
NAAFA

Newsletter

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October 1988

NAAFA's Rally to End Job Discrimination

Fat people in the Workforce: Their Talents, Their Strengths, Their Impact was the focus of NAAFA's first anti-size discrimination rally. On September 2nd at the national Convention in Baltimore, over 100 NAAFA members gathered to rally against size discrimination in the workplace.

The "balloon" rally was sponsored by NAAFA members and their friends, co-workers and families who made donations to a special fundraising and educational drive last summer. As requested, many members attended wearing their work clothes. There were people wearing hospital scrubs and uniforms, and people carrying calculators and books—all indicative of the type of jobs they hold.

The balloons, which were sponsored by the donors, were held in a net on the ceiling during the rally. Russell F. Williams, Board member and Co-Chair of NAAFA's Activism Committee released the balloons at the conclusion of his speech. "You're not at a fat people's rally. You're at a **civil rights rally**," Williams told the group.

Other featured speakers included Stuart Comstock-Gay, the Executive Director of Maryland ACLU; Harry Gossett,

"We believe that the majority of fat people in the workforce encounter job discrimination in some form during their career."

—Nancy Summer

"There's a philosophical truism in law enforcement that you can't protect a willing victim. If fat people allow themselves to be mistreated without any objection, nothing is going to happen."

—Harry Gossett

"What do we do about all of this? Do we follow the advice to slim down? No, that's not the answer. Should we lobby to have weighty people a constitutionally protected category? Yes. I think that's the answer."

—Rosezella Canty-Letsome

"If you keep the dream alive, ultimately there will be change..."

—Stuart Comstock-Gay

author of *Fat Chance*; Rosezella Canty-Letsome, attorney and founder of "Light on Your Feet" exercise programs for large people; and NAAFA President Nancy Summer. [Excerpts from all the speeches follow.]

Reporters from the *Associated Press* and several east coast newspapers including the *Baltimore Sun* attended the rally and the ensuing press conference. A number of excellent articles resulted, further publicizing our assertion that job discrimination against fat people is a severe problem in this country. ♦♦

Fat Fireman Fights for Job

After failing a physical exam in 1985, Michigan resident Ed Christy, 43, was fired from an \$8 per hour position as a volunteer fire fighter. According to a recent article in the *Lansing State Journal*, a doctor found that Christy's 260 pounds prevented him from breathing properly. In response, Christy filed a complaint with the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, charging discrimination on the basis of weight and handicap. While the article quotes Bath Township Supervisor Richard Brook as saying that Christy's health prevented him from doing the job properly, Jim Horn of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission said that Christy performed his duties as well as or better than his fellow workers. Furthermore, the physical exam which Christy was forced to undergo was not required of other fire fighters.

The Civil Rights Commission, which has filed the suit on behalf of Christy, is basing their complaint on violations of the Elliott-Larson Civil Rights Act (which prohibits employers from discriminating on the basis of weight) and the Michigan Handicappers Civil Rights Act. In addition to reinstatement, Christy is seeking back pay totalling about \$4,000, and an estimated \$6,000 for emotional and mental stress. The township board has authorized their attorney to seek an out-of-court settlement. Hearings are scheduled for early December. continued page2

Fireman, *continued*

Commentary

Guest Commentator Sally E. Smith

While it is always maddening to hear of yet another case of size discrimination, this complaint has many positive aspects. First, it is important to note that Michigan does, in fact, have an avenue of redress for those who have been discriminated against because of their weight. Michigan is the only state which has such a specific anti-size discrimination statute on the books. If Mr. Christy had lived in any other state, he would not have had a government agency as ready to defend him. [Many states have handicap discrimination

statutes which can sometimes be used by fat persons with job discrimination complaints.]

Secondly, the article in the *Lansing State Journal* indicated that the township is seeking to end this case quickly as it is costing them \$1,000 per day in legal fees; they are not happy about spending the taxpayers' money in this manner. The case is affecting them where it hurts the most: in the pocket-book. If you can't get someone to obey the law because they understand the law's basic justice, get them to conform because they can't afford not to. Thirdly, it is always inspiring when fat people come forward to fight for their rights, and by doing so, further the rights of us all.

Unfortunately, even with a statute on the books, few Michigan residents take advantage of the protection which the law provides. According to Jim Horn of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, the Commission rarely files weight related complaints; only 13 were filed last year. While the low number of complaints may be attributed to adherence to the law, Horn indicated that people are still embarrassed to bring out the issue of their weight in filing a complaint. He told us, "I'd like to believe that more employers are beginning to say weight is not a factor [when hiring employees]."

This case is further evidence of the need for an anti-size discrimination statute in every state in the nation, and it highlights the importance of asserting our rights at every opportunity. ◇◇

Members Sell Balloon Sponsorships

Last summer, NAAFA members were asked to participate in a fundraising and educational drive by selling balloon sponsorships for our Anti-Size Discrimination Rally. The goal of this drive was to educate non-member friends, co-workers, and family about size discrimination issues, while raising money to sponsor our rally. Prizes were offered to the members who raised the most funds. The following is the list of winners and participants:

First place winner
Peggy Ventura (NJ)

Second place winner
Toni Vanek (CA)

Third place winners
Wayne Heinmiller (IL)
Lynn Meletiche (NY)
Myra Kelly (PA)
Marilyn Christensen (MI)
Avery Ray Colter (CA)
S. K. Goodman (CA)
Mary Ellen Jackson (NY)

Third place winners, continued

Ellen Kahn (NY)
Peggy Weiss (OH)
Susan Tenzer (PA)

Other sellers included:

Jeanette Apprill (NM)
John J. Chandler (IL)
Lillian Dzurisin (NJ)
Andrea Fuehrer (NY)
Lourie Greenblatt (NY)
Loryn Lyn Longbrake (CA)
Nickia Myers (NE)
Shiela E. Parsons (MD)
Sally E Smith (CA)
Westchester Chapter of NAAFA (NY)
and a number of anonymous members.

Thank you for your support!

Your efforts paid for our first Anti-Size Discrimination Rally—which led to nationwide media coverage of the problem of job discrimination against fat people. ◇◇

NAAFA NEWSLETTER

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NAAFA, The National Association to Aid Fat Americans, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax-exempt educational, human rights organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for fat people.

NAAFA is not a diet group, but seeks alternative ways to enrich the lives of its members and large people everywhere through public education, research, advocacy and support.

Regular membership in NAAFA is \$35 per year. Other membership categories are available. For more information, contact Membership Services at PO Box 188620, Sacramento, CA 95818, or call (916) 443-0303.

Rally Sponsors

The Anti-Size Discrimination Rally was co-sponsored by NAAFA and the following donors:

Lynn Meletiche

Toni Vanek

Avery Ray Colter

Wayne Heinmiller

Marilyn Christensen

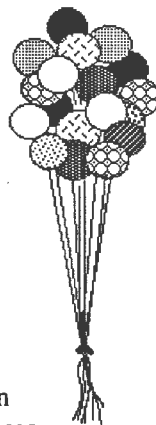
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Rally...

Excerpts from the introductory speech by Nancy Summer

[Nancy Summer is the President of NAAFA, and a member of the Board of Directors. She is a resident of Virginia.]

We're here to talk today about fat people in the workforce: Their talents, their strengths, their impact. We're also here to talk about fat people and job discrimination. It's a shocking story: one that involves millions of fat people whose occupational potentials have never been realized!

We believe that the majority of fat people in the workforce encounter job discrimination in some form during their career. It's also shocking to learn that many people in America know nothing about the problem.

In 1985 a reporter from *USA Today* called NAAFA because he had been assigned to do a feature article on some facet of the fat experience, and he wanted to do it on job discrimination. But after NAAFA gave him all sorts of information and referrals, he called back to say, "I'm sorry. I can't do the story. My editor doesn't believe that such job discrimination exists." Even after being shown the conclusive results of a study conducted by David Tucker

(who in the late 1970's was hired by the Maryland State Commission of Human Relations to conduct a study about job discrimination in that state), the *USA Today* editor still rejected the article claiming that if such job discrimination did exist, it must be an isolated problem in the state of Maryland, and not worthy of national coverage.

Other studies have been done in the last decade that have shown that job discrimination is indeed a national problem. Most recently, Dr. Esther Rothblum of the University of Vermont conducted a study of employment discrimination with NAAFA members. Preliminary results suggest that of the group of women, who weighed at least 50% over their "chart weight", 85% of them had experienced some discrimination during their career. That's a shocking percentage! [A report from Dr. Rothblum's study will be available in an upcoming Newsletter.—Ed.]

Dr. Rothblum and I spoke on the phone a few nights ago and she told me that the survey respondents were, in general, working and making decent salaries, but that a high percentage of fat women felt that they were overqualified for what they were doing. She also said that the study showed that, "the NAAFA people have actually gotten somewhere with their careers and their lives, but it's been one hell of a struggle to get there."

So when we talk about fat people in the workforce, we have to say: We're talented, we're definitely strong, and we're having an impact. Look around this room and you'll see doctors, nurses, attorneys, writers, teachers, and all sorts of people holding all sorts of responsible jobs.

I direct your attention to the net on the ceiling and the balloons that will be released at the end of this rally. Those balloons were sponsored by donations from our members and our members' friends, family, and co-workers. Those balloons are not just filled with air; they are filled with the hopes and dreams of many people that size discrimination will end ◊◊.

Rally...

Excerpts from the speech by
**Rosezella
Canty-Letsome**

[Rosezella Canty-Letsome is an attorney employed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the founder and creator of the Light on Your Feet exercise program "for large bodies". She resides in Maryland and is a NAAFA member.]

Anti-fat prejudice is strong everywhere, but I think it's strongest in the hiring area, because that's where visual impressions carry extra importance. There's a huge assumption in this society that fat people are lazy and that they don't make good workers. We know that this isn't true. But this is an assumption carried by many employers.

Anti-fat prejudice can be either covert or overt. I can tell you about the overt experiences that I have had. But as for the covert experiences, I don't know for sure why I didn't get those jobs because I'm an "FBW". I'm a fat, black, woman. I don't know if it's size; I don't know if it's race; I don't know if it's sex; or a combination of all three why it was that I didn't get the job.

It seems that in every phase of my employable life I've experienced some aspect of size discrimination. When I finished my freshman year in college, I applied for a job with the telephone company (I'm not using any names, so I can't be sued...). I took the written test and scored as high as anyone could, but when I went for the interview they refused to hire me because, as they said, I was "overweight and fat people tend to take more sick time than other people, and that's going to increase our insurance, so we can't hire you."

Before law school, I considered working days and attending night school. I was certified as an elementary school teacher. When I applied for the job, I was informed that I was well qualified, but more than 40% "overweight". They

wouldn't hire me as a full-time teacher, but they offered me a permanent substitute position, meaning that I would have half the benefits and not ever be guaranteed a full-time job.

When my family planned to move to the Midwest, I decided to go to a "head hunting" agency in Chicago. I sent my resume, and the agent set up some interviews for me. After my first interview in Kansas City, I called him to see what feedback he had gotten from the company. Although he had never met me in person, he said, "I understand that you are a little overweight." I didn't get the job, nor did I get any more interviews from the "head hunter"...

These are just some of my experiences in which I didn't get the job. We also know that sometimes, even after someone gets a job, they experience discrimination. People have a hard time getting promotions and getting raises because the employer thinks, "Well, they're fat, they're not going to leave this job. I can get away with it. I can cut corners here because it's going to be too hard for them to find a job someplace else."

Other people tell me about working in companies where they are never seen. They're hidden. They're in the back. In law firms, for example, fat lawyers are in the back doing the research. They have no contact with the clients who never know that there is a fat attorney working for them!

What do we do about all of this? Do we follow the advice to slim down? No, that's not the answer. Should we lobby to have weighty people a constitutionally protected category? Yes. I think that's the answer. However, that's going to take a long time. Lobbying is not easy. So what do we do in the meantime? In the meantime we accept our size and refuse to hide it. We wear clothing that fits, and looks beautiful. We get fit. (You know I'm going to plug exercise!) I think everybody needs to be fit no matter what size they are. We need to feel good about ourselves and project a positive image. ∞

Rally...

Excerpts from the speech by
Harry Gossett

[Harry Gossett is the author of Fat Chance, and is a security consultant and former FBI agent. He is a NAAFA member who resides in Virginia.]

One of the things that is troublesome about job discrimination against us is that it is presumed to be okay.

***We have a...dream—
where people will be
judged by their abil-
ity and not by their
attraction to gravity.***

Fat people are assumed to be lazy. It's a public image problem. But if you think back just a generation ago, Black people were considered to be inherently ugly, stupid, unsanitary, lazy, and enslaved by creature comforts. Today it sounds obscene to even say such a thing. In fact, 20 years ago Martin Luther King announced that he had a dream of a world where his little girl would be judged by her character, not by the color of her skin. Well, we have a similar dream—where people will be judged by their ability and not by their attraction to gravity. Because today, fat people are assumed to be inherently ugly, unsanitary, stupid, lazy, and enslaved by creature comforts. It's a very similar situation.

In most of the cases, the courts make similar assumptions. They assume that the employer wouldn't want to hire a fat person because the fat person would have health and attendance problems. In one case, the New York City Police Department was challenged in court because they had a very strict weight limit for police officers. The Department reviewed their sick list to demonstrate to the court that the 'overweight' officers had poorer sick records, but found quite the opposite. The 'overweight' officers had the best atten-

dance records. And so they changed their standards. Which I thought was awfully big of them...

Most employers haven't bothered to do that sort of research. We hear all the time about the insurance issue. The fact is that in most cases, hiring a fat person doesn't do anything to the employer's insurance rates. That's a false assumption that even the courts will accept sometimes.

We have laws in the United States protecting all sort of people from discrimination. You can't discriminate because of race, religion, national origin, sex, age, in some instances not being able to speak English, and in some instances you can't discriminate against people with AIDS. But you can legally discriminate against people because of their weight in most places in the United States. Only Michigan has a size discrimination statute. (Sadly, the Michigan law does not apply to children. Schools there can still discriminate on the basis of size!)

No one is saying that anyone should be put in a job they can't do. Blind people are not trying to become airline pilots, and fat people aren't trying to become fire fighters unless they have the physical strength to do the job. So that isn't really the issue. The issue is in regular routine jobs where weight would have very little impact on performance.

Most of the suits that have been filed outside of Michigan have been brought under the statutes that deal with discrimination against the handicapped. But this has sometimes led to some pretty convoluted court decisions. There was a case in Pennsylvania, for example, where the court said that even though the employer didn't want to hire the person because of their physical problems, those problems were not a handicap, and therefore the fat person was not protected by the handicap law. Can you have it both ways? "We're not hiring you because you're physically inadequate, but you're not protected because you are physically adequate." That doesn't make any sense to me, but perhaps the lawyers can explain it. I can't.

What we learn from this is that there are some legal remedies available, and that there ought to be more for which we should be lobbying. And where there are laws, we should be lobbying for **enforcement** of those laws. In the meantime, we have to be assertive about not being discriminated against. There's a philosophical truism in law enforcement that you can't protect a willing victim. If fat people allow themselves to be mistreated without any objection, nothing is going to happen. But if fat people raise a reasonable objection, the very weight of their logic can be overpowering! ◇◇

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kind of size discrimination. When cases of job discrimination come up, send letters to anyone who might be responsible. Object to a friend not being hired. Don't let them get off unchallenged. They may get away with it, but if they continually get letters, ultimately they're going to have to stop it. If a private corporation gets enough letters about not hiring fat people, they're going to have to change their ways because they're going to lose business. It's hard sometimes to be that pressure-oriented, but without the pressure it's not going to happen.

And finally, just realize that there is a long way to go. For every civil rights movement there has been a long way to go. But it's an exciting thing, and if you keep the dream alive, ultimately there will be change, and the system will be better for all of us. ◊◊

A Message from the Editor

This issue has been our Anti-Size Discrimination Rally special edition. In the months ahead, we'll be sharing more convention news: photos, workshops, awards, and other speeches. If you have any comments or photos that you would like to share, please send them immediately to the NAAFA office.

I would like to thank the many members who have been sending in their clippings, activism letters, and reports. Starting with this issue, the names of the people who have contributed material used in the preparation of the Newsletter will be included in the staff box on page 2. Please remember, your input is important to us...

Thank you...

...to Lynn Meletiche (NY) who supplied us with the great Fatworks II photo featured on the front page of the September Newsletter.

...and to Harry Minot (CT) and Linda Fuller (MI) for news clippings used in preparation of articles. ◊◊

Rally...

*Excerpts from the speech by
Russell F. Williams*

[Russell F Williams is a member of the Board of Directors and the Co-Chair of NAAFA's Activism Committee. He resides in Maryland.]

Friends, fellow NAAFans, and fellow citizens of the United States, some of you may be wondering why you are at a fat people's rally. You're not at a fat people's rally, you're at a **civil rights** rally.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said let freedom ring, and over the years more and more people have heard the bell of freedom and answered its call. Adams, Jefferson, Washington, heard the bell of freedom and they declared their liberty from the tyranny of England. Garrison, Truth, Douglas and Lincoln, heard the bell of freedom and in answer, slavery was ended in the United States. Anthony, Adams, and Tubman heard the bell of freedom and women were given the right to vote and the right to be all they could be. King, Farmer, Young, Chaney, and Evers, heard the bell of freedom in our lifetime, and Black people were allowed to vote and given access to public facilities. Finally once again, the bell of freedom rang, and Fabrey, Lefebure, Fisher and others responded and NAAFA was started, and the fight has continued for **our** rights as citizens.

*Freedom is the bell,
and the the letters and
phone calls are the
clapper on the bell of
freedom. The more
we write, the more we
call, the more we
confront, the louder
the bell of our free-
dom will ring.*

Freedom is the bell, and the the letters and phone calls are the clapper on the bell of freedom. The more we write, the more we call, the more we confront, the louder the bell of our freedom will ring. What do we ask for? We ask for equal rights as American citizens. We ask for life, and the doctors to cure us, not kill us. We ask for equal access to public accommodations without fear of ridicule, and we ask for freedom of opportunity based on our potential, not our appearance.

So let freedom ring. Let freedom ring in doctors' offices—the doctors who use our tax money to get to the positions where they are and then refuse to treat us. Let freedom ring on public beaches—we pay for them and ridicule is used to keep us from enjoying the facilities. Let freedom ring in the hotels where we gather—in Hagerstown, in Millbrae, and here in Baltimore. Let freedom ring in public schools—especially to the physical education and home economics teachers who seem to feel that the only acceptable shape for a woman is that of a 12 year old boy. Let freedom ring in the broad minds of the American public who seem to feel that the hungrier a person is when they go to bed, the better a citizen they are.

Our letters and phone calls will ring the bell over and over. Now, as a first step, we ring the bell for our freedom by declaring our Declaration of Fat Independence—our announcement to the world that we are ready for battle.

Now is the time for the revolution of the American Fat. Now is the time for our Declaration of Independence. Let the world know that we the fat have the right to pursue life, liberty and happiness and that we will challenge all those who deny us those rights that have been extended to other social groups. The next time someone by word or deed tries to deny you life giving and enriching medical treatment, or the right to travel about this land of ours, or the education or jobs you that feel you are competent to undertake, and which you feel will help you achieve happiness, do not hang your head in shame. Confront those who deny your humanity, and demand your inalienable human rights. ◊

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Thanksgiving Weekend New York City La Guardia Marriott

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Casual Dance
Swim Party

Saturday, November 27

Big Image Conference Brunch with guest speakers Thanksgiving Ball

Special room rates for NAAFA's at the La Guardia Marriott, Ditmars Blvd. E, Elmhurst, New York. Call (718) 565-8900 for room reservation.

Call Bunny Peckham at (516) 665-6525 for further information.

RING IN THE NEW YEAR WITH NAAFA!

New Year's Holiday Happening

Sponsored by the Northern Ohio Chapter of NAAFA as a fundraiser for NAAFA, Inc.

December 30, 1988 - January 2, 1989

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Reception and Private Pool Party

SATURDAY

Workshops, SIG meetings,
clothing sale, and more,
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SUNDAY

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To attend the NAAFA functions, use the reservation form enclosed with this Newsletter. Make checks payable to Northern Ohio Chapter of NAAFA and mail to Marilyn Sherman, 11 Mockingbird Lane, Elyria, OH 44035.

Classified Ads

HANDCROCHETED dresses, suits to 3XL. Elegant for office, church, parties. Send \$2 for pictures. Crochet Fantasy, 6330 Trilane, Elso-brante, CA 94803.

Found at convention: small, plastic cover, probably for battery compartment of camera flash. Write to NAAFA office stating approximate size (inches).

Attention New Members: Get into all the photo fun of NAAFA. Buy Facets, a photo journal featuring many NAAFA members from around the country. \$9.50 + \$1.50 P/H. Available from NAAFA's Book Service.

NAAFA Newsletter Advertising Policy

Ads received by the following dates will be printed in the next issue available: UPCOMING DEADLINES: December 2, January 2, February 1.

CLASSIFIED ADS

Non-Member ads: \$.75/word, 20 word min.
Member ads: \$.50/word, 20 word min.
Confidential department number: \$5 per issue.
Capitalized boldface words: Count as two words each—not available for personals.

PERSONAL ADS

Personal ads from members wishing to meet other members are published in "The Personals" supplement—mailed to members with this Newsletter. Instructions for placing or responding to personal ads appear in the supplement.

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Contact NAAFA office for ad rate card.

AD PAYMENTS

Discounts: Deduct 20% for identical ads in three consecutive issues.

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Foreign members: Send U.S. funds; int'l money order; or VISA/Mastercard.

AD ACCEPTANCE POLICY

Publication of any ad in the Newsletter, the "Personals", and/or mailing of any flyer by NAAFA does not imply any en-

dorsement by us. However, we will not knowingly publish an ad or mail any flyer that has false information, or which appears to be a violation of NAAFA's purposes or code of Minimum Standards. Ads or flyers for goods or services for weight loss or gain will not be accepted.

SEPARATE MAILING OF FLYERS

NAAFA occasionally mails promotional flyers for non-NAAFA goods or services. Such mailings either take place from our office or from Board-approved mailing services. Such mailings are completely paid for by the promoters; we make such mailings for informational purposes, and to help pay for overhead expenses. Those NAAFA's who choose not to receive such mailings can request it in writing. ∞