

State and Local

Convention for sunbathers draws nudists to resort

By Alan Sembera
Staff Writer

More than 400 people had shown up by Saturday at the Live Oak Ranch between Navasota and Brenham. The occasion was a convention for nudists.

Live Oak Ranch is a family nudist resort and is the site of the Southwestern Sunbathing Association's sixth annual convention, which began July 18 and ended Sunday.

Members of 13 nudist clubs from Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas convened at the 25-acre country resort.

While the convention did take care of some business, the participants spent most of their time just having fun.

They held dances Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. The camp's secretary, Patsy, said clothes were worn during the dances.

She said she didn't know if the country and western bands who played Friday and Saturday were nude, but Thursday's rock 'n' roll band did play in the buff after its intermission, she said.

Much of the outdoor activity at the resort centered around the pool. Men and women, young and old, sat around and visited while the water teemed with young skinny-dippers.

Near the pool, volleyball teams competed on the fenced-in court while friends watched from the shade of a nearby tree.

For those inclined toward less strenuous activities, there's a clubhouse on the other side of the pool with a pingpong table, a pool table, indoor bathrooms and showers, a wide-screen television and video games.

For outdoor sports, there's horse-shoes, washers, lawn darts and badminton.

There's even a hot tub for those who just want to sit back and relax.

In fact, if all the people weren't totally nude, this would be your typical weekend resort.

Jim, a member of the club, said the "weekend resort" nature of nudist camps is one of the things the "nudist movement" is trying to publicize.

"A lot of people think its orgies out here and all that stuff," he said. "It doesn't happen. It's a family atmosphere. See all the kids?"

These are the misconceptions that give nudists a bad image, Jim said. The convention is one of the things they are doing to help mollify the image.

"The last couple of years the whole movement has just experienced a great openness," Jim said.

"There's just a real push for openness now in the movement," he said, "where in the past, people didn't want their neighbors to know they're nudists, and their boss to know... and that still exists."

"I thought, before I started, 'Nudist resort — you go out to a back road somewhere and there's a stock pond and a volleyball net, and that's it.'"

The nudist movement also is trying to clear up misconceptions about what kind of people go to nudist camps, Jim said.

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— Jim, member of Southwestern Sunbathers Association

nudist camp everybody would be beautiful — all the women would be playmates, all the men would be male models," he said. "Well, they're not."

"There's all shapes... there's fat people, skinny people, tall people, short people, all kinds. It's just like your town except that nobody wears clothes."

The club members also encompass a broad scope of professions, he said, including doctors, lawyers, construction workers, pilots, farmers, ranchers and even a genetic engineer. "You name it, there's somebody here that's a member."

Another member of the resort, Don Q., said the diversity of people at nudist camps is what makes them special.

This diversity is possible because of the lack of social barriers created by clothing, he said.

"When you take your clothes off and you're meeting people that you've never seen before in your life, that communication barrier is gone," Don said. "All you have is your personality and your mind."

"You come up to a place like this, you'll find more people, people like you've never met in your life. You talk to them like you've known them all their life."

Charlie Moss, owner of the Bluebonnet nudist resort, which is north of Fort Worth, agreed that nudism brings club members closer together.

"Nudism removes barriers rather than creating them," Moss said. "It's a good vehicle for sociability. People end up becoming friends and communicating with each other with a great deal more ease."

"In this world people tend to isolate themselves and to have a paranoia as far as engaging strangers in conversation. The opposite occurs in nudist parks."

"It's not for everyone. It's not a total panacea, but it is a much better conduit for conversation and communication in the 'textile' world."

This attitude fosters a family type atmosphere, and parents bring their children with them to the resorts.

The children have an organization of their own, the Junior Southwestern Sunbathing Association.

The JSWSA held its convention at the ranch July 18-20.

More than 50 children participated in tournaments, saw movies, discussed "Young Nudist Health Concerns" and went on field trips.

The junior sunbathers visited the Bluebell Creamery in Brenham and the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park. They wore clothing during the trips.

There are about 1,500 members of the Southwestern Sunbathing Association. More than 275 of them are members of the Live Oak Ranch.

Larry and Sabra Hilderbrand bought the resort in April, and have added a number of improvements since then.

They expanded the bathroom facilities in the clubhouse, built a pavilion and added enough RV hookups to bring the total number to 65.

The resort also has a restaurant, which serves three meals a day, although the selection is limited.

The new owner also built a 10-foot fence around the volleyball court and covered the surface with sand.

The new owners have even extended an invitation for the A&M volleyball teams, including intramural teams, to come out and practice for free on the newly fixed-up court during the week, a member said.

A few years ago an A&M team had asked for permission to use the court to practice but was refused, the member said.

"The previous owners wouldn't let them, but we will now," he said. "If your team wants to come out and practice on our court — keep their clothes on or take them off — it's up to you guys," Hilderbrand said.

Larry Hilderbrand said membership at the club has gone up 22 percent since he took over. He said he wants more members, and said

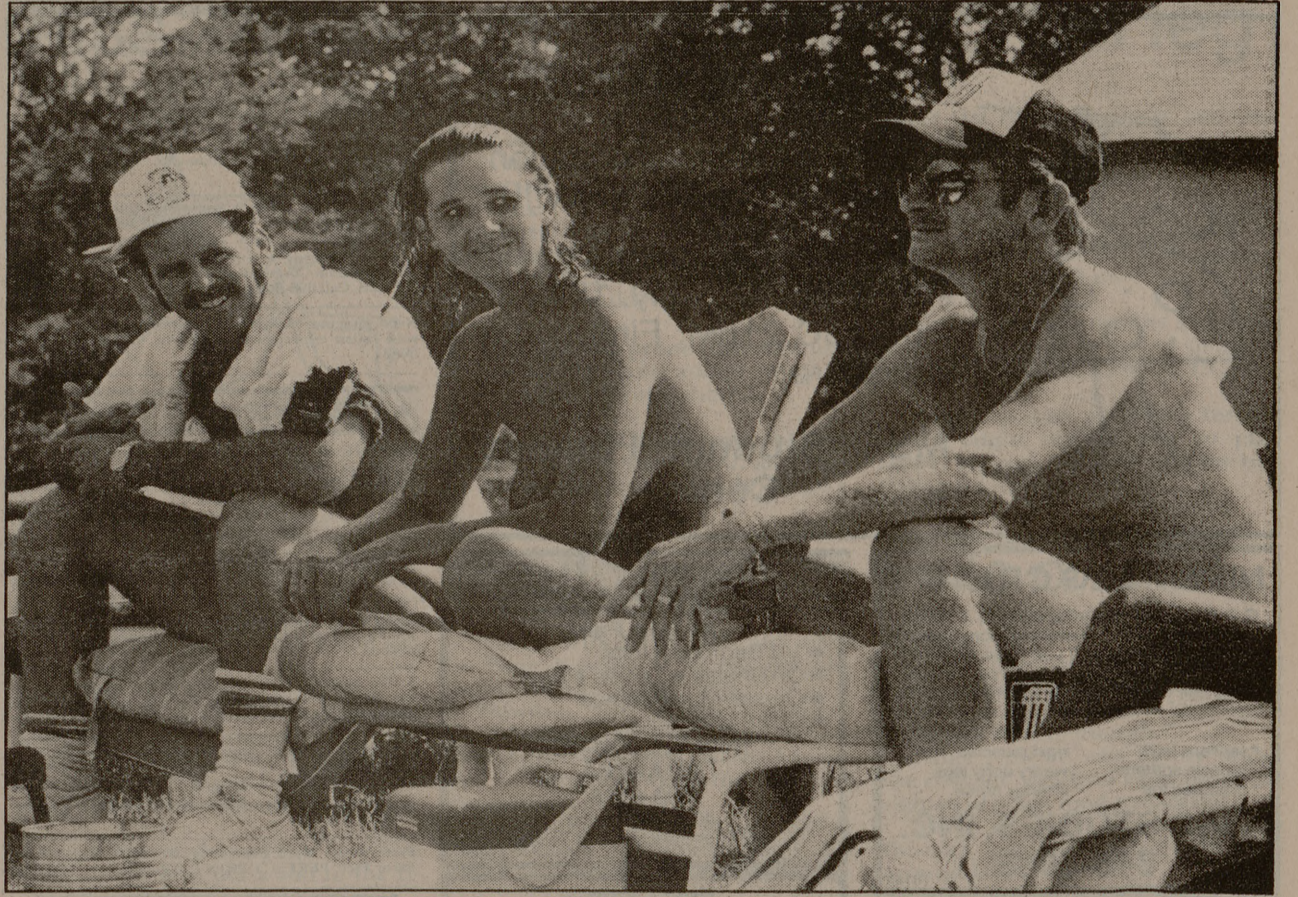


Photo by Jay Janner

A worker at Live Oak Ranch, far left, talks with some campers Thursday at the sixth annual

Southwestern Sunbathers Convention. The convention for nudists was July 18 through July 24.

everybody is welcome to visit the camp.

More information and directions can be obtained by calling (409) 878-2216.

Visitors are allowed three visits. All they have to do is come to the office and sign in. After three visits, they can apply for membership.

The camp is not a clothes-optional camp, so everyone inside must be nude unless weather or medical problems make clothing a necessity.

First-time visitors can keep their clothes on until they are acclimated to the nudity. This time period should last a maximum of a half hour to an hour.

A couple of the club members said men often have trouble undressing in public because they are afraid of having an erection when they get around nude women.

They emphasized that unwanted erections are never a problem.

"When everyone is like you, it just doesn't happen," one said.

Applicants must be screened and approved by a membership committee before they can become a member.

Since the resort is primarily for families, single men have a more difficult time getting approved than single women or families do, because of the long waiting list for single men.

"They try to keep it balanced," a camp employee said. "We have a tendency to get more male applicants than we do female. They don't always get in."

"You pretty well get approved if you're respectable, decent sort of people. They don't screen too heavily on families. Males, they watch you a little more."

Visitors must pay \$15 per day to stay at the camp. Members pay \$12 per day. There is an extra charge for staying overnight at the resort.

There is also a yearly membership fee.

Members of the Live Oak Ranch are automatically members of the SWSA and the American Sunbathing Association. The ASA has seven regions, with 200 parks, resorts and camps in the United States.

There are rules of conduct at the ranch, and the "don'ts" outnumber the "do's."

The resort prohibits the use of illegal drugs, excessive drinking, profanity, obscene and vulgar language, "offensive familiarities" and "indecent behaviors."

The rules also bar public discussion of "swinging" and any undue demonstration of affection.

Patsy, the secretary, said these prohibitions are nothing more than would be expected in daily public life.

"We want your conduct to be the same as it is in the main street of Houston," she said.

Computer network links universities in Texas

By Reisha Tucker
Reporter

When Texas A&M talks the University of Texas will listen and vice versa because of a statewide computer network that is expected to vastly improve communications between more than 30 academic institutions.

The Texas Higher Education Network, or THEnet, is the largest state academic computer network in the nation, linking A&M, UT and 32 other universities and academic institutions.

THEnet links colleges and universities and gives them access to important national data bases and libraries. Each university can get ac-

cess to the network through existing computer systems.

The system helps researchers, administrators and students collaborate on research projects, George Kemper, assistant director for technical services at A&M, said.

With this system for example, two professors from different universities who are writing a book together can communicate faster.

"Before, if you were real lucky, you would get something sent through the mail in a week or so," Kemper said. "With THEnet, electronic mail can be received in a matter of minutes."

Users of the network can share library resources, compare notes and perhaps in the

future utilize video teleconferencing.

The 3,000-mile network originally began two years ago when the UT system started connecting all of their universities with the Cray supercomputer in Austin, Frank Walter, public relations manager at ClayDesta Communications, said.

In spring 1987, plans were carried out to link UT's systems with A&M's.

ClayDesta, owned by Clayton W. Williams Jr., Class of '54, provides the telecommunications for THEnet.

"Kemper and William Bard, director of UT's System Office of Telecommunications Services, were the masterminds behind this idea," Walter said.

Because of Williams' loyalty to A&M, he wanted the state-wide digital network based in Bryan-College Station, Walter said.

"When all these lines were interconnected, we had to find a long distance carrier," Kemper said. "ClayDesta had the best service and the cheapest price."

Having this connection among Texas scholars builds the infrastructure of Texas, Kemper said. Now, Texans can communicate and more effectively compete for grants, he said.

"Our two universities coming together," Kemper said, "proved that we were determined and serious about working together cooperatively."

Teen escapes drowning

BAY CITY (AP) — A teenager working late at a city swimming pool says he escaped drowning after two men who anchored his feet and threw him into 14 feet of water failed to tie his hands.

Duc Tran, 17, said he was locking a gate at the pool shortly after 6 p.m. Sunday when a man grabbed him from behind, covered his eyes and held his arms. A second man grabbed his feet, Tran said, and he was dragged the edge of the pool.

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