

Seven Hospitalized in Eighth and, Likely, Last 'DIVA Night'

By Chris Ladd
EDITORIAL EDITOR

More than one thousand people paid ten dollars each for admission to "DIVA VIII," Skidmore Pride Alliance's annual dance founded on gender bending and free expression. Five, too drunk to leave, were carried by ambulance to Saratoga Hospital and two more were brought to the hospital from other points on campus.

"This was the worst event that I've ever seen in terms of medical emergency," said Barb Schallehn, coordinator of Leadership Activities. Leadership Activities works with SGA clubs, like the Skidmore Pride Alliance (SPA), to coordinate events on campus.

DIVA Night is one of Skidmore's best-known and best-attended events; SPA President Craig Hyland '05 estimated his group would net close to \$5,000 from the event. It is SPA's single biggest fundraiser.

The dance's notoriety extends past Skidmore's boundaries; the 2004 "Fiske Guide to Colleges" says Skidmore students "look forward to the DIVA Night party, where a group devoted to sexuality awareness 'creates a safe environment for all people, and promotes the 'DIVA' in everyone to come out.'" Owing to Saturday's events, it is unlikely that the event will survive long enough to make the 2005 edition.

Two of the seven people hospitalized were not Skidmore students, according to Associate Director of Campus Safety Larry Britt, one being below college age. Of the five Skidmore students, all were undergrads. Additional students were held at the event and questioned, but paramedics gave "borderline" students the choice of whether or not to go to the hospital, Britt said.

"I don't think we should put on an event that sends seven people to the hospital," said Hyland. "I love the principle of



Students Dancing at DIVA VIII in the Small Gym.

photo by Elizabeth Campbell

DIVA, and I hate to just abandon it, but it seems like we have to."

"DIVA used to be all about gender and sexuality," said SGA President Scott Minkoff '04. "I think that it's become a 'see how drunk you can get' contest."

"I think DIVA is dead," said Dean of Students Pat Oles.

Hyland said administration had expressed concerns earlier in the year that DIVA Night had grown too dangerous. He said that his group submitted a proposal to Dean Oles to make the event safer, working with S.P.A.R.K., the Office of Residential Life, and SGA to run a "smart choices" campaign in the weeks prior to DIVA Night, and increase the number of people from SPA, Residential Life, and Campus Safety at the event, among others. The campaign emphasized student responsibility and moderation, in addition to themes of personal expression. "[Administration's] biggest concern was the pre-gaming aspect," Hyland said.

"We knew last year's DIVA was difficult, but we wanted to see if we could make it safer," said Schallehn. "At 11:30 we had our first call [for the Paramedics]," she said. "Forty-five minutes into the event, and you knew that we hadn't been able to change the behavior."

Hyland said that although he was proud of the efforts of his organization and others, attempts to tone down

DIVA's image were "not effective at all," and the student body was "already set on getting smashed" before attending the event.

Despite the apparent failure of SPA's efforts, Oles said he thought the group put forth their best effort to make the event safer this year. "It was an exceptionally well-run event," he said, "members of SPA didn't have any fun there; they worked their butts off."

Schallehn said that SPA members working the event were "just as stressed" as administration.

One student, taken to Saratoga Hospital by ambulance at the beginning of the event, said he still could not remember anything between walking to the gymnasium just after 11 p.m. Saturday night, and waking in the hospital at nine o'clock the next morning. "I actually don't have any memory of DIVA," he said.

The student said he thought out of control drinking, increased DUI rates, and risks of sexual assault would be to blame if DIVA Night were canceled, although he said he would feel "no responsibility" for any such cancellation.

"I drank more than I've ever drunk," he said. "I guess I just need to watch out for myself better."

The student asked that his name be withheld.

In addition to those hospitalized, several students reportedly assaulted Campus Safety officers at the event. Schallehn said she witnessed a student who, after being ejected from the event twice already, thrust twin middle fingers from an officer's face on being kicked out a third time, shouting obscenities. "That's not cool," she said. "That's just not OK."

According to Oles, it was a relatively small number of students who got "senselessly drunk," before coming to the event; the majority, he said, just "came and had a great time." Oles was present on Saturday.

Britt, too, said that even though most students at DIVA Night had been drinking, most were "just good kids, dancing, having a good time." He estimated that only 20 or 30 of the thousand-plus students in attendance presented any real problem to Campus Safety. For some students, Britt said that DIVA Night was "an excuse to get hammered to the gills, get sick, and pass out."

"It's very easy to say that a few bad apples have spoiled the bunch, that only seven people went with the EMTs," Minkoff said, "but the truth is that those students were pre-gaming in Kimball and Penfield. Their friends let them go in that condition knowing that the future of DIVA was on the line."

Saturday night's events have raised questions about the upcoming Junior Ring dance, scheduled for Nov. 21. Last year, Skidmore all-college events were "dis-invited" from the Hall of Springs forever, owing to rowdy and drunken student conduct. This year, the dance is being held at the City Center. Only 900 students, a mere fraction of the Hall of Springs' capacity, will be able to attend.

"I'm very concerned about Junior Ring," Oles said. "If to plan an event, you have to plan for EMTs, that's an event that's not worth having."

Oles questioned whether large, all-college events were "community building," citing theater productions, dance and a cappella performances, and political action groups as more meaningful and worthwhile extensions of student interest.

"Large college events are definitely in jeopardy," Schallehn said. "If we blow it this time, there's no other venue."

Emily Martin '06, who was at this year's DIVA, said she enjoyed herself. "The music was good, they didn't play a lot of techno, and I ended up staying until it was over. It's a shame so few people can mess things up for all of us," she said.

Hyland, who says he will remember DIVA VIII as a "night from hell," said SPA plans to make donations to each of the ambulance corps that responded to the event.