

Rust flies high on local Independent surge

By BOB FOUS
Of the Emerald

In 1972, Bill Wooten, organizer of the Oregon Country Fair (formerly Renaissance Fair) and long time dabbler in local politics, decided to take on Frank Elliott in the county commissioner's race for position 3.

Wooten did pretty well. He lost, but he did pretty well — pretty well for a little-left-of-liberal Independent with a horse sense that appealed to about 29,500 voters. That was about 6,000 less than Democrat Elliott garnered and about 1,500 less than the other loser, Republican Andy Maxon.

So what? Past history? Water under the dam? Possibly not.

It turns out nearly one-third of the Lane County voters turned Independent for the county commissioner's race and most of that third came out of the city precincts, particularly the Westside and University area. If it would have been a city race, Wooten would have become a commissioner, but it was a county race. In Springfield and the outlying precincts, Wooten's campaign was undernourished and that's where he lost.

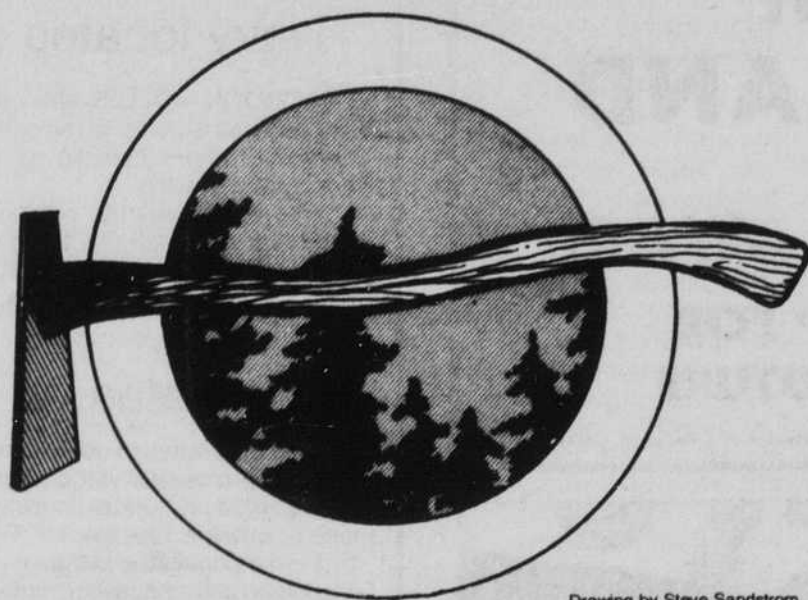
In Lane County the race was marked by a large turnout of Independent voters. Elections are traditionally two-way races. Democrat against Republican, and without the support of one of these, a candidate is fighting an uphill battle at best. But, here in Oregon, that legendary "fierce independence" shows signs of piercing the two party system's armor.

In 1972, there were 94,235 registered voters in Lane County: 52,789 Democrats, 38,945 Republicans and 2,501 other. Consequently, some 27,000 registered Democrats and Republicans voted for the Independent candidate.

In this year's commissioners' race, Elliott and Maxon retrace their well-worn political footsteps and another candidate, Jerry Rust, follows in Wooten's Independent steps (the ones he can still find) as well as busting quite a few new trails of his own into those territories the last Independent dared not tread.

When Rust first announced his candidacy late last spring he was a long shot, an unknown with a very low public profile. But Rust and his campaign people feel their aim is on the mark and are confident he will win.

Given Wooten's campaign, Rust's strategy should be obvious: maintain the support Wooten



Drawing by Steve Sandstrom

garnered in the city precincts and cross into some of that middle ground in Springfield and the rural precincts where Elliott and Maxon found a lot of their support.

But implementing that logic is something else again. Rust is neither a Democrat nor a Republican (the organizational dynasties) and has not run previously for political office. In spite of this, Rust's campaign is organized, efficient and effective — more organized, noted one local political veteran, than a lot of state-level candidates this year. Rust has 20 fulltime non-paid volunteers organizing benefit breakfasts, rummage sales and concerts. The volunteers also coordinate a canvassing effort in attempt to cover every precinct in the county. A few score more of volunteers pop in whenever a few spare hours allow.

Rust is not alone, but from whence does this new surge of Independent organizational ability spring?

Sometime in the mid-sixties the crystallization of the counter-culture occurred. For those who don't remember, the counter-culture was a name given to a starburst of movement away from the conventional. It was a hodgepodge of seeming contradictions, both to those in the counter-culture and those outside of it.

When its heyday was over in the early seventies, at least one ray of that star was aimed at Oregon. To a lot of people it seemed the best

thing was to separate from the rest of the world as much as possible.

The counter culture logo had come full circle, "tune in, turn on, drop out." Young people flocked to Oregon the way the disen-

chanted and disenfranchised flocked to the American colonies to escape the established thought and order of Mother Europe.

These new immigrants found Oregon fertile ground for communion with the natural and a great place to escape the political and economic stewpot of American, Inc. Their intent had been social sanity, but it proved apparent that the self needed some caring for also. The spirit remained in the individuals, but it now lacked its collective impact.

In 1974, Pleasant Hill author Ken Kesey tried to regroup some of the energy in the form of an event known as Bend In The River (BITR). BITR was defined as a media referendum. Informal town meetings were held throughout Oregon to discuss what the people of Oregon wanted for the future and there was a hazy idea that BITR would become a people's lobby to dictate the people's will to what the BITR

people thought was a non-responsive Oregon Legislature. The aim was to get people involved again in the processes which controlled a good part of their lives. Out of the town meetings came delegates elected to represent their community at a statewide conference to be held in Bend, six months after the town meetings. Jerry Rust was the elected delegate from Springfield.

The conference in Bend was televised and ballots were distributed. The idea was for people at home to watch the discussions of each topic and vote on the alternatives presented on the ballots. BITR would tabulate the data and present the results of the "people's will" to the Oregon Legislature. It turned out that most of Oregon willed not to participate, thus squandering any legitimacy BITR may have had in representing the "people's will."

BITR failed as a media referendum.
(Continued on Page 12)

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NOV. 2

You must
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Lane County
Elections Dept.
8th &
Charnelton

If you have been
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