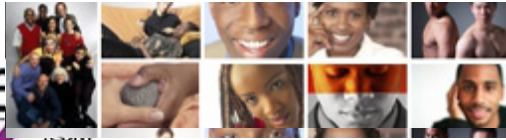


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An Interview

with the

Ladies of

Inherited



Entertainment,

Inc.

Written by Prideindex Staff



The ladies of IE - TJ Tolbert, Al Futrell, and later Jay Morrow - started with a small happy hour event in December of 2002. Fast forward to 2005 where IE's strictly enforced dress code (no athletic gear and an increased admission price if you wear jeans) and attention to detail (each guest is greeted personally when they enter and leave the party) have helped Merge become known as one of

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the few places that cater to
upscale African-American lesbians.

Tell us a little about Inhertwined Entertainment, Inc.

All: When Inhertwined Entertainment (IE), Inc. started there wasn't much going on that would cater to the kind of crowd we were looking for. We wanted to bring something kind of classy to the women's community. We wanted to bring that to the community because that wasn't happening at the time. We started in December of 2002 in a place called the Acropolis with about 30 people. The format was a 6-11pm happy hour. It's once a month on the 2nd Friday, so that kind of builds the excitement, people anticipate coming, people are eager to be there. And we chose 6-11, now 1am, so it wouldn't wear people out.

How is your team organized?

AI: As Promo Director/Webmaster, Jay is responsible for the 12-member Fleet team, all promotional efforts (ads, flyers, etc.), event attendance growth, and the maintenance and look of our website. As Communications Coordinator, I am responsible for all formal communications that go out to our patrons, partnering businesses and vendors. All writing, editing, proofreading, and formatting of documents and company literature comes through or from me. And as the event coordinator, TJ is in charge of making sure all aspects beforehand and the day of an actual event are cared for.

Have any organizations or individuals inspired you?

TJ: The organizations that inspired us were the older ones in DC. I had contacts with a few of the bigger promoters - basically straight promoters. I figured that we didn't need to reinvent the wheel - so what we did was just set up an event that catered to women but with the same type of elegant feel that we got from other events we had gone to. Promoters like Flowinsiders, they catered

to urban professionals - so they helped us get things started -helped us get clubs, general information, and liquor sponsors. They were great contacts. They followed us and helped us out.

What are your thoughts on the role of event/party promoters within the LGBT community?

TJ: It may sound kind of corny, but we're not doing it for the money. How far can you go off of \$6 per person? You can't really go too far with that. We give back to our patrons. If we're successful we spend more on them - we don't pocket the money, we spend more on staff. Or we'll spend it on an open bar at the beginning of the event. We have to give back to our communities, and not just provide a place where you can shake your behind. Every year we give to the Lesbian Services Program - a lesbian arm of the Whitman Walker clinic. You have to recognize that we're not just party promoters - we're members of IE, there is a responsibility that goes with that.

How do you balance being friends and being business partners?

Jay: We have a different dynamic - Alana is the quiet one, the peacemaker. Me and TJ argue all the time, but usually we're saying the same thing, - just in different ways. There's a presence about us when we're together. People realize that we're somehow linked - they'll say "oh yeah, I can see that". We haven't had any issues with business vs. friendship. We genuinely like each other.

Looking back, is there anything you would do differently?

Al: We don't really regret anything we've done, or think that we should have done anything differently. We've grown substantially, we've tried different things that maybe didn't work out so well, but you have to continue to try.

TJ: We don't regret anything we've done,

because everything has been so well thought out and planned. We've tried to think of every possible scenario and possible thing. That's why our events work so well for us, because they are so well planned - how we want to greet people, how we want the crowd to look. We make it a point to target females 25-44, but our average age is 28-34. The vast majority are gainfully employed and have at least walked thru the doors of someone's institution. They all have careers, not just gigs. They have established themselves. That's what we're doing as individuals and that's the type of person that we want to attract.

What advice would you give up and coming gay/lesbian entrepreneurs of color?

TJ: I'm sure we'd all agree - know your crowd. Know who your patrons are, know who your customers are going to be. Cater to them and they'll appreciate that. Put yourself in your customer's shoes - they're not just walking dollars - they have needs like everyone else. This is for anyone - know your crowd.

Jay: I would add "be sincere". Be sincere in the fact that they aren't a walking dollar; it's about providing a service. When we stand at the exit and say "thank you for coming", we're sincere. We want you to have a good time. We want you to tell others. It's about being sincere and being true to your purpose. If you're not sincere it may still work out, but it won't last. Every party is the most important party to us. We put mad energy into it; we're planning all this month for next month's party. It's the stuff that we would want to have.</br>

Al: I'd add "be consistent". It takes a while for people to get used to something - because things come and go so much. When they see you are providing something consistent they will continue to come back.

Can you share any of your upcoming

activities or plans for the future?

TJ: One of the main things we're focusing on for this year is scouting other markets. We've had such success with Merge that we're looking to do something elsewhere - in Baltimore and North Carolina, and later in Atlanta and New York. We're not just promoters, we're looking to offer the whole package - we want our web site to grow and include other information that pertains to women in general.

AI: we're planning to have our website act as a portal for women's events in the DC area. We'd like to show not just our events but also other events in the area. We want it to be a clearinghouse for information - information that talks to you about our culture, poetry, books, and movies. We're looking for writers and poets to submit things that they would like others to read about. They can submit their ideas and information to forwomen@inhertwined.com.

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