



GOOD TIMES ON THE GO

Roving party posses build friendships and muscles WORDS BY ADRIENNE VAN DER VALK | PHOTOS BY TABITHA JOST

It's sad but likely that whoever said, "Life's about the journey, not the destination," never got to ride around town on a neon streamered stingray or drink while chasing a guy throwing a trail of flour behind him. Eugene partiers are luckier. Those who want more out of their social lives than playing pool at a bar have some athletically based options available, thanks to a few organized and original thinkers who, with the help of their fellow footloose fun-seekers, have broken the party mold and let the celebration spill out into the streets.

For the past two years, Eugene's Bike Brigade has embraced cycling as more than a means of transportation. Combining funky bike bling, costumes, a sound system and anywhere from seven to 30 friends, this visionary posse has made mounting two-wheelers (and any other non-motorized transport) an event in and of itself. Long-term brigade participant Tabitha Jost explains that unlike Critical Mass, which has a distinctly political and environmental focus, the biweekly rides she and her friends plan are meant to celebrate the festive side of biking as a group.

"The whole intent with Bike Brigade was to get a dance party into the streets, to have fun and stay safe," she says. "We make noise. We're not protesting."

Jost is one of a handful of organizers who inform riders of upcoming events and choose themes for the rides. "There's a lot of color," she says, explaining that many of the participants are artists who put tremendous effort into the visual component of their mobile shindigs. Eugeneans unaware of the brigade may feel bewildered upon encountering a rolling crew dressed like "rock star cowboys" or "furry fuzzy friends" ("It was cold and wintertime!" Jost says of that particular theme), but this flamboyant fellowship quickly makes itself a welcome part of any scene. Dismounting long enough to do some dancing or parade through a local business (Sweet Life, Laughing Planet and Territorial Winery are regular stops), the brigade keeps its momentum by moving through several points on the party map before settling in for the evening.

"We end up going to Davis' at the end of the night to dance," Jost says. "And in the summer we go to Kesey Square and a DJ meets us there. People who want to go to the bar can go there and come back."

Jost says the brigade isn't specifically oriented toward drinking although some of their members do indulge. "Alcohol and bikes can be destructive," she reflects. "We try to be about safety, so we don't

want people falling off their bikes." As a unit, the brigade wholeheartedly embraces a definition of partying that translates into being creative and physical.

"We want to show others that it is important to dance, and we encourage all types of transportation. We've had runners with us, skaters, we've even had fire dancers. Bring an iPod, and Bike Brigade will play your music!"

The brigaders aren't the only nomads in search of a party-on-the-go. The Eugene Hash House Harriers (a self-described "drinking club with a running problem") keep alive a tradition that originated pre-WWII and now flourishes in every major city in the world. "The 'hash' was a pub for British soldiers on an island in Indonesia, one of the locations where the expats met and had beer," explains avid hasher Iain Young. "In 1937 these soldiers had spent months there doing nothing, so they originated a game of 'hounds and hares.'" According to Young, the "hare" ran through the jungle, leaving a trail of flour for the "hounds" to follow. Celebratory beer drinking followed. Fast forward 70 years, and hashing is still practiced in a remarkably similar format, with the substitution of an urban jungle and a greater emphasis on the social drinking that happens throughout the chase. Modern

"hares" still use flour to create their trails, a practice that led to Young's near arrest during a hash in California when police suspected him of spreading arsenic on the street.

While running and drinking may seem like a counterintuitive combination, Young explains that having a love for beer is really more important to the hash than being a star athlete. "The only competitive element is who can drink more," he says. "The emphasis is on camaraderie. We sing rugby songs to break down inhibitions. We all have hash names." And though hashers may enjoy tipping back plenty of pints between running stints, Young (or "Three Ball Jay") observes that the group members also look out for each other's well being. "You rarely hear of a hasher getting a DUI."

Young and his wife have participated in hashes all over the country; in some cities hashes can consist of over 200 participants. "It is an amazing way for people to acclimate to a new town. I never worry about meeting people. It is an instantaneous social group. We're very diverse in our careers and our interests but we all have social drinking in common." ■

For more information on where and when the bike brigade rides, visit www.myspace.com/rainorshineweride

For more information on the Eugene Hash House Harriers, visit www.eugenehasher.googlepages.com

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