

Publication: Jnl Final Edition 8/2005-today; Date: Aug 24, 2008; Section: New Mexico; Page: B4



Few Bare All at Topless Protest

Event Highlights Gender Inequality

By Raam Wong Journal Northern Bureau

SANTA FE — With more men holding cameras than women removing shirts, Santa Fe's Go Topless Protest Day at a downtown park Saturday initially looked like a bust.

The event was staged by 44-year-old Alaric Balibrera, a filmmaker, activist and, it should be noted, a dude. Balibrera was unsure how many women would join his protest against the line society has drawn between male and female chests.

A few minutes before the 1 p.m. strip time, the wide green lawn in Macaione Park was empty save for a couple making out beneath a tree. But a closer look around revealed a curious city employee sitting in an idling truck nearby and men nonchalantly strolling through, their six-megapixel cameras in hand.

"If there is a happening in Santa Fe, I'd certainly like to be present," said Dan Clint, who sat at a picnic bench as onlookers trickled in.

Clint said it was only fair that if men are allowed to go bare-chested, so, too, should women.

"Of course I'm a guy," he said. "I think guys would be all for it."

The event was put on by the followers of the Raëlian religion, who believe the human race was created by aliens.

The National Go Topless Protest Day was one of several such events planned in cities such as Austin and Omaha, Neb., with a "grand finale" slated for the doorstep of the Democratic National Convention.

City attorney Frank Katz said last week the event was legal, explaining that indecent exposure is considered below the waist.

Katz's words may have inspired others to get in on the act. City police responded Friday night and again Saturday morning to reports of a topless jogger on Cerrillos Road. All officers could do was ask the jogger to put her shirt back on, Deputy Police Chief Benjie Montaña said.

"It's not illegal, believe it or not," Montaña said.

Nonetheless, organizers pressed on with their campaign Saturday afternoon.

"We're not here to show our boobs, really. We're here to show our brains," said Balibrera as he unloaded boxes of fliers calling for "feminine strength and determination" in the campaign for equal rights.

Midway through the event, shirts were finally shed. First it was the men, who used body paint to write "LEGAL" on their chests.

They were followed by sword dancer Serena Pullen, 33, who removed her top, exposing her chest behind a thin mesh scarf.

"Anyone else?" Balibrera asked. "All are welcome."

By the end of the event, it was a handful of topless men and Pullen, the only woman comfortable enough to go bare-chested.

Belle Balibrera, the organizer's sister, said the event highlighted the plight of women globally, from female circumcision to unequal pay. "The only way we can get people to pay attention is to go topless," she said. "If sex pulls people in, then good."

But would she be removing her shirt? "No, I have a business in town," she said.

Ditto for her friend, a teacher, who stripped down to a bikini top and called it a day. A Saturday afternoon in the park isn't

enough to get most people topless, she said, adding, "you need beer and AC/DC" for that.



EDDIE MOORE/JOURNAL Eric Lagitana, center, dances Saturday with Serena Pullen in Macaione Park as part of Go Topless Protest Day in Santa Fe.