

GOING INTO HIBERNATION

Mr. Oregon Cub lays down his leather sash

by Glenn Scofield Williams

century? It depends on whom you ask. In his satirical book *The Bear Handbook*, Ray Kampf writes, "What it boils down to, when a bear needs a bear, is that he wants the right size man with the right amount of hair who is willing to do things that Jesse Helms says are wrong."

Frank Armstrong, the president of Oregon Bears, remembers: "For many years, we were rejected from a lot of the gay community for being big and hairy and that. The bear community came together because of that."

But beariness has become more complex than this simple idea. Weir, who is the membership director of Oregon Bears, says: "Obviously, there's something to say about the image: the facial hair, the body hair. But it is different for everybody. Anybody can be a bear if they think they are. We're an all-inclusive club, so we don't set any limits on what you look like, who you are, how you act. It's a frame of mind, and for every individual it's different."

So can women be bears? "We have women members," Weir says. "I took a female friend of mine to [Oregon Bears] happy hour at Fox & Hounds one time and she met the guys there and when we left she said, 'I love this!' They didn't care she was a girl. They visited with her and made her feel welcome and she said, 'You are my guys!' and after that she became a card-carrying member of Oregon Bears."

In June, Oregon Bears host their annual Bear Run (the bear equivalent of a festival) and it's going to be a humdinger titled "Beartown 13: Evolution." The Oregon Bears' run has become one of the more popular events on the circuit, and people come from all over the United States and Canada to join in on bear fellowship, fun and festivities.

"Oh my god, Beartown weekend is probably the most fun I've ever had in my entire life," says Brent Marr, artist and Mr. Oregon Bear Cub 2007. "The whole weekend was just a party from beginning to end. I slept for two days when it was done. And I wouldn't trade a minute of it for all the money in the world."

Beartown features events for every bear appetite, from social brunches to cigar socials, from cruises on the Willamette to cruising at Steam,

Referring to International Bear Rendezvous—arguably the king of bear runs, held in San Francisco—artist and Oregon Bear Brent Marr says, "I think Beartown is going to beat IBR this year in quality." He may just be right.

At Beartown 13, Marr will pass on the sash for Mr. Oregon Cub, which he's held for the past year. He recently met me for a drink and a chat at Fox & Hounds to talk about life as a titleholder.

Glenn Scofield Williams:
Why Mr. Oregon Cub?

Brett Marr: What you're running for is the chance to represent the organization. And the Oregon Bears do a lot of good things: They raise a lot of money for charity, they provide a network for people to meet people. I can't even imagine how many couples hooked up because they met through the Oregon Bears.

GSW: What did you do to get the title?

BM: First, there's an application process. You list your background and talk about the charity work you've done, and you write this dirty little fantasy that's sort of G-rated. Mine was about meeting a stranger in the park—that sort of thing. Then at Beartown we sold bear hugs and measured inseams, raising money for charity. We talked a bit about ourselves and what we plan to do as Mr. Cub and what we get out of being a member of the bears. And there was a funny segment where they read the little fantasy you wrote for your application in front of everybody. Then they pull this random question out of a hat. Mine was, "If you were a drag queen, what would your name be?" I chose Chlamydia Burns. Then all the members voted.

GSW: What does Mr. Oregon Cub do?

BM: First thing, we held the Suds & Studs Car Wash and Dunk Tank, where we gathered all the drag queens and the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence and local bar owners and bartenders to sit in the dunk tank. Meanwhile, the bears were washing cars. We raised about \$1,500 for Our House. We did

the Cavebear Party in January, where everyone came dressed as cavemen. We charged a couple of cans of food for Esther's Pantry for admission. And we had an Amateur Bear Strip Night at the Eagle in North Portland that went over very well; it was probably one of their biggest crowds. A lot of guys are anxious to have out-of-bar events, so about once a month we get everybody together to do a



In addition to his role as Mr. Oregon Cub, Brent Marr (inset) is an artist specializing in bear imagery.

hike. As a board member, you represent the club by hosting the Double X Dance or the Bear Brunch. You try to show up to as many bear events as you can. You're the club ambassador, and you make sure everyone feels welcome.

GSW: What did you get out of it?

BM: It totally brought me out of any remnants of a shell I had. Certainly my self-esteem sky-rocketed. It's been the time of my life.

GSW: Will you miss it?

BM: I'm having mixed feelings, very much so. I'm going to be glad to be able to relax once in a while. Now that it's coming to a close, I'll have a little more time to stay home and sit at the drawing board. On the other hand, I'm going to miss it a lot. But you know, once you're The Cub, you're always The Cub.

GSW: What's your advice for the next Mr. Oregon Cub?

BM: Just jump in with both feet. Enjoy the ride.

from the ever-popular Underbear Party to the camp fun of the Mr. Oregon Bear & Cub contest.

But it's not all just fun and games for Oregon Bears. Armstrong says, "Almost every bear run you go to, a lot of the money goes to charity."

According to Weir, the proceeds for Beartown will go to Tod's Corner, which provides material assistance such as food, clothing, household items and pet food to people living with HIV/AIDS. The program is administered through the non-profit Our House of Portland.

"We've worked with Tod's before," Weir says. "It's helping people who need it, and I'm all for that. If your community won't stand behind you, there's a problem, and that's what

I like about the bears; we like to give back to the community."

Armstrong gets passionate about Tod's Corner. And for good reason. "I've had help from Esther's Pantry when I first got here, and I had help from Tod's Corner for my pet. And it feels good that I was able to work with a bunch of people to be able to give back to an organization that has given to me."

To that end, a portion of the money raised from Beartown Silent Auction and various other activities during Beartown benefits local charities. "That's one way," Weir laughs. "We get [Mr. Oregon Bear and Cub] contestants out there at the Underbear Party to meet the people and measure their inseams. [For a low ticket price] everyone can have their crotch mauled by Mr. Oregon Bear and Mr. Oregon Cub, and it's a good fund-raiser for the charity."

Oregon Bears offer a place for those outside the mainstream gay culture to find a place to belong and to give back to the community. "I moved from Seattle because of the Oregon Bears," says Armstrong. "I met my partner in 1998 at the first Oregon Bears campout. We fell in love at first sight. I was around people into leather and the chorus and the bears up in Seattle, but I never felt compelled to join an organization until I met the Oregon Bears 'cause they're such a friendly,

kind group of guys."

Weir adds: "I love these guys. It gives you a sense of family. It gives you a sense of community. And when you participate in a bear event or when they sell raffle tickets, you know the money raised is going to go to Tod's Corner or Esther's Pantry or something like that. You know that you helped." 

BEARTOWN 13: EVOLUTION runs June 5 to 8 at various locations throughout Portland. For more info and to register, visit www.oregonbears.org.

GLENN SCOFIELD WILLIAMS (aka "Bear") writes prose, poetry, plays, periodica and porn in Portland.

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