

# The History Of Crocus Grove Sun Club

*Written in 2009 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Crocus Grove Sun Club*

Forty years ago, in 1969, one man had a vision to create a place where families could enjoy social nudism. It would lead to what became the most successful and longest owner-run nudist club in Canada. This is the story of Crocus Grove — the place and the people.

Leon Prucyk delivered papers for the *Winnipeg Free Press*. His pickup point had nudist magazines from Europe on display. Reading them gave him an interest in social nudism. He and his wife Evelyn and their children joined the local Manitoba Outdoor Club, whose members enjoyed swimming in the nude at a friend's lakeside cottage at Beaconia beach. Passing motorboats eventually made this difficult to enjoy *au naturel* so Leon decided to look for something more suitable. He dreamed of a place close to where he lived and worked in Winnipeg where families could go to enjoy social nudism, so he began to plan how to realize that dream.

In 1969, after a lot of searching, Leon found a 60 acre heavily wooded property on a high sandy ridge with pine trees bowing in the wind, the fresh scent of pine in the air and squirrels running about. It was an hour's drive north of Winnipeg. The trees provided a good screen from curious eyes and there was an all weather sand trail road.

Initially the idea was to have a nudist facility that would be a co-operative with the participation of four other couples that had followed Leon from the Manitoba Outdoor Club. However, the economics of the times made the co-op idea uncertain, so rather than lose out on the property, Leon and Evelyn took out a bank loan and purchased it themselves. Evelyn named it Crocus Grove because of the many Crocuses that grew in amongst the trees.

An Executive was formed to run the Club with Leon. Together Lynn and Leon had one seat on the Board. Everyone worked together. The Executive held meetings, set policies and planned events. In later years, it also handled some media communications.

The first constitution was written after looking at those of other nudist clubs. Over the winter there were meetings to discuss what was wanted for Crocus Grove's constitution. The Executive brought it to the spring meeting for discussion by the membership and voting.

In June of 1969, Leon applied for a charter for Crocus Grove, with Sunny Chinooks acting as the sponsor. In August of that year the American Association for Nude Recreation (then called the American Sunbathing Association, or ASA), granted the Prucyks a charter for their clothing-optional club. A charter is an agreement with American Association for Nude Recreation (AANR) that gives voice at meetings to the club holding the charter. Each year since then the Club has celebrated its anniversary in August.

For the first few years there were no buildings, running water or electricity, so Leon charged no fees. Fees were started around 1973. By 1971, Leon and John S. had cut a road all the way into the property and a fence had been erected to keep out curiosity seekers and wandering livestock from neighbouring farms. Ivan helped Leon dig a well by hand. There was a toilet and the beginnings of a volleyball court. Members pooled their money and purchased a 24-foot diameter above-ground pool.

1971 saw electricity introduced to the grounds and thanks to Leon's nephew, an electrician, the clubhouse was wired. A pool filter and an electric pump were installed, which eliminated the hours of hand pumping required

to fill the above-ground pool. People pitched in to dig a line to the areas without running water. Leon supplied the pipes and members who wanted water for their lots did the work of laying that line.

It also provided drinking water. Plans were made to recruit new members and for construction of more facilities. One member, Carl, was a first year apprentice bricklayer so he worked on the construction of the first building on the grounds, the sauna building, in 1973. Leon supplied the materials and some of the other members lent a hand with the construction, working in the hot summer sun mixing mortar and laying cement blocks. It was the Club's fourth year.

The sauna building had a wood-burning stove which was used to heat the sauna and the water for the showers. Firewood had to be burned to keep the sauna hot. A metal pipe went into the firebox and water went through the pipe, heating it for showers. Most everyone pitched in to help with the building, performing some type of work or another. Cedar benches were installed. There were showers and washrooms and a lounge area for socializing. The size of the building was adequate for the number of members at the time.

There was a membership committee made up of members of the Executive and Lynn and Leon. They interviewed prospective members in their homes. At one of these interviews, the wife could be heard shouting to her husband that if he got rid of those nudists, she would go camping with him. Eventually the interviews were held out at camp.

Leon's policy was that the only place where clothing wasn't allowed was the pool, and when it was built in 1985, the hot tub. This was so that new people could try the place out gradually rather than have to go nude all at once. Leon knew you couldn't rush people into joining a clothing-optional resort like Crocus Grove.

Membership was growing and ads were placed in a local newspaper advertising the clothing-optional resort. Initially, advertising the Club in order to build membership was difficult. In the early years, *The Winnipeg Sun* was the only publication to accept ads. Other media were reluctant due to the nature of the club. Around 1977, three members — Horst, Margaret and Jean — appeared on Peter Warren's radio talk show. One of our members, Robert, heard the interview and he and his family joined shortly afterwards. 1994 saw Bob, Pat and Evelyn A. appear on the same radio talk show to discuss social nudism and Crocus Grove Sun Club. Warren's acceptance of Crocus Grove led to acceptance by other media.

Leon also advertised in Beausejour and Portage la Prairie newspapers as well as *The Lance* community newspaper in Winnipeg. Even the *Coffee Time News*, found in many local cafes, accepted ads for Crocus Grove. After Leon was interviewed by a reporter from the *Winnipeg Tribune* in 1980, he advertised in both Winnipeg newspapers for a month. When he was interviewed on CHIQ FM and CFRW, Leon again took advantage of the publicity to run newspaper ads.

Over the years, the clothing-optional resort has been written about in local newspapers and visited by television crews. Stories have appeared on local supper hour news, interviews on radio stations and articles written in the *Winnipeg Sun* and *Winnipeg Free Press*. A French radio station from Winnipeg even sent a reporter out to do a story. Crocus Grove was accepted by both the public and the media. Bob has done numerous media events since. A recent search of the *Winnipeg Free Press* Web site archives reports 316 articles about Crocus Grove.

In the winter, members would get together at Lynn and Leon's home for an evening of hot tubbing, snacks and socializing. Winter swims at a city pool were started in 1972. For the first few years, members from the Manitoba Outdoor Club joined Crocus Grove members one Saturday a month for swims, volleyball, coffee, snacks and a sauna at the rented pool. These monthly swims were very well attended. Unfortunately, in 1997 the pool had a change in policy and management. Winter swims ended until 2000 when Margaret Grant pool was

rented. Being located at the very south edge of the city meant it was a long drive on a winter's night and attendance was not very good so winter swims were discontinued. Several attempts were made to find another city facility but many were uncomfortable with renting their buildings for nude swims. With others, the layout of the facilities didn't provide adequate screening from the street so winter swims haven't taken place since. A pool search may be undertaken again in the near future.

In 1976 an in-ground pool replaced the above-ground one at Crocus Grove. It was a big project that saw practically everyone take a turn at helping in one way or another. John S. was a man ahead of his time with his invention of a homemade solar heating system to heat the water for the pool. He used 10 to 12 lines of black pipe that took water up to the roof of the garage where the sun could heat it (this is where the pump house stands today), and then it was circulated back down into the pool. It wasn't until 1987 that a heater was purchased and installed for the pool. The pool was fenced in for safety and to keep out wandering deer and any livestock that might come by. To finish it off, a concrete patio surrounding the pool was laid.

Cottages began to be built. Membership had grown to about 100 adults plus their children.

In the spring of 1977, while they were in Winnipeg shopping, Leon and Evelyn's cottage was stuck by lightning and burnt to the ground. They rebuilt it that summer. The clubhouse was constructed at the same time and had a dining room, second floor lounge and small kitchen. The sauna building continued to be used for showers and washrooms.

With the two-story clubhouse and the sauna as the centerpiece of the grounds, that same year the Club hosted their first nudist convention for the Western Canadian Sunbathing Association (now called the American Association for Nude Recreation — Western Canadian Region). In addition to the 1977 convention, Crocus Grove has hosted conventions in 1988, 1991, 1997 and 2001. In 1985, Crocus Grove hosted the silver anniversary of the Western Canadian Sunbathing Association.

Leon kept fees low for members. He felt it was more important for people to be able to enjoy social nudism than to make a lot of money by charging higher fees. To Leon, the important thing was that as many people as possible enjoy the nudist lifestyle. In 1980, an unserviced lot rented for \$25 and a serviced one for \$30. A card was given out to members that allowed them to bring a visitor for one free visit before fees had to be paid. Leon's policy was that Crocus Grove members automatically belong to the American Association for Nude Recreation (AANR).

Crocus Grove's family-oriented atmosphere and affordable rates attracted many families, and the shouts and laughter of children enjoying the pool or children's play area could be heard echoing throughout the campground on sunny summer days.

In 1985, it was decided that Evelyn would be club manager, handling reception of visitors and prospective members, collecting grounds fees and membership dues. She gave tours of the grounds and in the early days she did this on foot, which was a lot of walking. A golf cart was purchased in 1989 for \$600 and Evelyn could be seen speeding down the roads of the campground with a visitor seated beside her, clinging to some part of the golf cart as she gave a running commentary on the grounds, facilities and rules. Eventually she wore that golf cart out. Another one was bought in 1995, this time complete with a bike horn attached to the steering wheel. Leon spent his weekends cutting grass, carrying out repairs and maintenance.

Over the years, as finances allowed, and often with the help of members contributing labor, Leon undertook other construction projects. In 1985, an addition was put on the club house which included the current kitchen, games room and hot tub room. Donations of dishes and utensils as well as furniture for the upstairs lounge were

made by members. A dry sauna was put in where the small kitchen had been. Showers and washrooms were put in at the same time. Leon eventually got tired of painting the clubhouse exterior so vinyl siding was added in 1993 when finances made it possible. Robert and Yvonne provided the labor for that project. The following year, 1986, a hot tub was installed with cedar wood around it and a cedar bench. A pool table was added for the games room.

The laid back atmosphere was interspersed with a wide range of social activities: pot luck suppers, camp fire sing-alongs, nude Olympics, the annual chili cook off, games nights, cribbage tournaments, wine and cheese, an annual Irish party, theme dances, wiener and corn roasts, and of course, volleyball. Volleyball has remained a passion with the membership. Trophies have been won for volleyball tournaments at AANR and WCANR conventions and are displayed in the clubhouse.

Other sports that have become part of life at Crocus Grove include badminton, mini golf, croquet, horseshoes, and shuffleboard. There's also table tennis and a recent addition — Bocce ball. Ladder golf was introduced a few years ago by Harry and is slowly gaining attention.

In 1989, Gunther and Heather organized a day trip for 20 members that took them by chartered boat to one of the islands near Hecla Island on Lake Winnipeg. There they enjoyed a day of nude sunbathing and fun. While some returned to camp in the evening, a few people camped on the island overnight before returning to Crocus Grove.

There have been celebrations of National Nude Weekend with open house and guided tours given to media and people interested in social nudism. A yearly garage sale, in addition to raising money for the club, became a way of showing off the facilities and educating the local community about the club and the nudist lifestyle.

The long, cold Manitoba winters don't prevent members from getting together. In recent years, a bowling night, a roast beef dinner evening and a February breakfast have been planned and were very well attended. Volleyball at a local community center has been added. Unfortunately, all events are textile but they enable people to stay connected until summer.

Early on, a newsletter was started to communicate with members about various events like conventions, social calendars and other club information. Published twice a year, it was named *The Petals* by Evelyn.

A gazebo was constructed in 1992. It had a picnic table, barbeque and chairs so visitors had a place to cook and eat in that was away from the mosquitoes that Manitoba is famous for.

The grounds now had a well-groomed volleyball court, miniature golf, badminton court and an office. A 1 km. hiking trail was cut out of the forested area that surrounded the grounds. "Builder Bob" and his family keep it groomed every spring.

In the 1990's, the shabby looking garage that stood on the east side of the pool was demolished. A new building was erected in its place called the pump house as it houses the pump for the pool. The well is also located in the same building.

Leon retired from his job at the phone company in 1995 and built a house on the grounds. He and Lynn lived at Crocus Grove year round. This was also the year that saw Highway 317 under construction. Although it was inconvenient at the time, the result was one of the smoothest highways in the province and a vast improvement over the former road.

Late one summer night, some enterprising members managed to take down part of the 8-foot fence that surrounded the pool area. They brought a Seadoo in and put it into the pool. A picture was taken with a member sitting on it and towing a water-skier. They then removed the Seadoo and replaced the fence, all without Leon knowing about it. A large framed photograph of the episode hangs in the clubhouse.

Crocus Grove was growing in members and facilities. By now there were a couple of trailers and a small cabin often referred to as the "Sugar Shack" for rent to visitors. It had been built by John and Vicki for them and their son. Lynn and Leon never named it and no one can recall how the small cabin got its nickname. There were also serviced and unserviced camping and tenting sites. More members built cottages or brought in RV's and trailers to live in.

By now there were 20 camping spots, three hot showers indoors, two hot showers located outside the clubhouse and a cold shower near the volleyball court. Picnic tables were scattered around the clubhouse grounds. Trees were cleared to make room for ten RV spaces with electricity and another ten with water for the many out of town visitors that came each summer and for nudist conventions.

In the summer of 1996, Gunther and Heather left with several other members to form another nudist club, Musqua Meadows in southern Manitoba.

Evelyn continued to act as camp manager until 2002, when Leon and Evelyn turned over the running of the campground to the members with the aim of giving them complete operation of the facilities in the future. Although there were a few bumps along the way, Leon considered the trial period a success and the summer of 2004 saw the change from an owner-operated club to a membership-operated one.

In the early years, the demographics of the club consisted of families and couples over 35 years of age. Some current members have been around since the early days. There have even been five generations of one family as members. They continue as members to this day, although one generation has since passed away.

The patriarch of this family, known in some circles as "Builder Bob," with the occasional help of his granddaughter and two grandsons, has worked on all the construction projects on the grounds over the years. From the time they joined, Robert and his wife, Min, helped Leon with every building project. Were it not for them, many of the structures that Crocus Grove has today would not exist.

Membership eventually rose to 180 card-carrying nudists in the 90's.

For a few years, beginning in 1992, the club held open house on a weekend in July designated National Nude Weekend by nudist clubs all over North America. Visitors were given tours of the campground and the nudist philosophy was explained. The first one resulted in five radio interviews and three TV stations carrying news stories about it. 92 CITI FM broadcast three hours live from camp. It was this open house that brought member "Volleyball Dennis" to check out the club and eventually join. The 1994 open house was especially well attended by representatives from the media including CJOB, CBC, French Radio, MTN-TV and Q94. These educational weekends were tried for several years and although well attended by the public, few new members were gained as a result. People who came for the free day returned to places like Patricia Beach, a public nude beach, where they didn't have to pay.

In 2000 Leon developed cancer. In 2004, because of his continuing poor health, the club leased the property from Leon. The club ran the entire operation themselves including advertising until 2006 when a corporation was formed by the members. The name "Crocus Grove" was registered in 2005. The office, originally located at Lynn and Leon's house, was moved to a building that was built near the clubhouse.

After a long struggle with cancer, Leon died in 2005. The loss of the club's founder and champion of nudism was a very difficult time for all. A co-op was formed with the intention of buying the campground from Evelyn. However, funding goals proved to be too difficult to complete that model of ownership. In 2006, members Ray and Sue took a hard look at what they could do to keep nudism alive in Manitoba. They came forward and made an offer to purchase, which was accepted. It was their intention to keep the campground a clothing-optional community.

Fire burnt one cottage to the ground shortly afterwards but there was no other damage thanks to the quick actions of a neighbour. He spotted the fire from his adjacent property and called the local volunteer fire department, which arrived very quickly and put the fire out.

A new road into the campground had to be made as the 60-acre property was subdivided in the sale. The campground was now 30 acres. The weather on the weekend the road was cut was cold and snowy, but despite this, more than 20 members came out and helped cut down and clear a new road. Ray and Sue provided hot soup and meals for the workers.

In the spring of 2009, Sue rented a booth at the Winnipeg RV Show to let more people know about Crocus Grove, currently Manitoba's only clothing-optional resort (Musqua Meadows closed in 2008). There were a lot of inquiries. The hope is new members will be found as a result of the RV show and other advertising.

July 2009 saw Crocus Grove take part in the first *Guinness Book of World Records* Skinny Dip. 49 people took their clothes off to help set a record for the most people skinny-dipping at the same time across North America. A pig roast to celebrate the club's 40th anniversary was held the following weekend. Two of Robert and Min's grandchildren named the pig "Oinkers." It was enjoyed so much it may become an annual event.

Crocus Grove Sun Club is full of interesting people. Each person contributes to the club's atmosphere and spirit in some unique way. Several members who have given years of dedication and service to Crocus Grove include Robert and Min, Bob and Pat, Betty and Barney, and Fern.

Getting people to serve on the social committee has always been a challenge, but Betty has always been willing to help out even when she is the only serving member. She ensures decorations for the summer's social events are in place and anytime a member is sick or in the hospital, she whisks off a get well card on behalf of the membership.

Robert L. (known in some Canadian circles as "Builder Bob" and "Bob the Builder" in Arizona where he spends the winter) and wife Min have always pitched in to help, as have all the members of their family from the day they joined Crocus Grove. Whether it be social events that need helping hands or the numerous building projects on the grounds over the years, they are the most reliable people any organization could wish to have.

For years, Pat occasionally managed the campground for Lynn and Leon so that they could run errands in the city. Bob took on responsibilities as groundskeeper and learned the technical skills necessary for the job so that Leon could take things a little easier. Bob has skillfully handled publicity and media for the club for years. Pat has worked tirelessly over the years when it came to new members and memberships. Bob and Pat are two of the strongest and most articulate voices for social nudism that the movement has in Manitoba.

Fern has enthusiastically promoted Crocus Grove to anyone who would listen to him talk of all the wonderful things about it and nudism. He has been a reliable volunteer from the time he first joined. His latest creation is a Bocce ball court behind his cottage for members to use.

Currently, the oldest members in terms of membership years are Heinze and Simone. They joined soon after Crocus Grove was started. Both have served in positions on the Executive and subcommittees in the early years of the Club — Simone as treasurer, Heinze as Trustee.

There have been some colorful characters as members of Crocus Grove over the years. Barney can be heard whistling away as he goes about his early morning walk of the campground, and he can be seen puttering away in his makeshift workshop on various projects.

Captain Don, another interesting character, had been a riverboat captain on the Great Lakes and then on a cruise ship when he came to Winnipeg. Don was a great storyteller and held a job at the Forks relating the history of that area to tourists each summer. Barney and Don, both nature lovers, went for long walks in the countryside around Crocus Grove, investigating the wildlife and flowers. Captain Don collected driftwood from his many boating excursions, bringing it back to camp to adorn his lot. When he died, he was buried a mile from Crocus Grove in Mars Hill cemetery. A reception was held in the clubhouse after the funeral.

Ed, a member in 1997, used to bring his guitar to camp for the campfire sing alongs. For the convention hosted by Crocus Grove that year, he wrote the Crocus Grove Song.

People aren't the only visitors and residents of Crocus Grove, though. There are over 23 species of birds.

For forty years, people from diverse backgrounds have come together at Crocus Grove to enjoy the nudist lifestyle with its many benefits while engaging in sports and social activities. Over the years, members have come and gone. Some have moved on to other interests while others have died, yet each one has brought something to Crocus Grove that has helped make it the special place that it is.

Crocus Grove Sun Club has survived two fires, the death of its founder, a failed attempt at a co-op and the sale of the property. It has shown the power of a dream and what people can accomplish when they work together.

Our history is about Crocuses and buildings, but that's only part of it. Our history is also about the community that we've built over forty years. Over those years, Crocus Grove Sun Club has shown the strength and beauty of community through a group of people who have lived the nudist philosophy of acceptance, tolerance and care for each other. What Crocus Grove expresses so well in its members is also part of our history and what we celebrate today.

#### **2010 POSTSCRIPT**

More than forty years ago, in 1969, one man had a vision to create a place where families could enjoy social nudism. It would lead to what became the most successful and longest owner-run nudist club in Canada — Crocus Grove.

Sadly, this man's dream came to an abrupt end in April of 2010 when the couple who had purchased the property from his widow in 2006 unexpectedly closed it to nudist use.

With its members now suddenly left without a home, Crocus Grove Sun Club's executive board immediately held an emergency brainstorming session from which emerged the concept that would become Naturist Legacy Inc. Modeled after a land trust (also known as a land conservancy), this new private non-profit corporation would own and manage land in such a way that both the land's natural heritage and our right to enjoy it as nudists would be preserved in perpetuity.

Crocus Grove Sun Club officially evolved into Naturist Legacy Inc. on September 11, 2010. New property was purchased shortly thereafter. With a new board of directors, new governing documents and an entirely new attitude towards business management, Naturist Legacy will own, develop and care for its land while permanently protecting it for family-friendly nudist use.

Naturist Legacy exists today because of the sheer tenacity of a small and determined group of dedicated nudists unwilling to relinquish their cherished way of life, or to let the dream of Crocus Grove's founder fade away. In the face of undeserved adversity, they devised a business model that has earned them a new home of their own and achieved a level of permanency for their nudism that was heretofore unknown.

To learn more about Naturist Legacy, please visit <http://www.naturistlegacy.org> or write to:

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