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THE NAKED ISSUE



THE WILLAMETTANS AU NATUREL.

Photo by Don Gustavson

The Willamettans is a local nudist club that was officially established in 1953. Hopefully, this will answer some of your questions.

BY SAVANNAH BROWN

If you drive through Springfield and onto Highway 126, and then keep driving, you'll get to a long, beautiful winding road. You'll drive deep into the western Oregon woods, where the road is lined thick with beautiful trees that touch the sky, and there's a view of not-so-far-off mountains carved by angels.

If you keep driving down this quiet, scenic path out past the very small town of Marcola (population 580), then, hidden in the trees, you'll find a very tall wooden sign that proudly says "WILLIES" in worn, yellow paint.

If you turn down this road, it might be hard to turn back.

You'll drive up a dirt path, and if you're using your GPS, it will say "turn left onto Willie Way." There, you'll approach an old locked farm gate, and you have to intercom into the office as to why you're there. Usually, it will only open for tours or members.

If you're so lucky and the gate opens, you will enter the grounds of the biggest nudist club in the Pacific Northwest. The Willamettans, or "The Willies," is about a 25-minute drive from Springfield.

"Nudist 'colony' is an outdated term," says Alan Jaskoski, The Willamettans' current president and a recreational nudist of 20 years.

According to historical records, the club's original incarnation, Club No. 327, was first documented in 1948, when 12 people (six couples) from the Corvallis area regularly met at one of their houses "to enjoy the benefits of nudism." As membership grew and it became all-ages, they eventually decided to buy property to host their lifestyle. In 1953, The Willamettan property past Marcola was acquired.

With over 44 acres of picturesque land deep in the forest, The Willamettans is currently home to 450 members each paying around \$300 per year. On these grounds, members have access to a lodge, a tennis and bocce ball court, a craft room, a dog park, a cheap bar with karaoke and themed events (The Full Moon Saloon), a gift shop which sells sheer, loose arti-

cles of clothing (Bun Marche) and a café, where the staff is required to be clothed (The Sunshine Cafe), among many other amenities. It is a clothing-optional retreat, where the only clothing-prohibited spaces are the sauna, hot tub and 9-foot-deep swimming pool (which just happens to be the most popular spot for the retreat).

The area is so gorgeous, in fact, that Jaskoski says last year a young couple visited "looking for a place to host their wedding. They were not nudists, but somebody had told them how pretty our grounds were." He told them The Willamettans would be happy to let them use the space for the wedding, should they decide. "They chose not to."

The Willamettans operate year-round, but when the Willies get chilly, "most of us don't go outside," Jaskoski says. However, "We are not against naked sledding, for the photo opportunity."

The Willamettans is a 100 percent member-run co-op, which means the club is entirely upheld by volunteering members (aside from the three paid front-office staff). On the wall in the lodge, there is a large list of chores on the bulletin board, and it is expected that the members (especially the regular guests) complete them. This means that walking around, expect to see (or participate in) lots of naked leaf blowing, landscaping and gardening outside, and clothed cooking and coffee pouring in the cafe.

Jaskoski says the average member visits, either camping or renting one of the 121 cabins, for around four days at a time, but some have bought houses on the property and live there full-time.

Rhonda Pratt has been a member for 34 years and has lived permanently on the grounds for 25 of them. She bought her house there 33 years ago and moved in with her husband, where she would eventually raise her children until they grew up. "As soon as I stepped on these grounds, I knew that I would be here forever. I was 30 years old," she says.

In terms of making the choice to bare it all, "I think most people would say it's a sense of freedom," Jaskoski says. "We all have flaws and things like that, and you discover pretty quickly that nobody's looking and nobody cares about them. You'll see a lot more eye contact up here."

He points out the inherent equality that comes with nudity. At the retreat, he says members include "people on minimal Social

Security, and we have multi-millionaires and everything in between. And once the adornments go off, there's really no way to tell one from the other, and everybody just comes and relates as human beings."

Jaskoski says that it is not uncommon for people to feel hesitant about the idea when they first arrive. "Most people have apprehensions about taking their clothes off in front of other people they don't know," he says. "Most of that is gone within 10 minutes."

Shirley Gauthier says that in order to maintain the respect and comfortability for everyone, The Willamettans put "a lot of energy into educating women and educating men. We have a 'women in nude recreation' program."

In the same vein, there are many hard and fast rules and etiquette when it comes to this club. "Sexual and lewd conduct is a big one," Jaskoski says. "We don't even allow the kind of dancing you see in town. I mean no offense, but the younger people and all their twerking? No, we don't do that up here."

Also, cameras are limited, and photos can only be taken in the non-common areas with the expressed permission of everyone around.

Another big one: Should you decide to spend your days in the buff, you must make sure to place a towel before you sit down anywhere, as you can't plant yourself directly on the furniture without a barrier. So long as the rules are followed, "We don't care what your personal life is, or who you are," Jaskoski says. "If you come up here and behave yourself and pay your fees, you're going to be treated

nicely and treated fairly and respected."

Gauthier first arrived at The Willamettans when she was 22 years old in 1972. She says there's a saying in the nudist community that she didn't believe at first: "It's the men that get the women to come, but it's the women who keep them coming back"

"Women, I think love it so much because we kind of take a beating in the real

world with body acceptance. I don't know that I've ever had any clothes as comfortable as my birthday suit."

It is a long and rigorous application process to be accepted as a member, which includes a full tour and three required visits (after which you are not welcome back if you decide not to apply) and a national criminal background check. Then, you undergo a year-long probation period where your behavior and contributions to the community are scrutinized and monitored before you are finally voted in.

But when you finally do get accepted, you will be free to live your chosen leafless lifestyle, deep in the woods past Marcola on windy Highway 126, left down Willie Way and up the long dirt path.

The Willamettans office is open 10 am to 6 pm every day 37000 Parsons Creek Road, Springfield. It is part of the American Association for Nude Recreation. For more information visit Willamettans.WildApricot.org or call (541) 933-2809.

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**— ALAN JASKOSKI
THE WILLAMETTANS
PRESIDENT**