



Sahara Dunes: nurse by day, burlesque dancer by night. Dunes will perform at this weekend's Fat Girl Speaks at Portland State University.

We're Fat and All That

Fat Girl Speaks this weekend

BY NICOLE RONAL HOOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Singer/actress Queen Latifah, comedian Mo'Nique and the new American Idol Jordin Sparks all have something in common with most women: they are plus-sized. These women have put their stamp on pop culture and a positive image without being rail thin. Yet society often turns an ugly face to the obese. In Portland there's Fat Girl Speaks, a celebration of size, self and sexuality.

"It is a life changing for a lot of people," said Olivia McClelland, 31. "No matter as me being a woman in this society you are constantly being told to hate your body. It's a constant mirage of messages and that's the bottom line with Fat Girl Speaks."

In 2004, Stacy Bias, a local entrepreneur and owner of the web site Technodyke.com, decided to start Fat Girl Speaks because she saw the need for an event that deals with body image in a positive way. The event was sold out.

"We had not idea there would be so many people," said McClelland,



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Fat Girls in Planning: Jenny Bruso, Amithyst Fist, Shawn Mathis and Olivia McClelland meet for the upcoming evening of fashion and performances that celebrate positive body images.

head organizer for this years FGS.

The following year, the event was held at Roseland Theater. More than 1,000 people came but McClelland says that some of the Roseland staff was rude and ridiculed performers.

McClelland wants the world to know that fat jokes aren't funny, especially in an environment that is supposed to provide a safe space.

Fat Girl Speaks is also an event to entertain. In previous years, McClelland says there were some complaints about the lack of diversity. At a sexy size 16, bur-

lesque performer Sahara Dunes will join the roster. Dunes, 30, says women should be busy embracing their bodies.

As an African-American she has heard stereotypes that black women carry their weight better, yet she had body image demons.

Dunes will join various local and national performers at Fat Girl Speaks, including a vendor fair, fashion show and performances on Saturday, June 9, 2007 at PSU's Smith Memorial Student Union Ballroom. For more information visit www.fatgirlspeaks.org.

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