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The appeal of 'Live free or die'

Antigovernment activists putting down roots in N.H.

The Boston Globe



Dale Everett, Richard Olney, Ian F. Freeman, Kevin Carlson, and Patrick Shields (from left) discussed efforts yesterday to obtain the release of fellow Free Stater Sam A. Miller from jail. They were not successful. (Cheryl Senter for The Boston Globe)

FREE STATERS, in their quest for extremely limited government in New Hampshire, have taken to displays of disobedience that vary from bizarre to provocative, including:



PERFORMING MANICURES WITHOUT A LICENSE



STAGING UNLICENSED PUPPET SHOWS



PLANTING GARDENS ON PUBLIC LAND



PUBLICLY DISPLAYING MARIJUANA

By Sarah Schweitzer

Globe Staff / May 29, 2009

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KEENE, N.H. - From a jail cell in this rural corner of New Hampshire, Sam A. Miller waged a philosophical battle, one milk carton at a time.



Discuss

COMMENTS (214)

here for illegally filming in a courthouse and refusing to reveal his legal name to jail officials. (He says it's private; jail officials obtained it from a fingerprint trace.)

His resistance has made him a folk hero among antigovernment types who have been making their way to New Hampshire from points across the country since their leaders put out a clarion call six years ago.

The Free Staters, as they are known, hope to lure thousands of like-minded

The soft-spoken electrical engineer declined food for nearly a month, save for swigs of milk. To eat, he said, would be caving to the tyrannical government powers that placed him

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souls to the state, with the goal of paring government to a bare minimum by eliminating things like taxes, speed limits, and zoning laws.

Thus far, just 427 Free Staters have relocated. Yet, here in Keene and in pockets across New Hampshire, Free Staters are making their case in increasingly provocative ways.

"Like Ghandi, like Martin Luther King, we need to educate and enlighten the public," said Miller, who joined the Free State movement after breaking up with his fiancée.

The actions have ranged from the odd, such as when Free Staters filed another person's fingernails without a manicurist's license on a public sidewalk or held an unlicensed puppet show, to the irksome, as when they tried to dig a garden in a downtown Keene park, to the instigative, such as the day they stood on a street corner with a marijuana bud held aloft. Sometimes, they simply veer toward obstinate, wearing hats in a courtroom after being asked to take them off or refusing to remove a couch from a lawn.

When arrests have followed, Free Staters have sought to film the criminal proceedings from beginning to end, including scenes from courthouse lobbies, where filming is not allowed in some cases, such as in Keene District Court. The lobby filming has yielded more arrests (often, with Free Staters going limp as officers approach) and more footage that Free Staters post on websites such as [FreeKeene.com](#), which has proved an effective recruiting tool.

The so-called liberty actions have been met with some bemusement by residents of this gently tolerant city, population 22,800, home to Keene State College, near the border of Vermont. But some say the tactics have taken on a menacing hue, such as when Free Staters have gathered on the streets of downtown Keene with holstered guns on their waists, visible on their waists.

"When they first came to town, there was a welcoming spirit. A lot of people were like, 'OK,'" said Richard Van Wickler, a Keene resident and superintendent of the Cheshire County Department of Corrections. "But unfortunately what happens is that when [Free Staters] take the radical approach, that invites people to get angry." [Continued...](#)

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