

Life is about pursuing a passion — find yours

This will be my last column written in Battle Creek (I will continue to write from sunny Florida!) I'm leaving to pursue a long held interest of bringing naturism/nudism to America.

Some readers will recall the occasional column I have done on nudism. Nudism is a philosophy of living based on healthy living, fresh air, sunshine, exercise, respecting oneself and others and living without clothes when and where possible.

It is a particular passion of mine and I've been given the opportunity to pursue that dream on a full time basis. My new position, executive director of the American Association for Nude Recreation (www.aanr.com/), is located in Kissimmee, Florida. While, I'm excited about this opportunity, I have many regrets about leaving my adopted home of 30 years and some wonderful friends. This is a great



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NOTHING TO HIDE

town, with many terrific people and a huge amount of potential.

In a way, Battle Creek and naturism are similar. Both are relatively small. Battle Creek at 50,000 residents is the 30th largest city in Michigan. AANR with over 35,000 members is not very large compared with other national membership associations.

Both Battle Creek and nudism suffer discrimination and misperceptions. Battle Creek is seen by some as the poor cousin of Kalamazoo, a blue collar community with limited

culture, a rust-belt history and a lot of crime. Nudism is often equated with sexual promiscuity, exhibitionists or people who are suspiciously self-closeted in "nudist colonies." Neither set of perceptions is accurate but perceptions are reality for many.

Just as we've had trouble gaining traction on the future economic prospects of Battle Creek in attracting industry or getting white collar managers to live here vs. living in Portage, Kalamazoo or Gull Lake, nudism has had trouble being accepted as a mainstream way of living and being accepted by the law as a nonsexual and healthy, positive way to live.

But I never gave up on Battle Creek. As chair of the Downtown Partnership I continued to observe good faith efforts to bring the downtown back — small business owners putting their money and sweat equity into shops and busi-

nesses that could be successful and help bring not only prosperity to themselves but vitality to the community, the city encouraging these efforts and allocating time and money to build a better community, large donor organizations like the Kellogg Foundation and the Kellogg Company investing in the downtown and the entire community year after year.

I believe Battle Creek will survive and thrive, as I suggested in my column last week on celebrating the honest work of manufacturing.

I believe nudism will also become increasingly accepted here in America, as it is in much of Europe. Munich just designated six large "zones" within the city where people could be nude to stroll, sunbathe or just sit on a bench and read the paper. Cap d'Agde is a completely nude community in France.

In Germany, Sweden,

France and other developed countries, visiting a nude beach or sunbathing in a city park is not seen as a "guilty" pleasure but as a pleasure and therapeutic interaction with nature to be savored. Can we, as Americans, ever relax enough about our bodies to visit a nude beach, have a nude barbecue in our backyard or hike the national forest nude (as is done in Switzerland) and/or tolerate others who do?

I think so. Many of you know Battle Creek was home to one of the oldest nudist resorts in the country in Sunshine Gardens. You may not know Turtle Lake Resort just outside of Union City is one of the largest and most successful nudist resorts in the Midwest.

I'm torn between pursuing the continued evolution of Battle Creek and the future of nudism in America. Both are enormous challenges and yet both strike a sense of passion and com-

mitment for me. I will continue to support both.

I lived and worked in Battle Creek for 30 years, devoting much free time to the naturist cause. Now, it will be the reverse. But no matter which way it is, life is about pursuing a passion.

Family is terribly important, and if you have a family you are very fortunate. But beyond family, there are causes and places and things worth being passionate about. I've found mine, and if you haven't, I hope you'll take some time to find yours.

Whatever you choose, put your heart and soul into it. Consider how you can pursue that passion — for love or money, and sometimes, if you're very lucky, for both.

Bill Schroer is now the Executive Director for the American Association for Nude Recreation in Kissimmee, Florida.