

Dwarf-date show sparks controversy

Some criticize, but show has support from little-people group

LOS ANGELES, California (Reuters) --Critics may roll their eyes at Fox television's upcoming dwarf-dating contest "The Littlest Groom," but the head of the advocacy group Little People of America says the show could end up giving his members a boost.

While some audiences may snicker at the spectacle of a dozen dwarf women competing with average-sized females for the affections of a 4-foot-5-inch bachelor, LPA president Matt Roloff said the Fox show may benefit people of short stature by depicting them as regular folks "just being themselves."

In other words, a person's size doesn't matter.

"Yes, the radio jocks will have a field day," Roloff told Reuters in a telephone interview. "(But) hiding us behind closed doors or in funny costumes will never give us the exposure needed to desensitize society to us."

Fox said this week that it would air the show, essentially a dwarf version of ABC's "The Bachelor," as a two-part special next month on February 16 and February 23.

The announcement sparked a flurry of angry letters to the LPA from little people and their parents and a debate within the Portland, Oregon-based organization over its response to the show, Roloff said.

"The fact that Fox is doing this reality show is outrageous," Roloff quoted one e-mail he received from the parent of a dwarf child. "It is one more avenue to make fun of their stature."

Roloff credited the producers of the show for consulting with his group in an apparent effort to develop and promote the show in a sensitive manner.

While the LPA neither supports nor endorses the program, Roloff said he would withhold judgment until he sees it. "My sense is that they probably didn't do anything too derogatory."

But the retired software design and sales executive said he remains troubled about the idea of throwing averaged-sized women into the mix, an element of the show he called

"ill-advised" and potentially hurtful to his members.

"Personally, I think that the (bachelor) guy might have the same tastes I have and prefer a little woman and reject the average-sized women," he said. "But at the same time, if it did go the other way around, it might be problematic, and make America think there's something wrong with little people."

He said there are roughly 100,000 people in the United States who have been born with dwarfism, a genetic condition that usually results in an adult height of 4-foot-10 or less and disproportionately short arms and legs.

"Littlest Groom" Executive Producer Bill Paolantonio defended the program as a "celebration of diversity."


"We have gone to great lengths to make sure everybody on this program is treated with dignity and respect," he said. "Human emotion is human emotion, no matter what the package is, and this program ultimately is about that"

He said all the dwarf contestants on the program had dated a mix of little and average-sized people, and that one little woman on the show had never dated a little person.

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