

My Interview with Bill Schroer

December 8, 2014

By Gary Mussell

In October 2014, Bill Schroer was fired as Executive Director of the American Association for Nude Recreation (AANR) in Kissimmee, Florida, after only five months on the job. Schroer had spent the summer touring the various regional conventions and large clubs making, in the minds of many who met him, a positive first impression

His sudden departure raised speculation as to why the new president, Bev Price, took such a sudden action before she had the approval of her Board of Trustees. According to the AANR By-Laws, only the 14 Board of Trustees can hire and fire the Director.

Price called an emergency phone meeting of the Trustees five days after the firing to approve her action, which she got on a 10-4 vote.

Word of the firing rippled across the AANR clubs at the speed of Twitter, with “WTF” being the most polite reaction to what appears to be a very unpopular decision.

The only thing the Kissimmee main office will say is: “Bill Schroer is no longer employed by AANR. We wish him well.”

Schroer had only been on the job since May. He was AANR’s third Executive Director in three years.

In the wake of so many unanswered questions, Jordan Blum (of Young Naturists America) and I interviewed Mr. Schroer on December 8, 2014 so he could tell his side of the story.

Mr. Blum has published his own report of this interview on his YNA web site at:

<http://youngnaturistsamerica.com/bill-schroer-goes-on-the-record-about-aanr/>

Q. Why did you consent to be interviewed?

“I wasn’t going to talk much about it until someone wrote false things about me on the Nudist Clubhouse blog, and that opened the door up. I felt I had to respond as my reputation was being disparaged”

Q. So exactly what happened the day you were fired?

“I was fired Wednesday, October 15, at 8am. Beverly Price and Julie Erlenmeyer walked in unannounced. Bev simply said, ‘your contract with AANR is cancelled’,” Bill said “OK,” packed up his stuff, and left quietly. Bill did not expect it to happen, but...

Q. Why didn’t you fight the decision that morning, or at least ask why? Just folding your tent and going away implies you knew it was coming or that you were accepting being at fault. It just seems uncharacteristic of a person to suddenly be fired and not want to know why.

“I think some additional background will help clarify why I did not pushback on the termination announcement. Since I had been on the job...even without accurate financial reports...I knew we were bleeding money...without going into detail, I know budgets, and I knew there had been a projection of increased revenue through membership increases due to the marketing initiative that had been

launched. That revenue estimate was very optimistic, and I knew it was unrealistic. To even get close to the projected loss I had to make some personnel cuts. I had to terminate two people. I regretted having to do it...but the money was not there. The head of the PR area, Sue Nerud, and the Executive Assistant, Catherine Hendrickson, were both highly paid and non-essential to keeping the organization running. Florida is an employment “at-will” state. When I had to terminate these two employees I did not provide a reason because of the employment at-will provision here. It allows an employer to terminate an employee at any time for any or no reason. I knew that would apply to me as well as Julie Erlenmeyer is an HR person over at one of the theme parks. So when they told me my contract was terminated...I wasn’t going to give them the satisfaction of telling me there was no reason.

“By the way...I think it’s important to note that one reason I accepted this without resistance is I believed at the time Bev Price had had a secret meeting of the Board and had the approval of the board to terminate me. It was not until later I learned the board had not been informed. Knowing what I know now...I would have asked her to get the approval of the board. Lesson learned for me....to ask if there is board approval. Never occurred to me she would do this on her own.”



Q. There are rumors you and the staff did not get along, that you were working them extra hours without pay on your projects so they could not get their regular work done. Is there any truth to that?

“I had a terrific relationship with the AANR staff. They were upset when I left. My birthday was three days after the firing, and I heard they were planning a cake and small party for me. This is not the sign of people who were upset with me.

“I know the difference between exempt and non-exempt employees, and nobody was asked to stay overtime, nor were they working without pay if they stayed overtime. A few of the Directors are salaried, so maybe they were complaining to Bev, I don’t know. The [Internet rumor] that there was any inappropriateness between me and any staff member is just ridiculous.”

Q. We heard that one project in particular, the new email system, was causing a lot of stress in the office and causing overtime hours. Bev has since abandoned it and gone back to the old system. What happened?

“The old email system was causing lots of problems because it relied on us keeping accurate email addresses for every club and its leaders, and these were constantly changing. Important emails sent from our office were never reaching many of the clubs. The idea was to assign a new and permanent email address for each club that would be used for AANR email, and each club would use it to send things to our office. Lynn [Taylor] was not fully on board with the

change, but she and Ashley [Beahan] were working out the bugs. I am disappointed all that hard work was abandoned.”

Q. There were rumors of you making unauthorized expenditures. Any truth to that?

“I have no idea where that rumor started. I never made any expenditures that were not authorized, since I only submitted mileage and air fare for reimbursement. The only other bill I ever submitted was a restaurant bill from when I went to Haulover to meet with Shirley and Richard Mason and Nancy Tiemann (Bare Necessities Cruises) and her fiancé, and I thought us paying for their dinner was an appropriate business expense given the support both organizations have shown AANR over the years. I told Beverly Price if she thought this was inappropriate then I would pay for it myself. Otherwise, I always paid for everything myself and never billed AANR for anything that was not a legitimate business expense.”

Q. Tell us your side of the rumors that you were working to have the lifestyle resorts rejoin AANR.

“I had received many calls from AANR members who were upset that some of our existing clubs were hosting parties in the evening that the members considered inappropriate for a nudist park. Examples: fetish parties and sexy lingerie parties where family members under 18 were not allowed. Since this is the same thing that got Caliente and Paradise Lakes kicked out of AANR several years ago, I started investigating. Rather than lose several more clubs, which we really could not afford to do, I started investigating the idea of a rating system to allow clubs to alert its potential members that such activity might go on in the evening.

“Yes, I did visit both Caliente and Paradise Lakes and a third one also - Gulf Coast Resort. I was hoping to better understand what their behavior policies are.

“This was part of the research I was doing on the proposed rating system. I wanted to understand how much distance there was between a place like Paradise Lakes (where the homeowners association is still part of AANR) and the formal AANR guidelines. That was my only purpose for visiting those clubs. I absolutely was not encouraging them to return.

“A rating system was first suggested several years ago by Sharon McLeod. It seemed to me to make a lot of sense, as a way to save these clubs from being kicked out.” My plan was to create a sliding scale from no such activity to yes, such things go on. “I did not want to lose any more clubs, and this seems the most workable system.

“This is what the Motion Picture Academy does. They simply inform people of what they might see in the movie so they can decide to go or not. It doesn’t ban the movie. Apparently I made some of these club owners very nervous about such a system.

“I raised the idea at the August convention Board meeting. They could have said no at that time, and that would have been the end of it. But instead, they asked that the idea be explored further.

“In any case, I could not impose any rating system; the Board of Trustees would have to do that. The item was on the agenda for the Fall Meeting in Henderson to discuss, so we were not even close to implementing it.”



Bill Schroer at Haulover Beach – CFI webcast 09/2014

Q. We heard that you were putting the Rating System into the new Club Directory that is due for publication after the first of the year. That would mean you were bypassing the Board to activate the Rating project on your own?

“Not true. I was thinking about putting the Ratings into the new Directory since I was anticipating approval of the plan by the Trustees at the Fall Meeting. We were in the process of putting together a questionnaire to go out to all the clubs in anticipation of the Guide update, and Martha [Young] said she was supportive of putting the question into the questionnaire, since the guide wouldn’t come out until almost a year later. If we were going to adopt a rating system it made sense to have the information in the guide.

“Then I talked to Vice President Sharon McLeod about this and Sharon advised me not to do it. With that direction I told Martha to eliminate the rating question in the questionnaire. It was a dead issue.”

Q. We heard one rumor that two advertisers were threatening to pull their money out of AANR if the rating system went through. True?

“We were a long way from anyone having to withdraw any advertising dollars, as first the Board would have had to approve the plan. Then the ratings would have to be prepared, and then the club directory published. I don’t know if they were serious because nobody knew (including us) how this was going to be implemented, if at all.”

Q. Did any of these reforms come up in your interview with the Board? Did they know what you wanted to do? Was this a case of buyer’s remorse?

“I tried to be very clear in my interview about who I was and what I was like. I was recruited by a team of 6 which included senior AANR board members and a club owner.

“I was never told I was doing something that they [the Board] did not want me to do. Nobody ever said to me “Don’t do this, or I was moving too fast.”

Q. Tell us about the Carver model of governance. We hear it would have been a major clash with the AANR Board culture of micromanaging everything.

“I am a Carver Model instructor. It is a way that the Board interacts with the Executive that is very successful in many non-profits. Contrary to rumor, the Board does not relinquish power to the executive. The Board establishes a list of ‘you may not do this’ instead of ‘do only this list,’ and that list may be as incredibly detailed as the board wishes it to be. The board actually has more control using this model, and the executive has a better understanding of what is off limits.

“I offered to set up a class for the Board using a different Carver instructor to avoid a conflict of interest so they could see if they wanted to adopt it or not. I see the AANR organization as similar to a School Board where there can often be a clash between what the Board wants and what the Executive does, and I wanted to make the lines of authority much smoother and more predictable than it had been in the past. We never got that far, but I never took any action that had been prohibited by the By-laws or the ruling documents.”

Q. What is the story about the organization’s attorney? Were you looking for a new one?

“Bev and I talked about the need for the organization’s attorney to be located in Florida.” Many of the legal questions I had concerned employment issues, and therefore AANR needed someone familiar with Florida law. “Jawn Bauer is an excellent attorney, but he is not licensed to practice law in Florida, only Indiana, and too often he said he couldn’t answer the question as it had to do with Florida law, and so we should find someone local.

“Beverly Price knew of my recommendation and concurred with my assessment. It is my understanding that she was okay with it.”

[According to Schroer, AANR was still hunting for Bauer’s replacement when his own firing occurred. Schroer believes Price called Bauer several times afterward to be sure of her legal footing in the matter, and then just decided to hire Bauer back. The Board approved a motion to retain him during the same telephone conference call five days after Bill was fired. – Ed]

Q. One more question has come up from a blogger who said you were working nude in the AANR office with staff there who are not nudists. This could be interpreted as sexual harassment in some states. Any truth to it?

“Sure is.....when I arrived I interviewed the entire staff and verified each person (nudist or not) would not be uncomfortable working in a clothing-optional environment. We as a staff discussed and agreed because of the location of the office...making the office clothing optional was not feasible. However, as you know I was recommending we move the office to a nudist resort, and there the office would definitely be clothing optional. I also did say that the office would be clothing optional on the weekend for any staff who

chose to work on the weekends. There never was anyone in the office on the weekend outside of myself....so it was never an issue.

“By the way, the employment handbook specifically discusses that AANR is a nudist organization and employees may be subject to non-sexual nudity, and if they are uncomfortable with that they should not apply for a position. Of course real sexual harassment is always illegal...but we made it a point to insure all staff understood simple nudity may be part of the work environment, and it is something to be expected. Hope that answers that one.”

Q. Anything else you wish to add?

“I consider [having had] this job a privilege. It was an honor. I loved working with the staff. We were starting to make progress on the changes that needed to be made. The Board was free to accept or reject what I was doing at any time. I always acted ethically and in a professional manner with everyone. The rumor that I was out of control or working outside the boundaries of what I was assigned is simply not true, and was started afterwards...why I don’t know. I was operating within the chain of command.”