

Antelope

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Since moving in, about 280 followers have transformed a worn-out sheep ranch into a productive farm. The new mobile homes and ranch buildings are immaculate and visitors are welcome at the ranch.

Headquarters of the ranch is about 18 miles away and out of sight of Antelope. Local residents say that isn't far enough away to suit them.

They were even less happy when the sannyasins, as the disciples call themselves, bought the town's only commercial enterprise — a tiny cafe, store, gas station — to distribute books and tapes to people. The cafe was renamed "Zorba the Buddha" and serves only vegetarian dishes.

The followers also own five or six houses in the community and have pressured and cajoled Antelope citizens to sell their property, Hill says.

The followers say they would rather keep to themselves on the ranch, but strict Oregon zoning laws forced them to buy property already designated for commercial use. Because the formation of their own city is now on hold, they want to work on other enterprises.

Matters came to a head when the Antelope City Council refused the Rajneesh a permit to build a printing plant on other commercial property. The council then set the emergency disincorporation election.

On Monday Wasco County

Circuit Judge John Jelderks approved the special election despite a challenge by the Rajneesh.

Hill echos fears of citizens who say that if the Rajneeshes cannot incorporate their own city, then Antelope may be the next best thing. The nearly 300 ranch-dwellers could easily outnumber the 40 Antelope residents.

To "take over" Antelope, the sect can move enough followers into the city to control the November election in which three council positions, the city recorder's job, and the mayor's post would be on the ballot. The current voter registration tally is 39 Antelope residents and 35 "new residents."

The concern of the Antelope people is mainly financial, Hill says. If the Rajneesh had political control of the city, they could expand municipal services and pave roads to accommodate large numbers of followers — and levy the taxes to pay for the services. If Antelope residents were taxed out of town, Hill says, the probable buyers for their property would be the Rajneesh. They could then set their own price.

Disincorporation would prevent this because Wasco County would assume control of land use and taxing.

Disbanding the city is not something the citizens of Antelope look forward to. Antelope was chartered in 1901; the first post office dates

to 1872. Hill speaks with pride as she tells of the old-time saloons, wooden sidewalks, livery stables and cowboys. "This is a sad ending for such a town."

Hill predicts the townspeople will all vote in favor of disbanding. But the election is not guaranteed. A growing number of followers now live in Antelope and are registered voters, she says. Under Oregon law, Rajneesh followers could move as many of the 174 registered voters on the ranch into town and register them to vote as late as election day.

"I'm not conceding yet," Hill says. "It's still a toss-up," adds her husband and former Antelope mayor Phil Hill.

In spite of the hassles, the loss of sleep, and sharp criticism brought to her by the followers, Hill says, "On a one-to-one basis, some of the Rajneesh are charming, well-educated, very personable."

Hill has received letters from all over the world — some warning her, some expressing sympathy. She has also received unsolicited donations ranging from \$2 to \$250 to help cover Antelope's bills.

But what happens if Antelope remains a town?

Hill looks out the window. A few blocks away, a newly painted black-and-white sign hangs on what was formerly the Antelope Cafe. It reads "Zorba the Buddha."

She remains quiet. Hill hasn't an answer.



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