

Saturday night hay fever in Eugene

By TOM WOLFE
Of the Emerald

Eugene's hay fever battle is getting out of hand.

By finals week of Spring Term up to 100 students a day were groping their way to the health center to find hay fever relief, according to Dr. Avar Long, student health center director.

Supplied with antihistamines, nasal decongestants, and eye drops, they returned to the streets to face the unseen enemy — pollen.

About 13 million Americans suffer hay fever symptoms. They suffer more severely in Eugene.

"The northwest wind sweeps down the valley gathering ammunition from the grass fields north of town," explains Long.

And there's plenty of ammunition.

The Eugene area is recognized as the grass capital of the nation. Different people give different accounts of exactly how that reputation was earned, but most agree it comes from the miles and miles of grass seed farms surrounding Eugene.

Within those fields, each flower spike of ryegrass will spill about 9.6 million grains of pollen into the air.

During a typical summer, pollen from those farms wafts into Eugene like dust to the suck end of a vacuum cleaner. Hot dry periods after a rain are the worst times. The onslaught peaks about the Fourth of July, but natives know that's only Phase One.

Then the farmers start burning their grass fields to kill weeds and the pollen is replaced with thick, yellow smoke. The city was suing the state about the smoke, but it's harder to

take the pollen to court.

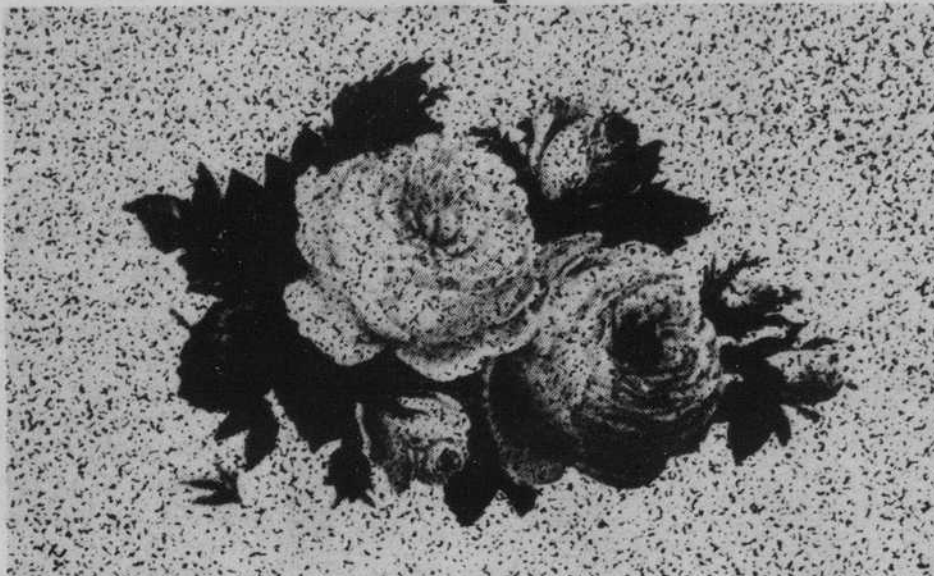
So citizens fight back on their own. Some wear surgical masks, some stay indoors, some take immunization shots — but mostly they just sneeze a lot.

Travelling to the beach offers tem-

plete who wasn't going to be pushed around by pollen. So when his hay fever got really bad . . . he left Eugene . . . for good.

It's hard to say how many people pollen has driven from Eugene, but according to Long, Ryan isn't the only

The noses keep on runnin'



Emerald Graphic

porary relief. Usually there's a wind coming in off the ocean and hay fever sufferers can luxuriate at the water's edge, hyperventilating pollen-free air — it's just over an hour's drive from Eugene.

The beach is nice, but you can't go there every time you need a breath of air, so other people have come up with more permanent solutions.

When track star Jim Ryan came to the University of Oregon, he found his hay fever almost insufferable. He was a strong, serious-minded ath-

lete.

"Eugene in the summertime is just flagrant exposure for hay fever sufferers," says Long. "They get itchy eyes, a runny nose, scratchy throat, have difficulty breathing and feel rotten. I personally know of several people who just had to leave."

Many Eugene sufferers can't just pack up and move to Palm Springs — dogs for instance.

Their sneezing and wheezing can sometimes be ignored by even-tempered masters, but when an En-

glish Bulldog starts wiping his fleshy, wet nose on your leg, you take notice.

Most dog allergies are caused by fleas, say local veterinarians, but not all of them. Amazon Park Animal Hospital is one clinic that will test dogs for other allergy problems. Several more animal hospitals in Eugene check for fleas and then automatically give pets a cortisone shot if no fleas are found. Others prescribe pills.

Portland, being larger and more sophisticated than Eugene, has a dog dermatologist to diagnose and treat animals' allergic reactions. Seattle has a complete Animal Skin and Allergy Clinic. (Animals must have references and appointments.) Eugene allergists still only treat humans.

But humans are big business in Eugene.

In addition to treatment by general practitioners, four Eugene physicians specialize year-round in allergy treatment. Currently, they're putting in extra hours during the work week and at least one allergist, Dr. John Minor, also works Saturdays.

Dr. Robert Jones, a Eugene Hospital and Clinic allergist, has set up a pollen-monitoring machine on that hospital's roof. At regular intervals the machine unleashes two sticky, silicone-coated rods and whirled them around collecting pollen and mold spores.

Every morning Jones and an associate analyze and count the spores and pollens under a microscope. Results are printed with the weather report in the Eugene Register-Guard.

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