

## The Leather Pride Flag



On 28 May 1989, at the International Mister Leather contest in Chicago, Tony DeBlase presented his design for a Leather Pride Flag, inspired by the rainbow-colored balloons used in the opening and closing ceremonies of Gay Games II and the spectacular rainbow of balloons that arched over the main stage at the G&L pride rally in San Francisco a few years before. He did not expect this design to be the final form, but rather the basis from which a widely accepted banner would evolve.

Tony described his design thus: "The flag is composed of nine horizontal stripes of equal width. From the top and from the bottom, the stripes alternate black and royal blue. The central stripe is white. In the upper left quadrant of the flag is a large red heart. I will leave it to the viewer to interpret the colors and symbols."

At the time, there was some debate about DeBlase's audacity in designing a flag without convening a committee of important leather men and women. Nonetheless, the enthusiastic welcome the design received at IML was barely the beginning. Before anyone really had a chance to think whether the design should or shouldn't be changed, it was everywhere.

By 1997, the leather pride flag design was solidly accepted around the world. Used and reused everywhere, twisted and warped into every shape, wrapped around every kind of product and made of every material from leather to crochet yarn. It has even been worked into the permanent colors of some leather clubs, a use that DeBlase saw as particularly significant, a special level of acceptance.

The original prototype of the flag and many, many examples of the design's application are on exhibit at the Leather Archives and Museum in Chicago. Among the examples, you could see there are: window stickers, run pins, key chains, beaded safety pins, business cards, jewelry, the logo of Bandanna magazine, the cover of a cookbook, letterhead and a hand-crocheted cock and ball cover (a cozy?). We have also seen the colors and design elements of the leather pride flag used as whip handles and whole whips worked into clothing designs, done as tattoos and hair dye jobs, and many, many times as cake decorations.

Of course, the leather pride flag has flown as an arch of balloons at any number of events, perhaps completing the circle from the inspiration DeBlase started with to the fully realized emblem we have today.

Unfortunately, on 21 July 2000 Tony DeBlase died of liver failure in Portland, OR. Born 3 April 1942, he was just 58 at the time of his death. The front page of *The Leather Journal*, Issue #125, August 2000, includes a fine obituary and picture of DeBlase. Although mostly known for his work in and among the leather/SM community, he also had interests in mammalogy (specializing in the biology of bats), was involved in museum administration, was a gourmet cook, was the founding publisher of *Dungeon Master* magazine, and wrote fiction under the name Fledermaus. He was involved in the founding and development of The Leather Archives and Museum, where he served as vice president of the board from 1992 until 2000.

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