

SCNA ANKH Award Biography



Ricc Bieber (5/13/1952 -)

Ricc was a founding member of several clubs in the greater Los Angeles area since the 1970's, including the Clothing Optional Society (COS), The Sun and Fun Seekers, and BARE. He was a charter member of Elysium Fields (1967), The Nativist Society (1980), and Beachfront USA (which advocated nude use of Venice Beach, California in the mid-1970s.)

Ricc also served as Vice President for the Western Sunbathing Association (now called AANR-West) and as a Board Director for that body for over a dozen years.

He was a founding member of SCNA (Southern California Nativist Association) in 2002 and served on its Board for several years.

The Early Years

Ricc says he first discovered nudism when he was about 9 years old.

“My grandfather had a string of book and magazine stores in the Inland Empire area of San Bernardino County, California. I would go with Grandpa to the various stores near the end of the day so he could collect the day's receipts. He would tell me to go to the dumpster out back to collect any comic books I wanted from there, as they were just be tossed anyway. In the dumpster, I discovered other magazines also – ones with naked people in them! I secreted them home. When I started reading the articles, I came to the realization these people were having a great time. I already liked running around the house naked any chance I got, and here was this entire group of people doing just that!

“When I was 15, I became a member of the L. A. Wheelmen, which was a bicycle travel group. With them, I began taking all-day jaunts on my derail-leur 10-speed to Castaic Lake or some other far-flung parts around Los Angeles. I really liked the freedom of taking the whole day to get someplace, and then get back home before dinner.

“About this time, I read in the L. A. Free Press about this new place opening up in Topanga called Elysium Fields. It was clothing-optional (I didn't really know what that meant yet), and it was only about a two-hour bike ride from my parent's home in Westwood. Easy ride! I would tell Mom that I was off to a ride with the Wheelmen, and instead I would head to Pacific Coast Highway, turn north into Topanga Canyon, and then up to Robinson Road to the Elysium gate.

“My first time there, I was welcomed by everyone and had a great time relaxing in the pool and sunning on the lawn/ Luckily, they never asked for my age or school ID, but that was because by that time I had a head full of wild hair and a beard and they just assumed I was older than I was! It was the beginning of my formal induction into nudism and the clothing-optional lifestyle.

“On other bike trips I also found other opportunities for a quick skinny-dip at some isolated place like in a river or hot springs. It was a lot a fun!

“As I got older, other interests (cars, girls, folk dancing club, etc.) took priority, but I always made time for regular visits to Elysium, and even managed to convince some close friends to give it a try. By now, I had a car so it was easier to get there.”

Free Beach Movement

The Free Beach Movement began in 1974. Ricc met Kurt Barthel, an elder statesman of the nudist movement, who was trying to get a “free” (meaning free from clothing) section established at Venice, Ca, just a few miles south of the Santa Monica pier. The organization BeachFront was born, and Ricc was a founding member.

After the 1978 defeats of the free beach proposal by the LA City Council, and later, by the County Supervisors, the Clothing Optional Society (COS) came into existence, whose founders Jim and Lynn Hensley, wanted to continue the fight alongside Beachfront USA (Beachfront was fighting the good fight in the courts while COS was fighting it by showing up at the beaches and being more confrontational.)

Ricc was active in both groups, even to the point of making a sign that went up at Pirate's Cove at the south end of Zuma Beach, much to the chagrin of the lifeguards. "We managed to plant the steel sign poles 4 feet in the sand with a lot of cement very early in the morning, and they couldn't remove it for a few weeks, until they got a heavy duty crew in to pull out the poles."

While in COS, Ricc also organized the first "Boogies in the Buff" nude dancing nights ever held in Los Angeles. "We held them in the basement of several different local churches. We had music, dancing, and body painters. We even got some of the churchgoers to join in the fun!"

Within a few years, the COS leaders "got burned out" and it looked like the group had run its course, so Ricc formed a non-profit 501(c)(3) club named called B.A.R.E. (Beaches Are Really Every-ones). "Yes, the name was a bit hokey, but it kept the nude beach dream alive for a while longer."

At about the same time, Ricc met Lee Baxandall, founder of the Nudist Society (TNS), at its first Gathering event at Elysium Fields in May, 1980. It was the start of a long relationship between the two of them. Ricc attended practically every one of the annual 4-day Gathering workshops, where nudists representing all the clubs and beaches on the west coast would meet to renew friendships and discuss common concerns. Within TNS, Ricc became infamously known as the "Pudding Toss Czar" as he organized the annual "food fight" of tossing chocolate pudding. "You have to be there to realize how much fun this is!"

WSA

At nearly the same time, Ricc met a man named Hap Hathaway while visiting the nude beach at Pirate's Cove in Malibu.

"He was impressed by my activism, and he asked me if I would like to attend a convention of the Western Region of the American Sunbathing Association (ASA). So I packed my bags and drove down to Swallows Sun Island in El Cajon, near San Diego.

"Even though everyone was naked at the meeting, these were serious people acting serious and there was not a lot of hugging going on. This seemed very strange to me after my years at Elysium, where people seemed much happier and hugs were exchanged between friends frequently.

"Hap talked me into running for a Director position, but I placed third. Hap told me that now a lot of people had met me, so I should run again the next year. (But first I had to become a member!) In the ensuing years, I was elected as a Board Director many times, and I even became Regional Vice President at one point."

While on the Board, Ricc served as a founding member of its Public Relations Team, and he also served on the Scholarship Committee which awarded cash endowments to high school graduates. "I served a couple tumultuous couple of years as Internal Affairs Chairman, where I investigated occasional charges of impropriety and inappropriate conduct at several parks, and it was not a very fun task." Ricc also worked the group's annual booth at local trade shows, and was awarded AANR-West Man of the Year for his decade of service.

Ricc's advocacy of having the beach people and the club people working more closely together were not always met with favor by this more conservative park-focused organization, "but people always knew where I stood." Meanwhile, while the rift between ASA and TNS grew wider.

Elysium and SCNA

"Elysium always remained my 'home club.' It was the place on weekends where I could escape to for a few hours and decompress. I spent many hours in relaxation, and many hours in building and renovating the Robinson Road facility. Being an electrician by trade, and in construction in general, I offered my talents." Ricc was responsible for building the large concrete BBQ used for years at the Sunday Night Pot-luck dinners.

When Ed Lange's daughters sold the Elysium property in late 2000, the members attempted to relocate the club to another property in the Malibu hills. "I did my level best to make it a success. We poured cement, ran electric, did plumbing and added lighting. We made it our home again, for a while." But the rebirth was not successful as the new site ran out of money within a year.

"When Elysium closed its doors, we knew it couldn't end this way, so the members got together and formed a new non-landed club: SCNA.

"I am very proud to be a charter member of SCNA (membership card #2). I also continue to support TNS and ASA (now renamed AANR)." *[Ricc is also one of SCNA's most prolific cooks and makes a dynamite chili each year for the Super Bowl party! – Ed.]*

Ricc remains a member of Beachfront USA and currently is Director of their Callen-Davis Fund, a legal defense fund works for the restoration of clothing-optional beaches throughout Southern California.

In his "spare" time, Ricc also builds model airplanes and like to play the ukulele. And, no, he is NOT related to the young pop singer, Justin Bieber!