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Title **One Name Says It All: Dozens of Minnesotans Are Known By A Single Moniker**

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Abstract Describes Minnesota residents who go by a single name, including Joybubbles. Quotes Joybubbles as saying his name comes from a retreat at Carleton College and says he legally changed it in 1991.

Keywords Joe Engressia; Joybubbles

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ONE NAME SAYS IT ALL

DOZENS OF MINNESOTANS ARE KNOWN BY A SINGLE
MONIKER

JIM RAGSDALE

Pioneer Press

Suppose you went to bed a fully named citizen and awoke the next day as a concept.

Joybubbles did.

Or maybe you lived with a nickname that eventually crowded out your real name.

Your driver's license might just say Frog.

Or you hated your real name, always did, and finally went to court and changed it.

To Bear.

Or Spirit or Vitamin or Hummingbird. These are not horses or pets, but people with single names. They are listed by these mono-monikers in official state records, inhabiting a tiny corner of our multi-named culture, a place where identity trumps convenience.

There are dozens of one-named Minnesotans. Most appear to be immigrants from single-name cultures. Some could be data-entry errors. But a hardy few have chosen

single conceptual titles for driver's licenses, passports and credit cards.

Their names can be conversation starters and computer stoppers. Clerks in hotels and rental-car agencies aren't amused. Bureaucracies are not one-name-friendly.

"My passport is just 'Frog,' " said Frog. "My driver's license is just 'Frog.' My state taxes is just 'Frog.' Any ID which is directly linked to Social Security, those are 'Mister Frog.' " At the University of Minnesota, he was "Frog Frog."

It's the name he has been called since he was a boy. "Most people grow up with a name and get a nickname," he said. "I feel like I grew up with a nickname that usurped my real name."

In 1996, he asked a Hennepin County judge to make it official. By any measure, his legal name is a mouthful -- Frog: *Batrachius Jeremiah John Laakso Krantz*. "Batrachius" is a Greek word for frogs. "Jeremiah" and "John" are his original names. "Laakso" and "Krantz" are his parents' family names.

You can call him Frog.

He is 33, was born in Oregon, attended high school in Minneapolis and went to the University of Minnesota. He moved to England this fall for graduate studies. It's not easy being Frog. He has traveled widely and seen eyebrows raised in many languages.

"I don't think of myself as a small green animal that hops," he said. "I do think of myself in some sense as being more of an amphibious being. ... I can move through cultures in the same way."

So why do it? Why not keep John Smith for the computers and business world and let your friends and family call you by your colorful alias?

Joybubbles is the legal name of a 56-year-old Minneapolis man who has been blind since birth. He said his upbringing was marred by abuse he suffered in a home for blind children. The name came to him at a time when he was trying to reinvent his childhood.

"We were on a retreat at Carleton College, a spiritual retreat, and it went around the room, what name would you like to use for the week?" he recalled. "Suddenly it got around to me and I said, 'Joybubbles.' It was like a breath. You just felt the rightness of it. ... I guess because it conjures up in my mind joyful feelings."

In 1991, he legally became Joybubbles. He is a telephone addict and ministers to his many telephonic friends via long-distance. Joybubbles, to him, describes the happy vibes he tries to send -- little packets of joy.

He has a shaved head, an impish smile and a quick wit. In the 1960s, he achieved cult fame under his original name of Josef Engressia Jr. by being able to whistle long-distance tones and make free calls.

He has a manner that could be described as, well, joyful.

When he lived in Utah, and his first name was listed as "none" in some official records, foreign-sounding telephone solicitors would call and ask for "No-nay," which was their pronunciation of "none."

Joybubbles gets a kick out of these minor identity crises. But names are basic to society and commerce.

Most people want to keep the name they were born with. But some try on new identities. Bad guys invent aliases to throw off the cops. Stars trade in their old Zimmerman or Janos for an artsy Dylan or a Left Coast Ventura. Some take on a professional name for public consumption but keep their family name.

Even in this era of identity theft and terrorist concerns, a legal name change remains fairly painless.

According to Paulette Lassig, litigant services coordinator in Ramsey County District Court's civil division, the process takes 45 to 60 days and costs about \$250. It requires

filling out an application, undergoing a criminal background check and appearing with two witnesses before a referee or judge who must approve the change.

State law allows judges to deny name-change requests if there is an attempt to defraud or mislead. In the case of felons, prosecutors may object and block the change. Name-change records are usually public.

Lassig said judges and referees may take testimony.

"They want to make sure the person is doing this for the right reason," she said.

But if there is no apparent attempt to defraud or evade, those who want to change to a nontraditional name are likely to prevail.

Bear did.

Growing up in St. Paul, Bear, 54, felt like the boy named Sue. While his original name is not uncommon for a male, he hates it so much that he politely asked that it not be included in this story.

"I just never liked it," he said. "In the first, second, third grade, I would get teased about it. I got in a lot of fights about it."

As a teenage motorcyclist, friends gave him his nickname, even though he was not the big, bearish type.

"I was teased, called teddy bear," he said. "It just stuck."

Now his new name is on his business -- Bear's Place, a motorcycle shop in St. Paul.

Shakespeare might have asked, what's in a name: Would a Joybubbles by any other name radiate such warmth? These three solo-handles obviously feel there is quite a bit in a name.

Frog has come across a part of the answer in his studies. Some ancient Scandinavian cultures believed that an unexplained illness was related to a person's identity. The cure was to do what Frog, Joybubbles and Bear did -- to treat the patient with the strong medicine of a new name.

Database editor MaryJo Sylwester contributed to this story.

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Photo: RICHARD MARSHALL, PIONEER PRESS

Joybubbles (formerly Josef Engressia Jr.) of Minneapolis took his new name to help him forget a traumatic childhood. "I've always wanted just one name," he said.

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