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Naturists pursue active nude pastimes, locales

Naturist organizations such as Body Freedom Collaborative are working to promote nude activities in designated areas

Ryan Bornheimer
 Senior Pulse Reporter

When Body Freedom Collaborative co-founder Daniel Johnson hears that club nudism is on the rise, he says he gets a little frustrated. He scoffs at recent articles that indicate increasing numbers at such organizations, giving voice to a more outspoken wing of clothing-optional advocates.

For these politically-minded individuals, the choice to go nude is more than a lifestyle — it's a freedom worth fighting for. And a number of organizations are taking their voices not to private clubs, but to the streets — or more accurately, public beaches and parks.

"Not everybody wants to sit on their ass around a club or other mostly sedentary activities for fun," Johnson said in an e-mail interview.

At this point, it might be important to delineate the terminology of the issue. Nudism and naturism are often used synonymously. However, the term naturism was adopted as an alternative to negative connotations associated with nudism. Naturism is often associated with environmental awareness, free beaches and recreational nudity, while nudism is associated with clubs and living nude full-time.

Johnson takes issue with membership figures released by the American Association for Nude Recreation, which boasts a roster of 240 private clubs and nearly 50,000 individual members.

"AANR will try to put a positive spin on its pathetic numbers," Johnson said. "The only reason there are so many AANR members is because they are forced to join when they pay their local club dues."

According to the organization's mission statement, BFC is a grassroots network of artists, writers, outdoor enthusiasts, citizen activists, pranksters, students, educators and entrepreneurs aggressively advancing opportunities on appropriate public lands for body-positive, clothing-free recreation and creative expression in a non-sexual context.

In short, not all nudists and naturists want to be confined to gated communities. And Body Freedom functions as a weapon for its members in the fight to reclaim public lands — and the right to bare all.

Body Freedom, in conjunction with like-minded organizations, is keeping its members busy in the fight.

Johnson and two other Body Freedom members staged a January "Polar Dip" at Luther Burbank Park in Washington. The threesome went au-natural in the watering hole near Seattle to bring their cause out of secluded areas and right into the minds of city-dwellers.

BFC is also attempting to organize a clothing-optional arts festival with other groups this summer. The name of the festival hasn't been finalized, but some of the possibilities discussed include Stark'n Art Fest and Body-positive Fest.

While BFC operates mainly on the West Coast, a number of other national organizations are interested in related causes.

One such organization — the Naturist Action Committee, a nonprofit political adjunct to The Naturist Society — supports the recreational

nude use of public lands. The group works with local organizations such as BFC to protect the rights of naturists throughout North America.

NAC, along with members of Body Freedom and other naturists, recently ventured to Rooster Rock State Park, one of two public beaches allowing nude recreation in Oregon. The naturists met with park officials in hopes of ensuring continued refurbishment and maintenance of the beach.

NAC executive director Bob Morton isn't quite as militant in his opposition to club nudism, but he said he believes the future lies beyond such restricted environments.

"I see clubs as a different facet of the same issue, but what we want to see is more public lands geared toward nude recreation," Morton said.

Morton is quick to refer to a 2000 Roper Poll illustrating a growing acceptance of nude recreation. According to the poll, 80 percent of 1,010 adults believed people who sunbathe nude should be able to do so without interference from officials, as long as they do so at a beach that is accepted for that purpose.

Perhaps the most important element when considering the future of nudist-related causes is the younger generation. And most people involved with the issue, even club members, agree young people are not exactly flooding private clubs.

"Try to find anyone under 35 — I think you will be disappointed," Johnson said.

Morton agreed, but said the explanation may be more financial than anything.

"Clubs skew high because older folks have more discretionary income. Younger people travel lighter. They may be involved in nude recreation, but not all join clubs."

And if organizations like Body Freedom have their way, they might not have to.

Contact the senior Pulse reporter at ryanbornheimer@dailymerald.com.

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