

Lookin' up

By ANN TRENEMAN
Of the Emerald

Lane County government has not been in the peak of health for some time. In fact, it could be characterized as sick. Employee morale is low; two commissioners have faced the threat of being recalled; and everyone it seems is criticizing the county assessor. And that's just for starters.

But Lane County Commissioner Jerry Rust says things are looking up. Rust sits drinking coffee, surrounded by stacks of papers and memos in his office at the county's Public Service Building.

"Things are getting better. We had to accept the fact things were not good." He compares the county with a sick person: "That person can't get well if he doesn't admit and recognize the sickness first."

Rust says that was a major reason behind a recent press conference during which he berated the "political shenanigans" in county government and admitted to having hindered, instead of helped, the situation.

"We weren't tolerant enough and we criticized too much," he says. "It infected the whole organization."

The board of commissioners, which Rust chairs, should deal with administrative problems as well as general policy-making, Rust emphasizes, but adds that in the past the board has confined itself too much to administrative decisions.

"We should pay more attention to policy making," he says. "We've intruded too much into administrative space."

Employee morale is on the rise with a new grievance policy in the



Commissioner Jerry Rust

making and the introduction of more delegated responsibility within each department.

"All it takes is the will to work together," Rust says shaking his head. "We sure haven't helped it (employee morale) any."

The Nov. 7 election could change several aspects of the county structure. Archie Weinstein, who along with Bob Wood and Rust make up the commissioner board, faces a recall vote; an assessor will be elected; and a ballot measure vote will determine if the assessor's job will be elected or appointive in the future.

The measure concerning the assessor's job is a "vindictive

thing against Bylund," Rust says. "Why would anyone want Archie Weinstein, a millionaire property owner, to pick an assessor?"

Problems in the county assessors office aren't new but Rust still endorses Bylund over his opponent, Bill Bain.

"He's taking a lot of heat from big business," Rust notes, adding Bylund isn't a "Republican-style assessor" — meaning he's not in favor of giving businesses lower property taxes. Rust adds that Bylund hasn't had the monies to perform his job up to snuff. "The budget committee came down on Bylund hard."

Rust is looking forward to Jan.

Rust says county morale is improved; cites shenanigans for past problems

1, when the board will be expanded to five members. "I'd love to share some of these responsibilities," he says pointing to the various piles around him. Will he be able to get along with the newcomers? "No one can raise as much hell on this board as Archie has..." he says grinning.

Indeed Weinstein's raised voice can be heard coming through into Rust's office. "We hear Archie whenever he gets upset," he says nodding toward the wall.

What about Archie Weinstein? Does Rust think he and Wood are ganging up against him? "There's never been a stable coalition against me or Archie," he says.

But administrative and political quibbling aren't the only things on Rust's mind. The issue of how to deal with 30,000 people in the River Road/Santa Clara area and the county jail are upper-most in his mind this week.

"What's really happening at the jail?" he muses. "The bottom line is that it's an unconstitutional jail." He cites overwork of trustees, unhealthy conditions, and people who really don't deserve to be in jail being kept there as things that need reform.

The county has imposed a growth moratorium on the River Road/Santa Clara area which, as an unincorporated city, has no sewage facilities. There is a quarter-million ground water study being conducted now and the initial results should be in within a year.

Other issues on his mind? "I've got to write a letter on Measure 10," he mutters, rifling through his papers. Measure 10 would abolish the Land Conservation and Development commission. "It's going to set us way back. People don't understand the issues."

"LCDC isn't a burden; land-use planning is working. We are preserving timber land and flood plane..."

"The way to reform isn't a constitutional amendment, but a legislative act. LCDC is only an administrative body. The county has tremendous leeway in making their own comprehensive plan."

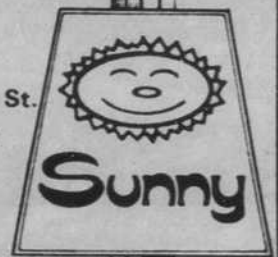
Rust is planning on changing his party registration from Independent to Democrat this year. "The way to be effective in politics is to belong to the political party."

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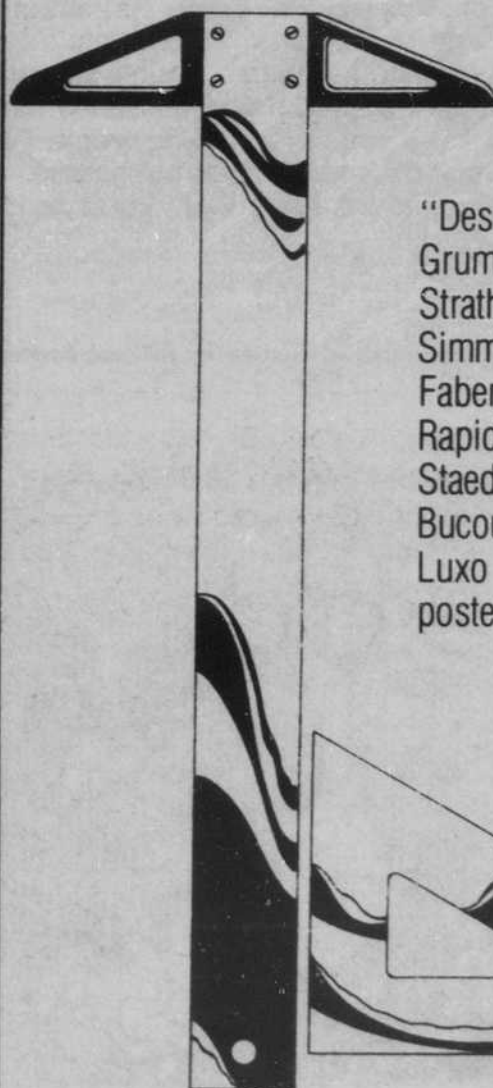
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