

200 disciples of a guru want to start a city called

RAJNEESHPURAM

Story by **DAWN GARCIA**
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Emerald reporter Dawn Garcia and photographer Steve Dykes spent one day last week with the people of the controversial commune, Rajneeshpuram, a group which is trying to incorporate as a city 107 miles southeast of the Dalles.

A community of guru followers is not what most people would call run-of-the-mill neighbors.

Maybe in Poona, India, where most of the 200 disciples of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh come from, but not in northeastern Oregon where the brilliant red and maroon clothes they wear contrast the grey sagebrush-covered hills they now call home.

But the group's colorful garb is not what is causing apprehension and opposition from their neighbors; it is the group's attempt to incorporate their commune, Rajneeshpuram, into a city.

Eighteen dusty miles away from the tiny community of 40 at Antelope—is the 64,000 acre ranch bought by the Chidvilas Rajneesh Foundation for \$6 million last July. The inhabitants—followers of a 49-year-old guru—wear long, wood-bead necklaces called "malas"—with a photo of the Bhagwan at the end along with their red clothes, another spiritual symbol.

Why red?

"It's the color of the rising sun," explains one disciple or sannyasin, as they call themselves. "It attracts energy and gives off energy."

Although it may be unique to be clad in red from head to toe, the style of their clothes is nothing out-of-the-ordinary: sweaters, corduroy pants, sweatshirts, and overalls.

They claim to be an agricultural community but want to incorporate the arid ranch into a city. Then they want to construct a school, a library, a medical clinic, a store and other facilities.

They already have won part of the battle for incorporation. The Wasco County Commission approved the city boundaries of the 2,100 acre area inside the ranch and also approved an election May 18 to vote on the proposed incorporation. The outcome of the election is a foregone conclusion since the only ones voting will be members of Rajneeshpuram.

But their Antelope neighbors—represented by the 1000 Friends of Oregon, a citizens land-use watchdog organization—are taking issue with Wasco

County over the vote and have asked Gov. Vic Atiyeh to sue the county over the decision.

"In order to create a city, you have to demonstrate a need to do so, and we feel these factors have not been met," says 1000 Friends' lawyer Mark Greenfield. "You don't need a city to run a farm."

This seems to be the concern of many Antelope ranchers who fear incorporation will turn their tranquil hills into a metropolis.

"We're mostly concerned that they're going to dump a whole bunch of people on us and go against the zoning laws," says rancher Kelly McGreer, whose family has lived in Antelope for five generations.

His wife, Rosemary, agrees.

"It would totally overtax this small community," she says.

Perhaps an even greater concern is what effect the Bhagwan's philosophy will have on the community. The Rajneesh's views on sex as a technique for shattering selfhood received a lot of publicity in his earlier days in India.

That publicity, coupled with the release of the movie, "Ashram," has increased public apprehension about the commune. "Ashram" is a German-made documentary on the counseling methods used by Bhagwan.

Scenes of followers beating each other in the nude have attracted big audiences to see the movie.

"We're afraid that the followers of the Bhagwan will have some effect on the young people," McGreer says.

Despite the apprehension, McGreer says that he has found the people to be friendly in his contacts with them, and was impressed by the construction of the buildings they are doing.

Construction to set up cover for the community before winter sets in is their main concern right now, the followers say. The prominent impression of the activities at the commune is one of busy craftsmanship—people, most of them in their 30s, building tables, sewage systems, plowing fields, caring for the animals and doing other work amidst stacks of wood and supplies.

At present the commune has purchased \$2 million worth of mobile homes, construction equipment and communication machinery.

A few farm-style houses and buildings originally on the ranch remain, but the rest of the place has been altered considerably. Cafeterias and other facilities are being raised quickly from the ground as crews work 12-14 hours per day, seven days a week.



Two followers of the 49-year-old guru, Rajneesh, work to erect a fence. Members get one day off per month which they often spend working.

One look at this destroys any mental pictures that Rajneeshpuram is similar to a commune left over from the 1960s; the organization and modern facilities, which include two twin-engine planes and a landing strip, indicate more sophisticated structure.

Smiles are the norm as people pass each other in their daily work, even after the long hours.

"I got one day off last month, but I wasn't doing anything, so I came and worked anyway," says one sannyasin, smiling.

The members have been chosen to come to Rajneeshpuram for what skills they can add to the community as a whole, says Ma Yoga Nirmal, one of the guides who escorts reporters and curious visitors around the ranch. Although Antelopers complain the commune will be expanding into the "Tens of thousands of people," Nirmal and others claim they are not trying to recruit more members now and only accept people needed for work.

The racy philosophy of free love and unrepressed sex seems not as important as the philosophy of "being total and cele-

brating life," as Nirmal describes it.

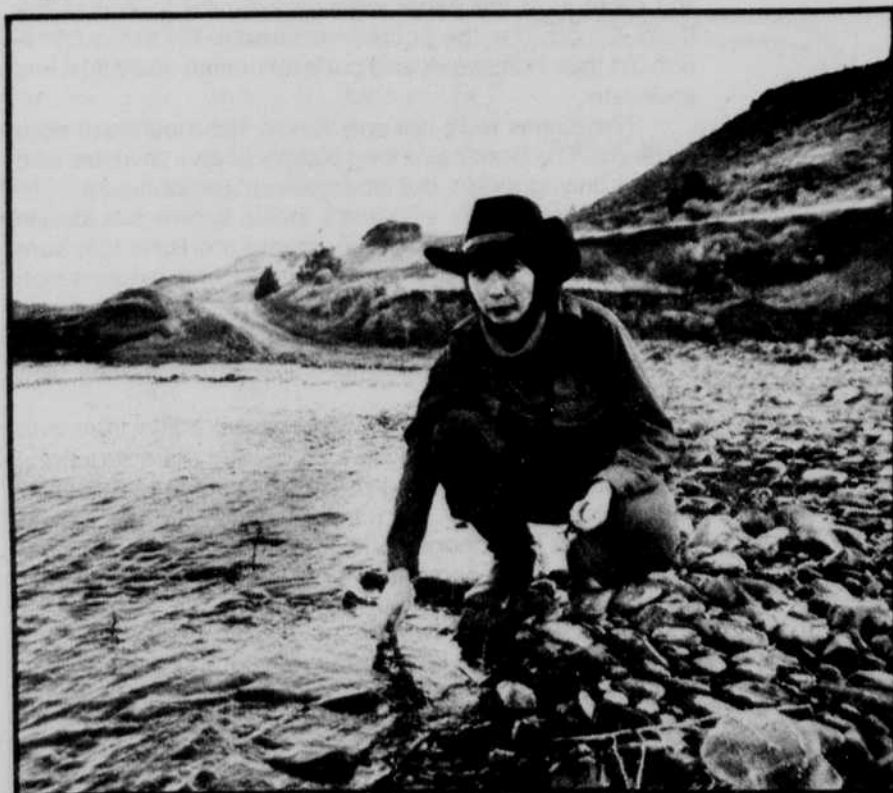
"It's really very practical and nourishing," she says as she hugs a fellow sannyasin.

Warm and frequent hugs are a common greeting in Rajneeshpuram, as is calling each other "love," and although they do not deny their "free love" philosophy exists, "it's entirely up to the individual and comes out of a sense of responsibility," says Shanti Bhadra, one of the disciples who works at the reception trailer the group owns within the city limits of Antelope. Because of zoning restrictions on making commercial sales, the groups use their Antelope office to sell more than 300 books, video tapes and cassettes of the Bhagwan's teachings to people worldwide.

It was one of these tapes that convinced Shanti "B", as she calls herself, to join the religious sect.

"I was running a health food store when I heard the Bhagwan on tape and fell in love with his voice," she says in her unmistakable Australian accent. "It's as simple as that."

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Ma Yoga Nirmal stoops by the John Day River.



Commune members take a break from the difficult task of building a city from scratch.