

Couples club franchises group sex

United Press International
NEW YORK — The largest of the swinging couples sex clubs is going national.

"I cannot see why you can't have clubs where you can socialize and have on the premises sex if you so desire," says Larry "King of Swing" Levenson.

Some estimate there are now 250 couples clubs in the United States. Levenson claims there are at least 3 million "swinging, swapping couples" based on membership in these clubs, the great majority of which meet in members' homes.

FEW HAVE PERMANENT facilities although several which permit sex of most sorts on the premises have cropped up in the past two years here, on the West Coast and in Florida. The swingers' sex movement would appear to be growing.

Levenson is trying to franchise the name of Plato's Retreat, which he opened in New York three years ago, into a number of major U.S. cities.

"This is not a subterfuge like a massage parlor," he says, responding to a charge he is trying to emulate the growth of massage parlors across the country. "This is an absolute lifestyle. Nobody has the right to tell me how to lead my life with my lady in a private area."

Levenson says he is negotiating franchises for the Detroit, San Francisco and Fort Lauderdale areas, has inquiries from 10 other cities including Montreal and expects there will be more.

TO PROMOTE HIS scheme, he announced on a Detroit television talk show his selection of the Motor City over other possibilities "as a compliment to the city."

One woman threatened to shoot him. "I hope God takes care of you," she shouted. Others on the show expressed similar sentiments less forcefully.

"Your proposal to locate a business establishment such as Plato's in Fort Lauderdale would be in violation of our community standards and totally inappropriate for our city," wrote Mayor E. Clay Shaw after Levenson said he was talking with prospective local businessmen about setting up a Plato's there.

"He was begging me not to go there," Levenson says. "He said it is a family town. I wrote back. I said I'm looking for family towns. I was debating whether to open there but I said he just convinced me."

"OPPOSITION USUALLY helps me. Every time they try one of their stupid moves, it just gives me publicity."

Fred Barry, 38, a native of Altoona, Pa., and his wife, Dixie, 29, raised in Waukesaw, Wisc., are regular patrons of Plato's.

Asked what they think of the franchising plan, Barry, partner in a TV advertising agency, says, "There is

definite growth in sexual permissiveness. There is an underground in every community. But it is on a relative scale. Many could not support one."

"We met a couple from Arkansas here," says Steve, a computer operator who, like most patrons of Plato's, would give his first name only.

"WE MET ANOTHER couple from North Carolina who drove all night to get here," says his companion.

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ion, Pat, who works in an accounting department. "Some just come to look."

"This is a growing thing," Steve says. "More and more people are getting into it."

The slightly paunchy Levenson, 43, former manager of a MacDonald's hamburger stand in the Bronx, says he organized Plato's by turning his avocation — "I'm sexually oriented" — into a vocation.

Now he serves as a kind of cult leader. He takes pride in his "throne" set up beside his disco dance floor and "Larry's Staff Room," featuring side by side double mattresses. He has been termed a modern day Dionysus, the mythological Greek god of wine, who met violent establishment opposition wherever he went because of his introduction of orgiastic rites.

BUT LEVENSON says, "I named it Plato's because I couldn't spell Socrates."

There is an exception to the comparison. Levenson purveys no wine — or liquor. The Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission saw to that.

From Levenson's point of view, this has been a blessing in disguise. He sought a license, but when it was rejected, settled for soft drinks and coffee plus a cold buffet in the sprawling subterranean basement of the old Ansonia Hotel on Manhattan's west side.

Since authorities use liquor law enforcement as a primary control on such establishments, the police could do little to act on community complaints in the early days of Plato's. At one point, Mayor Edward Koch declared a crackdown. He sent in building inspectors, food and health inspectors, fire inspectors. They found a few violations.

"They're a private club," says Sgt. Phillip Tambasco of the Manhattan South public morals squad. "They're consenting adults behind closed doors. There's no booze — no ABC violations."

"PROSTITUTION? If it's there, they're not running it. It's somebody coming in. The place is no brothel. There are laws against consensual sodomy but we'd have to lock up the entire country on that. And all violations of fire and health codes

have been cleared up, so far as we know."

"When they first opened, there were numerous complaints. But they've dissipated. Whether the residents have resigned themselves to the place or are played out (complaining), I don't know."

Narcotics, with the possible exception of some marijuana, appear to be absent.

"We make occasional visits to keep a clock on things," Tambasco says. "But here's no complaints coming out of the place, no people being ripped off that we know of."

"WE DON'T HURT anybody," Levenson says. "People don't have to come. If nobody showed up, I'd be out of business."

"You can come in and see for yourself. You won't have to take your clothes off."

The reporter, who remained dressed, found a regulation swimming pool with nude swimmers. Not all the dancers in the disco or the occupants of the game room, the backgammon and TV lounge and the poolside eating area beside the buffet were nude. Nor were they having sex. That was occurring in the "private rooms," dimly lit mattress-floored cubicles with plywood walls. It also went on in the "pillow room," which fulfills its name, and the "mat

room."

"Group therapy for 50 or 60 people," is what Levenson says the mat room offers. Posted regulations require all enter nude. A view of it recalled ancient Asian frieze

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sculptures of scores of entwined bodies. The friezes have generally been described as pornographic in nature.

"WE'RE NOT REALLY swingers or swappers. We're exhibitionists," says Sean, 30, a bartender who moved to New York from Boston, discussing his use of the mat room with Patricia, 28, a hairdresser. "When it comes to the basics, we stay together."

"The place is not for everybody," she says.

Each of the couples interviewed talks of fulfilling their fantasies and being "turned on" by their activities. They say they became involved after periods in which they were bored with sex.

Levenson claims about 250 couples fill Plato's every Friday and

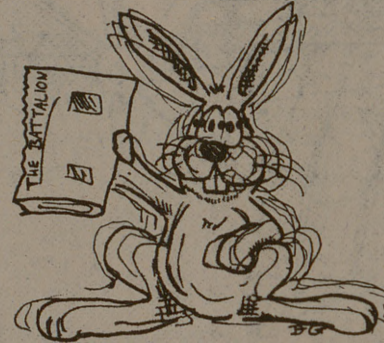
Saturday night. Charlie says they are aged 18 to 80 but most are 30 to 45.

HE SAYS THE weekday crowd is almost that large other nights except Monday. "That's our day of rest."

The tab is \$45 a couple to get in the first time, \$30 thereafter except every six weeks when an additional club fee of \$5 is imposed.

Single women are also allowed to enter and charged only \$10. "They're mostly bisexual," says Levenson.

Single men are not permitted. Levenson: "That would be disastrous. Homosexuality is a turn off among swingers."



See what's in Focus in Thursday's Battalion.

New Atlantis book stirs murky myths

United Press International
ATHENS, Greece — Yet another new book about Atlantis, the continent of mythology, is becoming a Greek best-seller, although Vassilis Paschos' theories have raised some smiles among archaeological experts.

Paschos, 55, a Greek customs official fascinated by the myth, almost 20 years, says Atlantis was not an isolated island but a continent covering much of what is now the Atlantic Ocean.

"Atlantis has been pinpointed in the Bermuda Triangle, in Greece and Santorini (now Thera) and recently in the eastern Atlantic," he says.

"Those researchers were both right and wrong. They confined Atlantis to one location, while in fact it included all the areas mentioned. The title of Paschos' book, 'The Atlanteans, Mr. Von Daniken, the Gods,' refers to his belief that the inhabitants of the lost world were responsible for the birth of technology, rather than space visitors revered on earth as gods, as Swiss author Erich Von Daniken would have it.

"The evidence of ancient writers like Plato and the striking similarities among linguistics, mythology and archaeological remains in the Americas, Egypt and the Aegean point to common origins which I am certain were in the continent of Atlantis," he said.

Paschos claims that Atlanteans founded colonies on the Aegean islands of Crete, Delos and Santorini, which survived the sinking of Atlantis around 6,500 B.C. Fugitives from Atlantis introduced technology to the Aegean, he adds.

But archaeologist Christos Doumas, who heads the Santorini Museum, remains unconvinced.

"If Atlantis existed as described by Plato, according to his chronology, it could be none other than the Minoan civilization of Crete," he said. "It then becomes impossible to consider Santorini as pre-Atlantis, or one of its colonies, since only the final phase of Minoan culture is found there."



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