



ABOVE: Assistant Editor Deborah McGee, left, with Office Manager Sheri Longobardo.

RIGHT: Production Manager and Editor Sonja Ungemach.

OPPOSITE TOP: Ad Manager and Editor Elisabeth Lyman, left, with Editor Lucia McKelvey.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Account reps Kate Garnhart, left, Garde Wells and Susan Brokaw.

PHOTOS BY CARY GRONER



EUGENE'S "OTHER" NEWSPAPER

The First Five Years

by Rick Beasley

Conceived under a brilliant sun and a deep blue sky, it started out as an idea among good friends on a float trip down Oregon's Illinois River.

Like a lot of other bootstrap publishing ventures, it was born a few weeks later on a kitchen table cluttered with rubber cement, paste-up sheets, border tape, and an assortment of news and photos that any bigwig journalist in his right mind would file in the can under the copy editor's desk.

But the news that made Page One copy in *What's Happening* quickly found an audience hungry for the rich fare of events that were often dismissed by the mainstream press. In a cutthroat market dominated by a big daily paper, a half-dozen entrenched weeklies and a handful of penny-ad shoppers, *What's Happening* defied the odds and flourished in a business where longevity is often measured in months rather than years.

Celebrating its fifth anniversary this week, the publication that put arts and entertainment in the headlines is already looking ahead to its first decade as Eugene's "other newspaper."

"*What's Happening* is a good story in itself," mused Clark Gallagher, the award-winning publisher of *The Springfield News* whose offset presses churn out 18,000 copies a week of the spunky tabloid that has found a solid niche as one of the largest papers in the Emerald Empire. "They started *What's Happening* in the middle of a recession, which any publisher who knows anything would tell you is impossible. But they knew their market, and I think they had more confidence in Eugene and Lane County than the rest of us. The paper has become one of our best accounts, and a very special success story in this business."

It wasn't so much a case of sublime ignorance—the friends who founded *What's Happening* had no common background in journalism or publishing when they started the paper in 1982—as a case of simple necessity.

"Like a lot of other people in Lane County at that time," recalled Editor Lucia McKelvey, "we were either unemployed or underemployed. We decided to create a job for ourselves."

Lois Wadsworth, one of the founders who remains with the paper as film critic and feature writer, came up with the name and the idea for a weekly calendar of arts, events and entertainment. Bill Snyder, whose marketing background gave the budding publishers some key inroads into the local business community, began selling ads with partner Liz Lyman, whose unlikely background as a special ed teacher from Boston gave her a sensitivity to others that has built a substantial and broad base of advertising support. Sonja Ungemach, probably the most experienced of the group with her background in newsletter and pamphlet design, brought all the loose ends together with her production and layout skills.

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