

# Coming UP: Three-Week Issue

The August 27 issue of *What's Happening* will be a three-week issue and will include events information from August 27-September 16.

## Office Hours, Deadlines

The August 27 issue is our annual summer-break issue and we will close the *What's Happening* office from Friday, August 28 to Wednesday, September 9.

The office will re-open Thursday, September 10 at 9 am, and the Calendar and Classifieds deadline for the September 17 issue is 4 pm, September 10.

The display advertising deadline for the September 17 issue is Monday, September 14 at noon.

## Future Features

**September 17:** *Pacifica*, *What's Happening's* first Literary Supplement, is four pages of prose and poetry chosen by jurors of the First Annual Lane Literary Awards, sponsored by Lane Literary Guild, Lane Regional Arts Council and *What's Happening*.

**September 25:** Eugene Celebration issue—comprehensive coverage of Eugene's biggest party!

**Mid-October:** Special Fifth Anniversary Issue. *What's Happening* looks back and looks ahead: How have we contributed to the specialness of Eugene? What is our future role?

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## PUBLIC INTEREST

# Riverfront Research Park: Economic Boon or Boondoggle?

by John Haakanson

Some critics call it an economic boondoggle. Supporters respond it's precisely what Eugene's sputtering economy needs.

Almost everyone agrees on one thing: Barring some unforeseen roadblock, construction of the Riverfront Research Park will begin within two years.

Supporters of the park, including the Eugene/Springfield Metro Partnership, and much of the business community, say the site's potential attractiveness, coupled with its proximity to the University, make it appealing to potential tenants.

"We need to capitalize on the strengths of the University, not just natural resources," says Diane Uto of the Metro Partnership, echoing what is becoming a recurring theme as Eugene heads into the 1990s: the need to diversify the local economy away from heavy dependence on timber.

Detractors remain unconvinced, including some businesspeople who would benefit if the project's mix of research, light manufacturing and technologically oriented firms does decide to locate in Eugene as a result of the park.

"It's like building an opera house in Gresham," says local software designer Greg Byrnes, who supports the idea of economic diversification, but thinks the partners in the project are trying to do too much too soon.

"Under the yoke of their tremendous frustration, everybody is looking for an elixir," said Byrnes, referring to powerful local businesspeople who have been "battered" by the recession of the early 1980's and its lingering effects, and see the Riverfront Research Park as a way to diversify local economic strategy.

"People think, 'Goldschmidt, Olum, and Obie, are for it, so it must be a good idea,'" says Byrnes. "But none of those names are technological types."

Byrnes, 41, who graduated from Harvard with a major in history and a minor in math, is now designing computerized three-dimensional

libraries of industrial components which allow companies to lay out phases of manufacturing operations, such as duct work or pneumatic conveyance systems, on a computer screen.

Byrnes has worked for three years on the project, and will begin marketing the libraries this summer. His other business experience includes a joint venture with a local construction group which bought and sold used machinery in Viet Nam and the Philippines after the Viet Nam War.

He has taken a hard look at the local economy and feels Eugene lacks what he calls the "critical mass"

**Eugene attorney Nancy Willard, president of the Eugene Software Council, says potential companies will be looking for a track record of successful University-industry cooperation...**

necessary to make the riverfront project a success, the conditions necessary to "set off a reaction that will be self-sustaining."

"If we put some antecedent things in place, then we can justify the park," said Byrnes, who points to the lack of technologically-oriented support services such as patent libraries, and businesses selling certain kinds of electronic components as elements necessary to provide the critical mass to support a project on the scale of the research park.

Byrnes feels the fact that the Riverfront Park offers an attractive site, cheap power, and affordable rents may not be enough to get companies to locate here. He points out that West Eugene's Willow Creek industrial park has not been a success to date, despite offering some of the advantages touted at Riverfront.

He also believes Willow Creek, which has managed to attract only two or three tenants since it opened several years ago, would be an ideal place to begin setting up some of the elements of the critical mass necessary to do bigger things when the time is right.

"Let's find an industry which could be connected with the University, and get it temporarily located in Willow Creek. . . . If the private sector gets excited about University expertise, if we can get one instance of that working, . . ." large projects can then be justified, he said.

However, the Riverfront Park has not made it this close to groundbreaking time without a chorus of supporters, including Diane Uto, 32, Associate Director of marketing for the Metro Partnership, a group aggressively recruiting new businesses to the area.

"Critical mass has got to start somewhere," says Uto (pronounced "Utah"). "I don't think it's fair to say, 'We're not now, so we never could be.'"

Uto, who listed Eugene's underemployed, highly educated work force as an asset which will help attract potential research park tenants, feels critical mass is already here in some areas, including software.

She also points out that if the park is built to completion, it could provide 3,000 jobs on site and have "a real ripple effect" in terms of creating

new service economy jobs in the community as a whole.

Responding to critics who cite competition from research parks in other cities plus logistical problems with the 71-acre site, Uto lists Eugene's quality of life and the link the park would provide to first class researchers and equipment at the University as strong marketing incentives.

"The Riverfront Research Park says, 'We're ready to move forward and play in a bigger league,'" Uto says.

On the other hand, a number of factors could combine to hinder the park's development, says Nancy Willard, 34, a Eugene attorney specializing in business and software.

"We're competing with 20 other University related areas in the West," says Willard, citing a feasibility study on the development of the park done by the Battelle Institute of Columbus, Ohio.

Willard, who is president of the Eugene Software Council and has 45 software-related clients, says potential companies will be looking for a track record of successful University-industry cooperation in deciding whether to locate here, or in say, Fort Collins, Colorado.

"The University's track record is minimal," says Willard, who contends that "more work needs to be done on how the University is relating to industry now."

Although Willard says the University has made "dramatic improvements," she still feels there is an "anti-industry mind-set . . . I keep bumping up against it," she said.

Willard also wonders about the impression prospective clients will have of the site as it now exists, stating that the railroad tracks which bisect the tract and the existing buildings, including the University power plant, make the aesthetics "a minus going in."

As an alternative to the park proposal, Willard suggests a research triad, with scaled down development at the proposed site, another small development in the Autzen stadium area, and industrial spinoffs at Willow Creek, where the city has already spent tax dollars extending roads and sewers to an underused site.

"Let's broaden it so we have a research community instead of a research park," says Willard, who is concerned about the lack of quick access to west Eugene's industrial areas and to the airport, from the site.

Uto answers concerns about the airport by saying the time required to get to Eugene's soon-to-be-expanded facility is less than many Portland firms have to travel to Portland International Airport.

She also feels the lack of a track record is not crucial, as "nobody has a long track record, because the big link between industry and education is just beginning."

"Stumbling blocks are not uncommon," in developing this type of facility, says Uto, who recently attended a conference on University-related research parks held at the "Research Triangle," a 6,500-acre project involving Fortune 500 corporations and Duke University, North Carolina State University, and the University of North Carolina.

But Uto admits the Metro Partnership does not take clients to the site as it now exists unless they request a first-hand look, which would seem to lend credence to Willard's concern that the area's current aesthetics, coupled with costs of up to \$20

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