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RETURN OF THE *Gentleman*

A once-dying breed,
the well-groomed,
fine-mannered male,
sees a sudden revival



By JENNIFER WOOD
Illustration by KARYN LEWIS
Freedom News Service

Wherever you may have seen him — at a local mall or a nightclub — he stands out. He's confident, gracious, well-spoken — and always impeccably dressed.

"When I hear 'gentleman,' I think it is the guy who behaves himself, respects others, and dresses well," said Remy Toh, a 45-year-old Scottsdale, Ariz., resident who grew up in Paris, and who has worked with Armani and Valentino. "That's my job."

Toh learned his genteel ways from his father, whom he describes as "the most elegant and sophisticated man you've ever met."

Such role models can be hard to find when magazines like Maxim and TV shows like "Jackass" and "The Man Show" suggest that to be a real man, one must ogle women, chug beer, act uninterested when it comes to matters of personal hygiene and not be afraid to perform senseless acts in public.

And though pop culture may be putting forth the notion that the gentleman has permanently bowed out of society, there are signs that the well-mannered, well-styled man is coming back.

Marketers are targeting the influential "metrosexual" — a straight, urban, well-groomed man.

Online, a group called The Stiff Collar: A Guild of Traditional Gentleman www.stiffcollar.com seeks to promote "the sartorial and behavioral standards of a gentleman."

And on Bravo's hit show, "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy," five gay men rehabilitate a hapless heterosexual, teaching him how to cook, dress, groom,

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decorate and behave.

A recent episode featured a New York Port Authority officer, stripped to his skivvies for an application of self-tanner.

“ This is so embarrassing,” he kept repeating.

But by the time the “Fab Five” had completed the makeover, the officer admitted that he’d never felt better.

A crop of new books is also attempting to resurrect the gentleman.

Michael Hall, a Kansas City, Mo., doctor, recently wrote “The American Gentleman: A Contemporary Guide to Chivalry.”

John Bridges and Bryan Curtis have penned a series of guides with titles such as “A Gentleman Gets Dressed Up,” “A Gentleman Entertains,” “A Gentleman Pens a Note” and “A Gentleman Raises His Glass.”

Public desire for the gentleman has never subsided, Curtis said. It is just a lost art.

“ It’s about time” is what Curtis hears most often from his books’ buyers, who are “overwhelmingly” female. The reactions of girlfriends and wives on “Queer Eye” is similar:

Some seem so shocked that their man would open a door for them, or know how to cook an elegant meal, you’d think they’d traded Homer Simpson for Clark Gable.

Such enthusiastic feedback has given men the motive to evaluate their own closets and table manners.

“ Public conversations about image is changing as a result of these programs,” said Lauren Solomon, a New York-based image consultant and author of “Image Matters! First Steps on the Journey to Your Best Self.” “They are all bringing a positive spin to what can actually happen when you put yourself in the hands of a professional.”

“ In most of these cases, it really is a head-to-toe deal,” she said. “Clearly, the clothing is the most prominent change, but it is not the only thing that needs changing.

Once you’ve got the look, you better have the behavior to support it.”

While gentleman-like dress and behavior is known to attract women, these qualities also help men gain respect in social and business situations.

Soloman said a gentleman — which she defines as a man who “is prepared for any occasion and is able to conduct himself appropriately in any situation,” will get better seats at a restaurant, upgrades at the airport and pay raises at work.

“ You name it,” Solomon said.

“ To really excel in today’s world, men need style on the inside and out.”



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