

# BEACH BUZZ

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“Keeping Our Beaches Bare”

## Poseidon’s New Clothes

### Editorial

It’s been a good long time since anybody paid so much attention to Poseidon, a bronze statue that’s been aiming its invisible trident at Sacramento, California’s K Street Mall since 1972. This rendition of the mythological god of the sea – a replica of a famous original and a gift from the government of Greece – has become as much a part of the downtown backdrop as the steady drone about what Sacramento needs to attract more convention business. But Poseidon was restored to a position of prominence last week when members of the Advanced Training Institute International – a home-schooling organization meeting at the Sacramento Convention Center – took offense at his nudity (one conventioneer likened it to “pornography”) and sought permission to clothe him. The Convention and Visitors Bureau acquiesced, and Poseidon appeared on various days in a toga, khaki pants and finally on Friday – when pictures of him were snapped for the front page of the next day’s Bee – in a shirt, tie and slacks.

Now, the first reaction of instinctive defenders of public art might be outrage that a bunch of out-of-town conventioners want to waltz in here and prevent us from looking at our own statue. And in more than one instance, outrage was exactly what was provoked: Poseidon’s clothes were stolen almost

every day. One of two downtown workers who tried to disrobe him Friday said: “This is my city. That art is in my city,” and asked what the home-schoolers are actually teaching their children about “freedom of expression, art, the classics or their bodies.” (A worthy question, but because they’re home-schooling their children, what they teach is their

animate object; people argued about the nature of pornography, what art is appropriate for a public space and the city’s evident eagerness to kowtow to convention business. Does this mean Sacramento should let every convention that comes to town impose its morals and aesthetic preferences on downtown? Absolutely not. And we’re disappointed in

the comments of the convention bureau president, who told The Bee’s Bill Lindelof, “These people brought a huge piece of business that has had a great impact on our community. When visitors come to town and make a simple request, we try to fulfill that request.”

Taken too far, that road could lead to a city that supports no public art, or only art that doesn’t challenge anybody’s sensibilities. Sacramento was one of the first cities in the country to adopt a public art ordinance, requiring 2 percent of construction budgets for local government projects to pay for art. That vision won’t be bold if it pays only for plain vanilla.

The irony for the Advanced Training Institute International, whose members have since removed themselves from such uncomfortable proximity to male genitalia, is that Sacramentans who might never have noticed Poseidon,

tucked between the Community Center Theater and the Convention Center, now want to look him over. All of him.

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Right-wing conventioners offended by nude statue remedy the problem with new duds.

Photo by Chris Crewell / Sacramento Bee

prerogative.)

But the debate and attention that surrounded Poseidon last week represent what public art ought to be about. For several days, a static statue became an