

GROUPS

The one truism about the bear community is that none of its members can conclusively decide what is a "bear." But they mostly agree that we're not talking about the four-legged, fur-covered creatures that live in dens and catch fish in their mouths. The bears of the gay community are two-legged, generally fur-covered men who catch crumbs in their beards and mustaches.

Hairy gay men were first identified as bears in 1980 by Dr. Jack Fritscher in the magazine *Man2Man*. Within a few years, a segment of the gay male community—men who rejected the traditional shaved and plucked models of sexual desirability put forth by the media—had found a home. The bear community embraces "natural masculinity" as embodied by facial and body hair on blue-collar-type men. Bears often consider themselves both masculine and animalistic, maintaining a look and a communal attitude.

"A bear, to me, is an individual who is either hairy or not hairy," says Ron Morrill, a Portland-based bear, "as long as he appreciates the hairy aspect of the person he likes, and that he's kindhearted and warm, like most bears."

That feeling of warmth is echoed in a statement by Oregon Bears board member David Whitney: "I have found the bears to be the most comfortable group of people. I've gone to the bars and felt like a total outsider, and as soon as I joined the bears, I was welcomed with open arms by a loving family—a group of men that understood me."



PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER PAPST

From left: Oregon Bears coordinator Brian L. rubbing up against Brian N. and Mikey

## Out of the den

Like bears to honey, men from all over the Northwest congregate in Portland for Beards & Roses

BY ANDY MANGELS

The bear movement has inspired bear clubs throughout the world, all holding weekend events, contests, bearhug parties and fundraisers. The first club of this sort in Oregon was Cascade Bears, founded in 1993 by Darryl Ballini and Michael Goldberg. When that group disbanded, some of its members took up the challenge to create a new club, the Oregon Bears. Now in its fifth year, Oregon Bears has over 200 members in Oregon and Washington, an Internet site, and a newsletter, *Pawprints*.

Some regular events include Paws 'n' Balls (bowling), Bears on Wheels (roller skating) and a camping trip to the Oregon coast.

Mike Ryan, a member of both Oregon Bears and the Gen-X Bears, finds acceptance within the bear community and enjoys its easygoing attitude.

"The bears, to me, have always been a group of acceptance," he says. "I haven't fit in with a lot of the other gay crowds. The bears have always been very good about being there with open arms and not judging anything on appearances."

Tom Ayers, a self-professed "bear admirer" and ex-San Franciscan, believes the bear community is exemplified by two ursine concepts: the bear hug and the teddy bear.

"It's the same thing. It draws you close," Ayers explains. "You end up with really good friends."

Brian Hunter is the chapter coordinator for Gen-X Bears, another group in the Portland area.

"The thing about Gen-X that is different is that we're a group of younger-type bears," he says, "and the main focus is to have a forum for socialization for the younger bear crowd in non-bar-related events. We try and organize movie nights and potlucks, which don't involve going out to the bars and forcing people to interact that way."

Founded in late 1998, Portland's Gen-X Bears is affiliated with a ring of chapters throughout the country. The loosely organized local group has about 30 members.

So you'd like a chance to see the local bear community in action? From June 8 through 11, the Oregon Bears are throwing their big annual event, titled Beards & Roses 2000.

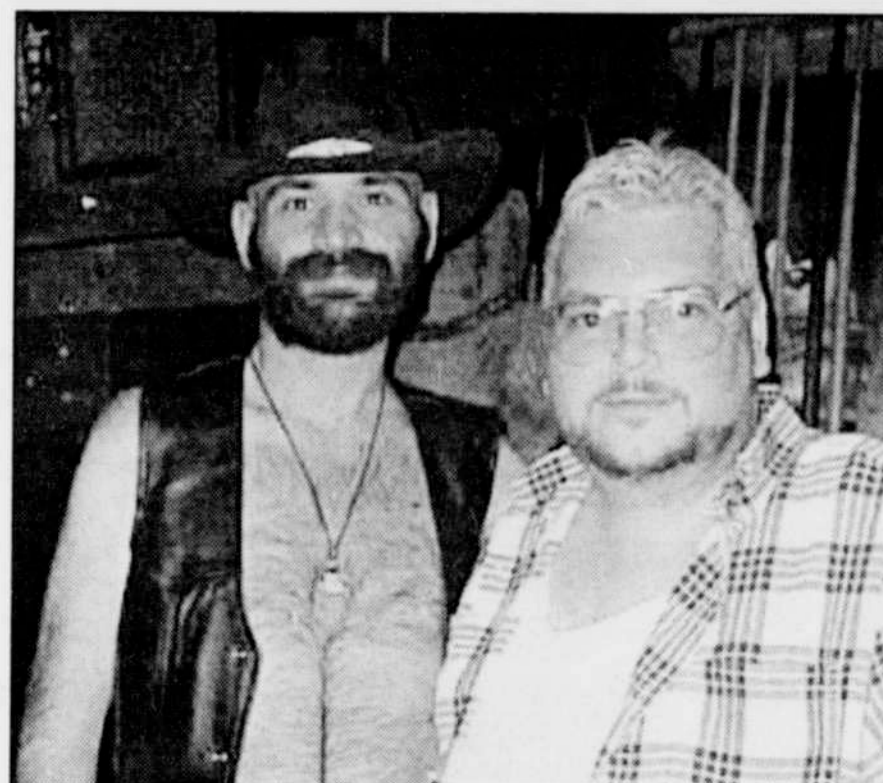
"We have a number of gatherings or activities where people from the local area and out of town will gather to mix and mingle," says Christopher Papst, chairman of the Beards & Roses committee.

Those events include Thursday registration at C.C. Slaughters and a Friday night Underbear Party at the Dirty Duck Pub.

"The guys are gonna commingle in their boxers and briefs," promises Papst.

Then they'll gather as a group to watch the Rose Festival Parade on Saturday. Later that evening, a special dinner will precede the Mr. Oregon Bear and Mr. Oregon Cub contests, with mistress of ceremonies Snickers LaBarr, and a dance will wrap up the night.

Sunday activities include a brunch at Hobo's, a trip to a clothing-optional beach on



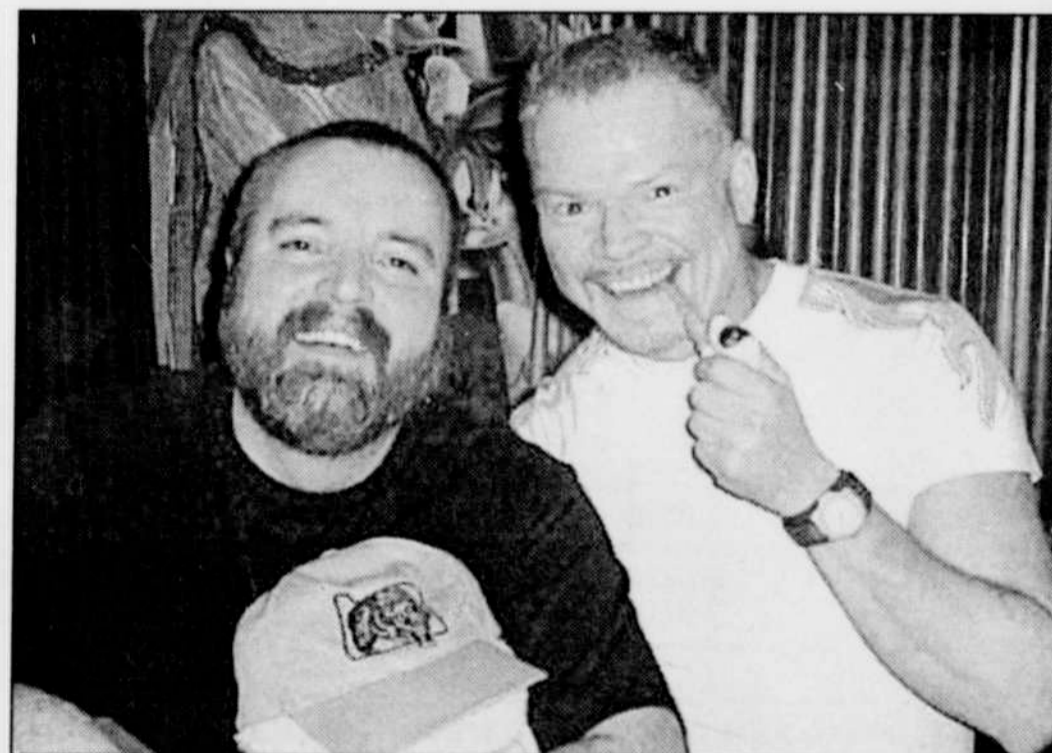
Beards & Roses event coordinator Chris Papst (right) and committee member Ron Morrill

Sauvie Island and a beer bust at Silverado. Attendees will also be able to choose from side trips, including group tours of the Oregon Zoo and the Japanese Gardens, shopping at the outlet mall in Wilsonville, and a scenic tour at the Columbia River Gorge.

You can also watch for the Oregon Bears marching in the pride parade on June 18.

■ For more information about the OREGON BEARS or BEARDS & ROSES 2000, check out the group's Internet site at [www.oregonbears.org](http://www.oregonbears.org) or call the bear hot line at (503) 240-2813. For more information on the GEN-X BEARS, visit [www.genxbears.org/oregon/index.html](http://www.genxbears.org/oregon/index.html).

Mr. Oregon Cub, Smitty, (left) and Mr. Oregon Bear, Mark A.



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