



**Imperial
Royal Sovereign Court
of the Desert Empire, Inc.**

Mission Statement

We, the members of the Imperial Royal Sovereign Court of the Desert Empire, Inc. (IRSCDEI), join together knowing there exists in our realm a true need for serendipitous acts of goodness, kindness, love, and charity. It is for these purposes that we gather our collective resources.

It is for these purposes that we dedicate those resources which enable us to act as a focal point for channeling needed monies to charitable organizations. During these endeavors we shall be ever mindful that goodness, kindness, love, and charity are virtues beyond measure, and that our means to these ends are to have fun, receive donations, and disperse those assets for the betterment of those people living within our world.

History of the IRSCDEI

On July 5, 1997, Mark Jensen-Jewel and DeShannon Christi Jewel, were enthroned as the first Baron and Baroness until such time that the empire was granted Court status. Finally, on December 9, 1998, an Imperial event took place here in Las Vegas, Nevada. The first Emperor and first Empress of the IRSCDEI were crowned. Mark Jensen-Jewel and DeShannon Christi Jewel took their places in the history of the International Court System by becoming Emperor and Empress I of Las Vegas, Nevada.

Coronation (a gala function held once yearly) is where voters from within the boundaries of our “realm”, which includes Clark, Lincoln, and Nye counties, crown the newly elected Emperor and Empress. This is significant, as the community has a voice in selecting who they want to represent them in their organization’s fund-raising capacity. The primary goals of the elected Monarchs are to further relationships with organizations and businesses within our community, to hold functions and fund-raisers for the enjoyment of the community, to raise money for charitable organizations, and to help those in the community who are in need of assistance.

Each different elected Monarch sets his/her own standard and selects causes that he/she feels are important. The Emperor and Empress also attend Coronations throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico representing Las Vegas and the Southern Nevada area in an attempt to further relations with outside communities.

**History of the
International
Court System**

In 1964, José Sarria, a popular female impersonator in San Francisco, California, was crowned Queen of the Beaux Arts Ball by the Tavern Guild. In his acceptance speech, Sarria thanked the crowd but informed them, all the same, that he was "already a queen". He then proclaimed himself "Her Royal Majesty, Empress of San Francisco, José I, the Widow Norton". The name Widow Norton was in reference to a much-celebrated citizen of 19th century San Francisco, Joshua Norton, who in 1859, having lost his fortune, and in a state of apparent mental imbalance, had declared himself Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico. Despite presumptions about Norton’s mental state, Sarria admired that this man had earned himself a reputation for being a brave peace keeper and for remaining headstrong in the face of opposition without resorting to violence. In homage to Norton, Sarria organized elaborate annual pilgrimages to lay flowers on Norton's grave in the Woodlawn Cemetery in Colma, California, and he even purchased a grave plot for himself adjacent to Norton's.

Sarria's assumption of the title of Empress led to the establishment of the International Court System in 1965, whose primary goal was to raise money for charitable

organizations and fight for social equality for the gay community. Now, decades after its investiture, the International Imperial Court System (ICS) has over 70 chapters in the United States, Canada, and Mexico; some chapters (also known as “empires”) cover entire states, such as Alaska and Hawaii, while others cover cities, counties, or regions. But the entire system continues to grow at a gradual pace and even new chapters from countries such as England and Australia have been discussed.

Within the ICS, original founder José Sarria is so much revered that he is affectionately known as "Mama" or "Mama José" and the "José Honors Awards" are presented to Imperial Court dignitaries and others in a bi-annual banquet held in his honor. Each chapter or court holds an annual coronation which is typically its largest fundraiser and presents an opportunity for attendance by local community members and members from other chapters as well.

In many ways, the ICS operates with the same spirit and practices found in fraternity organizations such as the Freemasons. But in other ways, it is also similar to a theater group, providing a creative and entertaining outlet for its members. Individuals with unique aspirations and talents work hard to design elaborate costumes and sets, and arrange musical numbers to be openly shared in the name of both charity and gay equality. It can often be extremely challenging, with a great amount of networking, traveling, practicing, sweat, and tears. But the system itself, as Mama José intended it, provides a solid and reliable

backdrop of lighthearted fun and burlesque liberties which naturally serve to lighten our work, embolden us against those who might oppose our efforts, and ultimately leave us with a joyful reminder of why we have accepted this challenge in the first place – for the betterment of our communities. The efforts of all chapters in the ICS combined provide more than 1.5 million dollars each year to nonprofit organizations.

Welcome to the ICS!

The court system was originally designed as a forum for “campy fun” and, indeed, our titles (such as “Emperor”, “Empress”, “Prince”, and “Princess”) as well as our gala functions enthusiastically reflect that nascent spirit of “campiness”. None of this, however, undermines our objectives as each year the IRSCDEI raises tens of thousands of dollars for local, regional, national, and even some international charitable causes, such as the Pink Ribbon Campaign.

Perhaps one of the most positive aspects of our empire is that it is open to everyone. Our membership is made up of many different types of individuals from within the LGBTQ community and heterosexual individuals as well. No person’s gender, lifestyle, or mode of dress has any bearing on their welcome within our empire or their eligibility to join the Court Family.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact us at www.desertempire.org via our Board of Directors page.

To Make a Donation to the IRSCDEI

We can accept donations in many ways and a portion of every donation may be tax deductible. If you require any paperwork for tax purposes, just let us know.

Come to any of our functions and performances that we hold throughout the year and make your donation by directly tipping court performers, by providing items for raffles and auctions, or by donating products or services directly to those in charge of the various aspects of each function. You can find a calendar of our events on our website.

By visiting our website you can also access all our levels for Individual and Corporate Sponsorship. The IRSCDEI also has the Juan Ochoa Benevolent Fund and the TNT Scholarship Fund programs that you may be interested in contributing to.

Donations by check or money order should be made payable to “IRSCDEI” and mailed to: ATTN: TREASURER

IRSCDEI
PO BOX 46481
LAS VEGAS NV 89114

