

# PALM SPRINGS



## LOVE ALL

*LGBT tennis players from around the world are welcomed to the desert for the 22nd annual Palm Springs Open* **By Lydia Mack**

**T**here's more to look forward to this Thanksgiving than too much turkey and massive crowds waiting to storm the doors of their local Best Buy. The weekend also marks the Palm Springs Open, an international gay tennis tournament put on by the Desert Tennis Association. All proceeds benefit the AIDS Assistance Program, a nonprofit that has been giving food vouchers to men, women and children living with HIV/AIDS in the Greater Coachella Valley since 1991. Throughout the weekend, you're able to cheer on LGBT players from around the world while supporting the great work AIDS Assistance Program does for the community.

Now in its 22nd year, the Palm Springs Open is as popular as ever. "It's the largest gay tennis tournament in the world," says tournament director **Nabil Najjar**. "A few years ago we attracted over 380 players from all over the world, and this year we are closing in on about 270 players who represent over 12 countries."

And who can blame them? The great weather and constantly sunny skies make Palm Springs ideal for outdoor tennis year-round. The three-day tournament is free and open to the public, though you'll need to grab tickets to Saturday's banquet, taking place at 7 p.m. at the Mission Hills Country Club. The \$45 tickets include a no-host cocktail reception, dinner and entertainment, but trust us, this isn't your everyday banquet. Sure, there's a silent auction and raffle prizes, but there's also a talent show and a chance to mingle and congratulate the players in person.

Feeling generous? There will be plenty of chances to donate to the AIDS Assistance Program directly. "Everything that gets raised at the banquet goes directly to the AIDS Assistance Program. We are very fortunate to have a very successful event every year," says Najjar.

Compared to other charity events, the fundraising process is kept pretty transparent. "I'm very lucky and fortunate to have about 14 volunteers that help me run the event," he says. "And it's very simple. We basically pay our bills after the event is over and then whatever money we have leftover, goes to the AIDS Assistance Program."

As a former tennis pro himself, Najjar is one of many volunteers

dedicated to the work. "To volunteer my time for a worthy cause is very important to me," he says, "so I've been doing this since 2001." It may have been 14 years since he took over organizing the event, but his passion and mission have remained the same. "Our main goal was to keep it a charity event and to raise money for multiple AIDS foundations in the desert area."

Since partnering with the AIDS Assistance Program in 2004, the Palm Springs Open has donated more than \$100,000 to HIV/AIDS services. Last year, the Desert Tennis Association was able to donate \$10,000. "We are hoping this year to exceed that number," Najjar says.

In addition to a great team of volunteers, Najjar attributes the success of the Palm Springs Open to a supportive local community. "The local LGBTQ community in the desert, they support pretty much everything that goes on in the Valley. For example, during Thanksgiving, there's a big softball tournament as well—a gay softball tournament—that the local softball group puts on. So not only is there gay sports going on in the desert area, there's also many other functions around the same time," he says.

The Palm Springs Open also receives equal support from the AIDS Assistance Program itself, including its own volunteers and Executive Director **Mark Anton**, who helps rally up local businesses to donate raffle and silent auction prizes for the banquet each year.

There are plenty of cities where gay tennis players do not have the same amount of support as they find in Palm Springs, and Najjar believes those cities have the most room for growth. "We are very fortunate in the Palm Springs area," he says. "I'm in the Gay and Lesbian Tennis Alliance. I've been on that board for 14 years. We do have tournaments all over the country and the world, and almost every major city is represented by a gay tennis nation. There's a lot of room for growth in cities that are just starting out with gay tennis."

For a list of upcoming GLTA tournaments around the globe, their schedule is available at [glta.net](http://glta.net), and for anyone interested in registering for tournaments in the Palm Springs area, there will be one in March and another in May. You can find all the details online at [deserttennis.us](http://deserttennis.us). ■

### 22ND ANNUAL PALM SPRINGS OPEN

Coachella Valley  
Country Clubs  
Nov. 27-29  
[deserttennis.us](http://deserttennis.us)



# Calendar

Fri. | Nov 27  
**CAROLE COOK**  
 Purple Room

Even at 91 years old, singer-actress-comedian **Carole Cook** is still going strong. A longtime friend of **Lucille Ball**, Cook performs Nov. 27-28 at 8 p.m., Nov. 29 at 1 p.m. [purpleroom-palmsprings.com](http://purpleroom-palmsprings.com)

Fri. | Nov. 27  
**A QUEER CAROL**  
 Desert Rose Playhouse

This contemporary gay retelling of the **Charles Dickens** classic will leave you laughing—and shedding a few tears, too. Through Dec. 20. [desertroseplayhouse.org](http://desertroseplayhouse.org)

Fri. | Dec. 4  
**VICKI LAWRENCE AND MAMA**  
 Aqua Caliente Casino Resort

Beloved *Carol Burnett Show* singer-actress **Vicki Lawrence** and her best-known comic character share a stage, starting at 9 p.m. [hotwatercasino.com](http://hotwatercasino.com)

**SAT. | DEC. 5**  
**FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS**  
 Palm Canyon Drive

What's gayer than a parade? A Christmas parade going through Downtown Palm Springs with all the floats decked out in colorful lights. The fun starts at 5:30 p.m.

Sat. | Dec. 5  
**SUZANNE WESTENHOEFER**  
 Copa Nightclub

The award-winning lesbian comedienne, the first openly gay comic to have an HBO comedy special, never fails to entertain. Showtime is 8 p.m. [copapalmsprings.com](http://copapalmsprings.com)

Tue. | Dec. 8  
**BARRY MANILOW**  
 McCallum Theatre

"Copacabana" singer **Barry Manilow**, who married his longtime manager **Garry Kief** last year, sings his hits and more in five shows through Dec. 13, with proceeds benefiting Coachella Valley charities. [mccallumtheatre.com](http://mccallumtheatre.com)



## WORLD AIDS DAY IN THE DESERT

**THROUGHOUT WORLD AIDS DAY** on Tuesday, Dec. 1, Desert AIDS Project hosts a number of activities for desert residents. A special rededication ceremony of the red AIDS ribbon in DAP's main lobby starts at 11:30 a.m., followed by a luncheon for clients and staff. Come 5:30 p.m. at the Camelot Theatre, the AIDS service organization hosts its second annual Everyday Heroes awards ceremony, honoring hostess **Bella da Ball**, journalist **Nicholas Snow** and several volunteers.

Additionally, DAP has free screenings of the acclaimed documentary *Desert Migration*, about gay men with HIV/AIDS living in the Coachella Valley, at 9:30 a.m. and at 3 p.m. at its offices. Author **David "Cat" Cohen** will discuss his new novel, *Longer Road Home*, at 2 p.m.

Health-related classes offered throughout the day include chair yoga, relaxation and breathing techniques, acupuncture and Reiki massage. Additionally, DAP has workshops on job interviewing and résumé writing. Desert AIDS Project is located at 1695 N. Sunrise Way. [desertaidproject.org](http://desertaidproject.org). —**James F. Mills**

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