



First Coast Naturists



About the author
Pete Williams
AANR Staff Writer

Longtime AANR writer Pete Williams is a NASM-certified personal trainer who writes about fitness and simple living at www.ToLiveLean.com. Do you have an idea for a “Sporting Life” story or does your club have an unusual sports tradition? Email editor@aanr.com.

Forming a non-landed nudist club traditionally has been challenging. Without a landed resort, organizers had to find like-minded members and grow the club mostly by word of mouth.

David Berry expedited that process. The retired U.S. Navy commander started First Coast Naturists out of Jacksonville, Florida, in May 2013 by launching a group on www.Meetup.com, the popular online service used to organize events for those with similar interests.

Berry figured that, since there were Meetup groups for almost everything imaginable from kayaking to photography to wine tasting, why not start a nudist group? Within three weeks he had 25 members and the group took off from there.

First Coast Naturists became an AANR-chartered club in 2015 and later that year was recognized as AANR’s fastest-growing club. These days, membership stands at roughly 200, which Berry can quantify from his Meetup membership. In mid-November there were 127 members and he figures slightly more than half are couple’s profiles.

“Meetup is a great platform for those wanting to build a club,” says Berry, who has recommended it to those who live more than 60 miles from Jacksonville, figuring they’d be more active by starting a group close to home rather than traveling to participate with First

Coast Naturists. “And it’s an instant way to make new, like-minded friends.”

Other than the online component, First Coast Naturists operates pretty much as AANR travel clubs have since the 1980s. Interested people are invited – via Meetup, the club’s Facebook page, or the www.firstcoastnaturists.com website – to attend a “textile meeting” at a local restaurant for dinner and drinks. From there, newcomers can attend club events, which include pool parties at member homes, trips to North Florida nudist destinations, such as AANR clubs Sunny Sands and Suwanee Valley, and nude beaches like Apollo and Playalinda.

Occasionally they’ll venture further, heading to the Blind Creek nude beach in Fort Pierce, or west to Cypress Cove in Kissimmee, or to Lake Como near Tampa. Once a year, the club charters a bus to a nude beach where the bus ride is clothing-optional.

Berry, who works as a civilian contractor for the Navy, which is aware of his nudist involvement, can run most of the club administration out of Meetup, keeping track of members, dues and, of course, event attendees and RSVP’s.

Meetup was founded in 2002 by Scott Heiferman, who was influenced by the book “Bowling Alone” about the decline of



community in modern culture. By 2010, Meetup had eight million users and today has more than 35 million users worldwide representing 225,000 groups in 180 countries.

Groups are organized into one of more than 30 categories, the most popular of which are “adventure and outdoor activities,” “career and business,” and “parents and family.” Most events take place weekly or monthly at local venues, usually on evenings and weekends.

First Coast Naturists, like landed clubs, organizes its calendar around holidays and warmer temperatures. North Florida weather can be unpredictable in the winter months so the club tends to hold indoor events such as a wine and cheese party and a Bunko event. The group has ventured to Kissimmee and even into South Georgia for nude bowling events.

“We’re all over the place over the course of the year, mixing it up between house parties and resorts,” Berry said. “We try to do something every month in addition to our textile meet-and-greet for newcomers. My mission for the club is to provide opportunities for social nude recreation.”

Jacksonville is a military town and the club has a number of veterans like Berry, so members get involved in collecting gift cards and other donations for local veterans.

Some members get together informally via Meetup. If a member is going to stay at Apollo Beach on a Tuesday, he or she could mention it to the group online. “Not many people are off from work on Tuesdays, but we’ve had instances where suddenly eight people are hanging out together at the beach,” Berry said.

Berry and his wife, Kassie, both of whom had been married before, met during a singles event early in the Internet era. Berry was open about his nudist involvement, not wanting to be in a relationship with a non-nudist, and Kassie mentioned that she had been to Apollo Beach. They were married in 2001 at Sunny Sands, the AANR club in Pierson, Florida.

One First Coast Naturists couple met through the Meetup group and recently had a nude wedding. Like all AANR clubs, First Coast deals with the single male issue, but Berry says it generally has not been a problem. The textile meet-and-greet helps to weed out those who might be there for the wrong reasons.

“Single guys get a bad rep and some of the time it’s deserved, but most of the time it’s not,” Berry said.

Berry is hesitant to let in new Meetup members who belong to dozens of groups on the site, figuring they’re not serious about becoming involved. He also gets calls from traveling nudists under the mistaken impression First Coast Naturists is a landed club and inquiring about room reservations. He refers those folks to landed AANR clubs.

While Berry will allow members who live beyond the 60-mile radius to join, he encourages them to start their own

groups. He figures Meetup can help bring together nudists who don’t live close to landed AANR clubs.

“If you can create something local, you’ll have a lot more fun and it won’t be so much work organizing,” Berry said. “There’s a need for more traveling groups and this is a great way to build one that didn’t exist until recently.” ●

