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## Earth's crowded enough, some say *Potential parents opt to put the planet before procreation*

WEATHER

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Pamplin Media Group, Apr 10, 2007

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We have a global population problem. Some Portlanders are doing — or, not doing — something about it.

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They are choosing not to have children.

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According to the 2001 State of World Population report from the U.N. Population Fund, the number of people worldwide surged from 1.6 billion to 6.1 billion over the course of the 20th century. In same period, on-dioxide emissions increased twelvefold.

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COURTESY OF MICHELLE SCHNEIDER

For Michelle and Kevin Schneider, seen here in fall at Oktoberfest in Munich, Germany, one of the benefits of not having kids is being able to travel. Besides Germany, the couple spent six weeks in Australia in 2005 and is planning a two-month tour of Europe.

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“Most people would rather focus on the symptoms — pollution, sprawl, species loss,” says Albert Kaufman, founder of the Portland chapter of Population Connection. “If we don’t bring the number of people down, these are just stop-gap measures.”

Based in Washington, D.C., Population Connection advocates stabilization of the world’s population at a level that can be sustained by the planet’s resources.

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Seeing population at the core of environmental issues, Kaufman decided 10 years ago to forgo having children.



“We can put up all the windmills we want,” he says. “If we can’t stop reproducing at 70 million a year, nothing’s going to prevent us from overwhelming the planet.”



The current global population is just over 6.5 billion. The U.N. Population Division expects the number of people to grow to 9 billion by 2050.



“The human population is out of balance with the rest of the natural world,” says Ramona Rex, Population Issues Coordinator for the Sierra Club’s Oregon chapter in Portland.



“It took the whole time that humans were on the planet to reach 1 billion, in 1800,” Rex says. “So you can see that the human population has really escalated.”



Rex attributes this to positive developments: With advances in agricultural technology, medicine and sanitation, more people are living longer.



“The flip side is that we are on a finite planet,” she says.



More people means a heavier demand on limited resources, like arable land.



“We’re starting to talk about water shortages,” Rex says.



During our own children’s lifetimes, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projects that average temperatures across the planet will increase by 2.7 degrees to 10.5 degrees Fahrenheit, thanks to global warming.



“In the developed nations, we’re consuming fossil fuels,” Rex says. “In the impoverished nations, we’re losing the forest covers — for example, the Amazon being the lungs of the world.”



**Adoption’s always an option**



Portlander Sheri Strite was 27 years old when she started considering overpopulation — around the same time that she opted for sterilization.



“I thought there’s a lot of problems that the population’s going to cause,” says Strite, now 51 and single. “There are a lot of children who don’t have loving homes.”

She realized that if she decided later to be a parent, adoption was an available option.

Strite hasn’t regretted remaining childless. She says the only possible downside might be not having someone to care for her in her old age.

“But nothing’s certain,” she says. “Life is full of surprises.”

Kevin and Michelle Schneider, age 33 and 30, are the founders of Childfree and Happy in the Rose City, a support network for Portland singles and couples who don’t have children. The group first met in January and has nearly 50 members.

Michelle Schneider had gotten pregnant last year, but the couple lost the baby only eight weeks into a very difficult pregnancy.

“It was unbearably bad,” she says. “I was so sick and miserable. I don’t know if I want to go through that again.”

After that experience and after considering the public school system, the proliferation of drugs, and the value the Schneiders place on their own freedom, along with the planet’s population problem, the two decided they will remain

childfree.

Within a developed society, it is not uncommon for some people to remain childless, while others have large families. It's a matter of striking a balance that keeps the population from growing even larger.

"If you look at all of the developed countries where women have opportunity, have choice, have access to contraception, the average birthrate is at replacement level of two children or fewer (per family)," Rex says.

Strite and the Schneiders fully support people who choose to procreate, even if others don't understand their decision not to.

"It does frustrate me that there can be so much judgment flying back and forth," Michelle Schneider says of the criticism that not having children can be viewed as selfish.

"If it weren't for those having kids, the human species would die off! But there are enough people in the world," she says.

### **Do your own thing**

Besides opting not to procreate, Rex says there are other ways to be a part of the population solution. People can support federal legislation for international family planning, and urge Oregon state senators to approve the Access to Contraception Act — requiring coverage of prescription contraceptives by health care plans — which recently was passed by the Oregon House of Representatives.

"My involvement in population work is not about saying someone shouldn't have kids," Kaufman stresses. He says Population Connection is working to ensure women's health and welfare, and to allow access to contraception and sex education for everyone so they can make informed choices.

Happy with her own choice, Strite encourages others to make the decision that's right for them.

"If you feel that you want a family, a question is, Do you feel that you wish to procreate?" Strite asks. "I think that if you do, that's great. If you want to make another choice, that's great, too."

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### **Find out more**

- [Childfree and Happy in the Rose City Meetup Group](#)

- [Sierra Club: Global Population and the Environment](#)

- Oregon Chapter Population Chairwoman: Ramona Rex  
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- [Population Connection](#)

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