

West Michigan should open market for nude beach

From earlier columns the alert reader will recall the author is a naturist ... someone who believes non-sexual nudity is a positive, healthy approach to living and brings us closer to nature and an appreciation of the world around us.

One of the ways even many non-naturists enjoy occasional public nudity is via skinny dipping. In a 2006 Roper poll over 25 percent of adults in a national sampling have skinny dipped in mixed company at some point.

While many of these occurrences take place at private homes with swimming pools, at one of the thousands of obscure lakes or ponds around the country or at naturist resorts, there are a number of public nude beaches around the country.

From Florida to New Jersey to California ... these legal nude beaches provide an opportunity to



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NOTHING TO HIDE

work on your tan without tan lines or simply swim as nature intended ... without wearing wet, clammy bathing suits.

But why does Michigan need a nude beach?

I imagine many readers have their own reasons for the answer to that question but here are my top selections:

1. It's cool. Nude beaches exist all over Europe ... particularly Spain, Germany, France, Denmark and Sweden.

The most progressive and forward thinking countries are also the

most open about public nudity. Here in the U.S., Florida, California and New York/New Jersey lead the way as trend setters in other areas of society as well as nude beaches. We could be right up there with them.

2. It's good business. The nude beach in Miami (Haulover Beach) represents only 1/3 mile of beachfront in South Miami, but is responsible for more than twice the parking and user fees of a comparable non-naturist beach nearby.

From the time Haulover Beach was identified as clothing optional in 1991, revenues have increased 126 percent while revenues for the nearby "textile" Crandon Beach have declined.

3. Its good for tourism. There are naturists all over the world seeking positive, safe, beautiful nude beaches.

Isn't Michigan's tourist industry one of the

leading generators of revenue in the state? If Florida's Pasco County commission can authorize thousands of dollars to be spent in German naturist magazines attracting German naturists to Florida's naturist resorts, why would we doubt Pure Michigan's pristine beaches couldn't be equally (or more) compelling to European naturists?

4. It's fair. It doesn't often occur to non-naturists ... but naturists are taxpayers too. We fund the state and national parks and seashores as much as any other dedicated user group (think snowmobilers, horseback riders, bicyclists, hikers and campers).

These user groups have dedicated trails, riding paths, campgrounds or other parts of state and national parks dedicated for their use ... why not a clothing optional beach for naturists?

Citing the same Roper poll from 2006, 74 percent of respondents to the poll "believe that people who enjoy nude sunbathing should be able to do so ... as long as they do so at a beach that is accepted for that purpose."

5. And, lastly, and importantly for me, it gives us all a chance to get comfortable with our own bodies. I wrote earlier about the body image issues so many Americans have. Too many of us are embarrassed by our bodies. And, we are even more intolerant of others. You don't see that in Europe.

None of us have perfect bodies ... but too often I hear people say "I don't want to see that "fat", "old", "wrinkled" or whatever hurtful descriptor comes to mind.

Really? I don't want to see pigeons either but somehow I'm mature enough to deal with it. That lack of acceptance

of our own bodies and others is debilitating, hurts our self-esteem and our ability to accept and connect with others.

As a final thought ... to those who think a clothing optional or nude beach means an abandonment of the fabric of society and/or the advent of a new debauchery: One cannot do anything on a nude beach one can't do on a "textile" beach (i.e. public sex, gawk at women, etc.)

The only difference in standards is that one doesn't have clothes on. It doesn't mean you can behave like a jackass.

Now, how about carving out a section of Willard Beach to be clothing optional?

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