

Free swim takes on nude meaning

BY NICOLA LUKSIC

TORONTO (CUP) — In a move believed to be unprecedented for a Canadian university, the University of Toronto has approved a nude swim at the school's athletic centre.

The initiative was driven by a campus club called the U of T Naturists, who took the first plunge earlier this month when about 37 members jumped in the pool — stark naked.

They and other club members will be able to swim in the nude periodically throughout the year.

"There's absolutely nothing obscene about being nude," said Thomas Lundy, an organizer with the club and student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

"Nude swimming is definitely not erotic. Sex and eroticism are in the mind, not in the naked body," he said as he floated into the shallow end.

Lundy, who spent most of his life in Europe, was introduced to naturism when he was eight, and says he has difficulty understanding why North America is so behind the times when it comes to basking in the buff.

"People find nudity hilarious. Why does the North American population react to plain, simple, sheer nudity and call it perverted or sexual?" he asked. "I don't think I can ever adjust to this way of thinking."

Some swimmers who participated in the nude swim seemed to share Lundy's desire to change what they refer to as restricting North American attitudes.

"It is very liberating to be naked and in touch with the water,"

said Mickey Cirak, a U of T student and volunteer at the campus Sexual Education Centre.

The event ran more smoothly than the clothed lifeguarding staff at the athletic centre expected.

"I thought it would be a little more rowdy — more jumping around and noise," said lifeguard Missy Field. "They just seem fun-loving and down to earth."

Despite the social taboos surrounding nudity, the naturist group is receiving the same kind of treatment from the university as any other of the 185 student groups on campus.

"I'm happy that there is such a diversity of student interest groups for people to choose from," said Jim Delaney of the U of T student affairs office, adding he would rather take part in the Beatles' Appreciation Club than sign on for a nudist colony.

Still, attitudes on campus vary.

"I think it's very inappropriate for an academic institution of this stature to endorse this kind of group," said Mark, a first-year U of T student. "I think that the body is sacred and private. That's my moral standing and personal opinion. Although I'm opinionated, I'm also open. I have to say that it's great that there's so much diversity."

It's difficult for him and society not to equate nudity with sexual activity, he added.

Others couldn't believe the nude news.

"I thought it was a joke," said student Paul Sanders upon hearing of the nudist accreditation. "I would never do it. I'm way too self-conscious."

But breaking down negative body image is part of what naturists

claim they're about.

"You become shameless. These people don't have the body taboo created by our society. I think it's great for people with body image problems."

"You see all kinds of bodies here," said film student Bulen Akman while drying himself off on the pool's deck. He says he no longer feels painfully aware of what many would deem a small penis.



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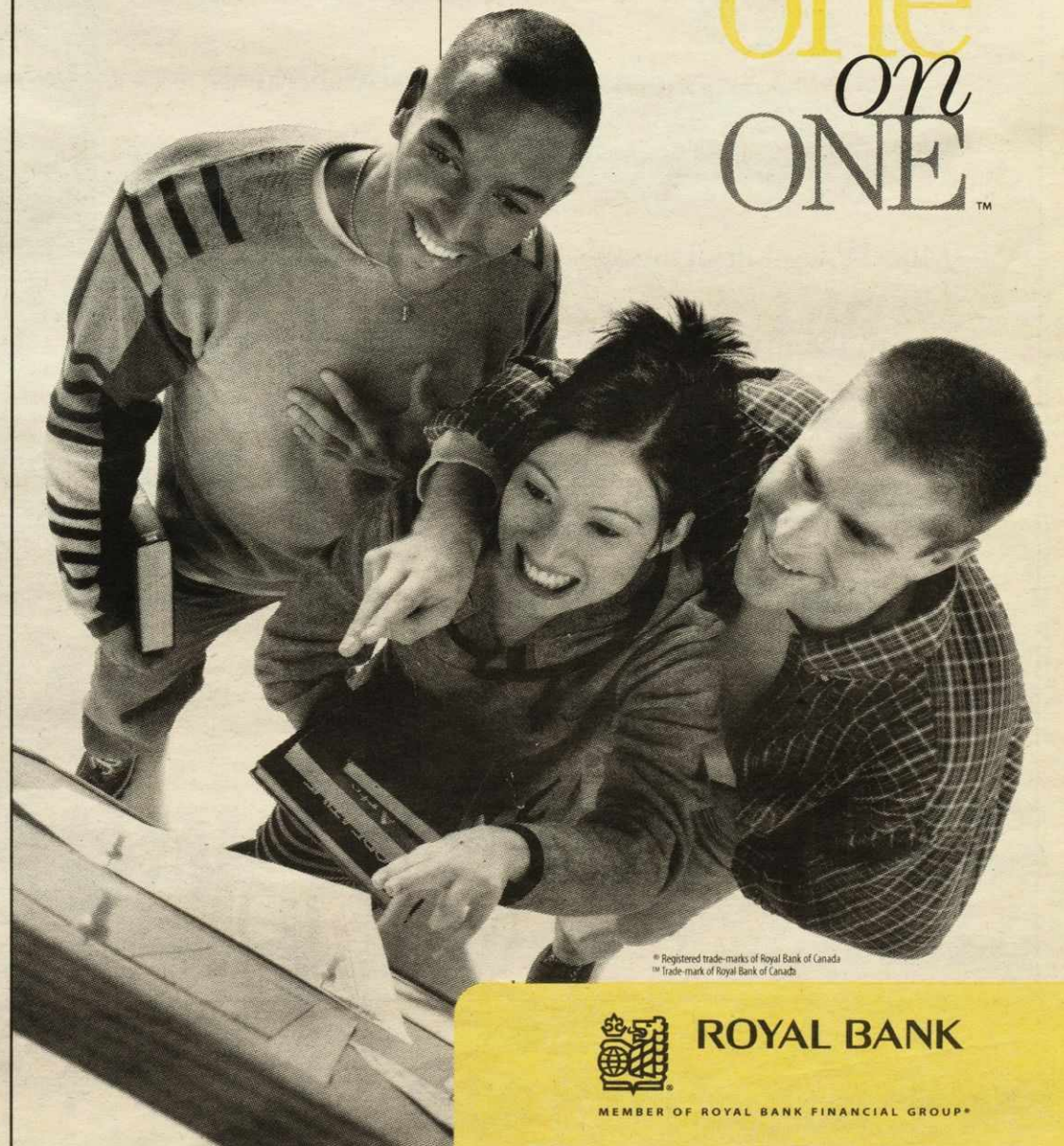
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