



ENTERTAINMENT

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*Cruise*

MAGAZINE



# Bruce A. Dettloff

Flamboyant, extravagant, generous and gentle were just a few of the apt descriptions that began pouring in as word spread that the former owner of the Gold Coast Saloon and past president of the Detroit Bar Guild — Bruce Dettloff had been shot and killed in his Detroit home. Many knew him as the blond bar owner with all the jewelry who seemed to always travel in an entourage. His arrival at even the simplest of events was often times a happening in and of itself.

Most knew him as the owner of the Gold Coast Saloon, a Detroit male dancer bar. In the early 1970's, Dettloff began working at the Comquest Lounge, a gay bar on East State Fair Avenue (formerly Sir Karp's) as a waiter. He worked his way up to bartender and then as manager. Taking a bold step, he converted the place into the Blue Boy Lounge, a bar that featured male dancers on a regular basis (a new thing at the time) and skimpily-clad waiters working the floor.

After the Blue Boy closed, Dettloff bought the bar business at 2971 East Seven Mile Road and created the Gold Coast Saloon. He decorated the bar in a very opulent fashion with crystal chandeliers and large gold cupid figurines. As at the Blue Boy, the new club featured male "go-go" dancers.

Not content to let the grass grow under his feet, Dettloff opened Applause, a disco-cruise bar at 5716 East McNichols near Mound Road in Detroit on March 15, 1979. After several incidents of vandalism over the first several months it was open, the bar was broken into on

July 26, 1979, ransacked, robbed and set on fire. The bar was completely gutted by the fire and never re-opened.

In 1988, Dettloff sold the Gold Coast Saloon and began work on buying the bar at 6221 East Davison at Mound Road. He planned to open the place as Zippers — a gay dance bar. The place did open in 1989 for a short while, but various licensing and regulatory agencies would not approve the transfer of all the necessary licenses and permits. According to various reports, Dettloff was in the process of selling that place at the time of his death.

A man of humble beginnings, Dettloff became an institution in the Detroit-area gay community. While most knew him for his flamboyant "Liberace-type style," others knew him as a "doer" and "mover."

In addition to working in, and/or owning, five Detroit gay bars, he helped form the Bars and Towels, Inc. (BTI), an early organization of owners of gay businesses. Among BTI's innovations were annual summer picnics, and the BTI Sunday Mixed Bowling League, which went on to become the largest (gay or straight) mixed bowling league in the country. The bowling league continued long after the BTI organization folded, and is still bowling Sundays at the State Fair Lanes in Detroit.

When there was talk in 1982 of formally organizing Detroit's gay bars into the Detroit Bar Guild (DBG), Dettloff was there to help. He served as president of the organization for several years. Some say his most memorable moment was when he was carried in as Cleopatra on a throne chair by beefy go-go dancers in gold lame bikinis at one of the early DBG Follies Shows at the Roostertail.

But others remember him best for some small personal moment. One person re-

## Cover Story

Bruce Dettloff, former owner of the Gold Coast Saloon, was killed in his home on December 29.

## COVER STORY

lates that he will never forget the time he was stranded hundreds of miles from home with no money. He called Dettloff and enough money to get him home was wired to him. Others tell of similar stories of personal times when Dettloff helped them with what was needed at the time, whether it be personal support, a loan of money, advice or help in getting them out of a mess of some sort.

Dettloff lived a full and active life, he enjoyed living and liked to surround himself with nice things. Many are shocked at his sudden death and will miss him greatly.

His funeral was conducted at the Verheyden Funeral Home in Grosse Pointe Park on Thursday, January 3, 1991. The funeral was conducted in the largest room in the place, but the room simply could

not accomodate all the mourners who came to pay their final respects to a man they knew and loved. Many were forced to sit in the hall or stood around the rear of the room to be there for him, as he had been there for them in some way in their life.

Dettloff is survived by his wife Margaret, his daughter Melody, two brothers, two grandsons, his stepfather, his grandmother, two nieces and a nephew. In addition, he leaves a grieving gay community of friends and colleagues shocked and sorrowed by his sudden and violent demise.

The family has asked that memorials be made in Dettloff's name to Wellness House.

— Phillip O'jibway

