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## Entertainment

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### Conventional fur for all

**LISA KREMER** The News Tribune

- Learn more about Conifur at [conifur.org](#).
- Learn more about furies at [yerf.com](#), [dutchfurs.com](#) and [flayrah.com](#).

• Common furry terminology:

Chirp: "hey everyone!"

Rawr: threatening

Yip: pleasure/fun

Woof, bark, yip: conversational terms

The skiing fox led the procession, followed by a ferret in priestly robes, a giant squirrel with an even-more-giant tail, a blue fox, a raccoon, a lion, a mountain goat and more.

In all, 33 people wore giant, head-to-toe animal costumes in a parade Saturday morning at Conifur Northwest, a convention for fans of anthropomorphic animals at the Tacoma Sheraton Convention Center.

The giant, furry heads made talking difficult, but one thing was clear: The Conifur attendees were happy.

"I drove 1,200 miles to come here," said William Di Fazio, who wore the squirrel costume and who lives in the San Diego suburb of Fallbrook.

Conifur attendees are called "furries." If you've seen the "CSI" episode about perverted, sex-oriented furies, no, that's not what this is all about, said Matt Romanek, director of Conifur.

"We don't have anything like that," Romanek said. "If there were anything like that, me or my staff would take care of it right away."

Furries tend to love cartoon animals, from Bugs Bunny to the Lion King, but particularly amateur-drawn art that appears on Internet Web sites and in small-circulation fanzines.

"There's nothing specific (to pull people together), like 'Star Trek' or 'Stargate,'" Romanek said. "People create their own characters or identities, and they'll ask comic book artists to draw their characters."

For example, Mark Merlino, who created what was probably the first furry convention in California about 15 years ago, has a furry character called Syls (he pronounces it Silas).

"I'm a pinemartin," he said, showing a drawing of Syls the pinemartin, who has enormous, intelligent eyes. He says Syls is his "fursona."

Furries are "people who want to live as animals, not on all fours, but as furry human animals," Merlino said. "They want to combine the best of humans and of animals."

"It's an identity thing. People will say, 'I'm a leopard trapped in a human body.'"

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Merlino doesn't wear a costume, but he's impressed by the people who go to the effort to do that. Most of the socializing that furies do, he said, takes place online, in multi-user conversations (MUs). The conversations are called MUDs (multi-user dimensions), MUSHs (multi-user shared hallucinations) or other names, depending on the software used.

They're all low-tech, text-only conversations using old technology, Merlino said, but that's enough. For example, a few years ago he participated in a three-year-long conversation of fans of "The Lion King," who created a group called "The First Light Pride."

Conversations go on 24 hours a day, and, because participants are adults, sometimes wander into sexual or sex-humor realms, Merlino said.

That can be confusing for non-furies, he said, because people in the United States tend to assume cartoons are for children. In other countries, particularly Japan, that's not true, he said — cartoons are drawn for people of all ages.

About 400 people attended Conifur on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The convention included a dealers' room, where people sold comic books, stuffed animals, videos, artwork and more; an art show, where artists sold their work in a silent auction; lectures by visiting artists and authors; the parade and a dance.

On Saturday morning, many of the conventioners got up early to watch cartoons and eat cereal together in one of the Sheraton's ballrooms. Many wore furry ears, had tails draped from the back of their pants and carried stuffed animals.

As with a science-fiction convention, most attendees seemed to be white males, though there was a fair number of women.

Howard Whitcomb of Medford, Ore., watched cartoons while he held a giant blue Stitch stuffed animal from the movie "Lilo and Stitch." He seemed relaxed and happy wearing pajamas and the blue furry feet from his fur-suit costume, which he's named "Gusty Fox."

Attendees weren't just the furies, but also their friends and family.

Kathleen Ramos of Bellevue and her husband Nathan got a room at the Sheraton for the weekend so they could attend Conifur with their son Tyler. Tyler, 17, wore a wolf costume he made.

Kathleen Ramos said she's happy that Tyler's a furry.

"I think it's good," she said. "It gives him other kids to relate to and it gives him other interests. It seems fun.

"If this is the worst he's going to do, I'm a happy mom."

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