

Upon entering Stinky's Gentlemen's Club near Jantzen Beach, three things occurred to me in rapid numerical succession:

- 1) There are naked women here;**
- 2) These naked women are the most *unattractive* naked women I've ever seen in my life;**
- 3) These women are so hideous, I'd actually give them *money* to get dressed again.**

These three elements...plus the seductive topper—cans of PBR for only *25 cents*—have paradoxically proven to be a magical business potion for the tiny ramshackle club.

Stinky's Gentlemen's Club, which had teetered on the brink of bankruptcy for almost two dozen years, has turned a profit for the past three business years. Last year, it was among Portland's five most profitable strip clubs. This year, the Portland Sex Academy gave Stinky's a Velvet Clit award for "Industry Comeback Story of the Year." Stinky's secret? A deceptively simple marketing strategy encapsulated in an advertising slogan that has burrowed itself within Portland's collective unconscious as if it were a boll weevil nestled fluffily within cotton:

UGLY WOMEN, CHEAP BEER: C'MON, GET STINKY!

The slogan first appeared in a crude ad campaign which blitzkrieged late-night Portland TV stations for eight straight months in 1999. "If you were a night owl who watched TV back then, you couldn't get away from Stinky's," says Jerry LaBuck, a professional cable-TV repairman, amateur media analyst, and regular Stinky's patron. LaBuck, a tall, amiable, somewhat mooselike Lake Oswego resident, chats with me at Stinky's as we slug down frosty bottles of O'Doul's and watch the crowd loudly urge "Melba," a 73-year-old erotic dancer, to put on her clothes. "Soon after those ads started appearing," LaBuck continues, "everywhere you went, it was Stinky's, Stinky's, Stinky's. 'C'mon, get Stinky!' Everybody was saying it. And the cheap beer didn't hurt, either. The ads made it sound like fun. I started coming here a couple of years ago, and now I actually like it *better* than the places with the good-looking chicks. And I don't mind throwing a five-spot at some old buzzard to put on her clothes. Some of these broads are *nasty*, and I just naturally get caught up in the fun of the moment."

Stinky's, nestled amid junkyards and toxic grasslands in a North Portland industrial no-man's land, is one of the city's oldest strip clubs. It was built in 1947 by Tex "Stinky" Reeves, a one-armed boxer and Impressionist painter who is still listed in *The Encyclopedia of Sexual Records* as having The World's Most Sharply Curved Penis, bending a full 23 degrees from stem to stern. Ironically, for the first few decades, Stinky's was renowned for having the most *beautiful* topless dancers on the West Coast. Stinky's became the haunt of high-rolling

A NIGHT AT

STINKY'S

mobsters and thrill-seeking high-society members seeking classy adult entertainment.

When Tex "Stinky" Reeves was mangled to death by a construction crane in 1974, his son Biff "Smelly"

Reeves, a yoga

instructor and heroin addict, inherited the business. Through a series of what he called "costly business decisions"—i.e., the repeated decision to buy heroin with money which should have been spent on payroll, supplies, and taxes—Biff nearly drove Stinky's into the ground. Because of his widespread reputation as a "smackhog," the sort of women who gravitated to Stinky's were, to be kind, Ladies of the Lower Orders. Only the most desperate, over-the-hill, unemployable sort of erotic dancers dared apply at Stinky's. Because of this, Stinky's revenues declined for years. The high rollers went elsewhere, replaced by a brooding, shiftless clientele mainly composed of junkyard workers, incontinent old men, and homosexual serial-killing teams.

Things looked grim for the club until one morning late in 1998 when Biff "Smelly" Reeves, walking through some grasslands near Stinky's, was pecked to death by a flock of hostile pelicans.

But what may have been a personal tragedy for the Reeves family turned into a business boon for the club.

When Biff's son, Rick "Stank-Ass" Reeves, acquired Stinky's, no one had much hope for the club's future. With 14 felony convictions for drug possession by the time he turned 21, Stank-Ass seemed cut from the same cloth as his father Smelly.

But as the legend has it, while Stank-Ass sat alone in Stinky's late one night after closing time, "zonked out of my gourd from smoking Mexican tar all night," a vision of his grandfather Stinky Reeves appeared to him. "He just walked right up to me at my barstool," Stank-Ass told a reporter for *The Portland Tribune*, "kind of like with ghosts in the movies, where you can sorta half-see through them, and he put his hand on my shoulder. He said to me, 'My boy, you've got some *really* ugly women here. Make it work for you.' And then he was gone. And then I started writing my business plan: Get the ugliest chicks you can find; sell beer at cost; fill the bar with yahoos who get so drunk on cheap beer, they think it's some kind of conceptual hipster *fun* to throw tens and 20s at ugly women to get dressed; and then charge the dancers 50 PERCENT of their tips off the top in order to compensate for the loss I take on beer and overhead. So far, it's been a fucking goldmine. I haven't even had to kick heroin, and I'm *still* making a profit!"

Yeah, Stank-Ass, but you're also providing a *service*. As I leave Stinky's, I realize I've spent only three dollars on beer and am plastered beyond the ability to speak. I've also spent about 20 dollars on the "unstrippers," but I had a good time doing it. As I drive home swerving between lanes, I realize that for at least another day, I don't want to kill anyone.



THE STRIP CLUB WHERE WOMEN ARE PAID TO GET DRESSED