

Going to Takilma? Call Switchboard

By BOB WAITE
Of the Emerald

Referral network lists information

A woman enters the small comfortably cluttered Switchboard office at 454 Willamette Street above Grower's Market. "I'm leaving for Takilma tomorrow morning and I wanted to see if someone needed a ride."

"Tacoma?" asks the receptionist. "No, Takilma. It's down by Cave Junction," she explains.

Tom, the receptionist, shuffles through a file and finds a man who is leaving for Medford at 1 p.m.

"Wait a minute," the woman says becoming indignant. "Do you understand what I'm saying? I am driving down tomorrow. How can he say when he's leaving if he's asking for a ride? I'm leaving in the morning. If he's leaving at 1, tough."

Tom explains that he is looking in the correct file and suggests that she give the man a call anyway. As she leaves he rolls his eyes and shrugs.

One of the two telephones rings. The caller explains that he has just arrived in Eugene with a pregnant dog who is due at any time. He adds that he has no money for food or gasoline.

While Tom listens to the caller's story the other telephone rings. "There isn't a whole lot of help in that area right now, but if you're really starving...well, I have some numbers that you could call. Let me put you on hold because the other phone is ringing...okay?"

The caller on line two needs a ride to Washington and Tom gives her a telephone number to call. Looking in another file he picks up line one, but the starving man with the pregnant dog has hung up.

Tom (not his real name) was recently arrested for a minor crime and is working at Switchboard in lieu of jail.

"I have to do 36 hours of community service work," he

explains between telephone calls. "I was resentful at first because I have to 'volunteer' my time, but it's become a rewarding experience now that I've been here for awhile. It is gratifying to be able to help other people."

Switchboard is operated by

Of those 25 people, five are paid full-time staff. Jay Stutz, agency director, is paid through a \$9,000 revenue sharing grant that the organization recently received. Wade Powell, volunteer coordinator, and Maggie Maloney, resource developer, are paid through CETA funding.

years Switchboard has had its ups and downs, but it seems to be going into a nice high period."

Stutz attributes past problems, in part, to a lack of a paid full-time staff and volunteers, as well as to a lack of funding.

"In the past," he explains,

every day and it gives Switchboard a continuity."

Maloney is currently entering new human services organizations into the Switchboard files. The files have not been updated for at least a year, she says. She is also working on a "How to Survive In Eugene" book which will list inexpensive housing and restaurants as well as commonly called service organizations.

Getting more people to call offering rides is a priority, Maloney says. "The ratio of people needing rides is always greater than those offering rides. Maybe the consciousness of drivers will change with the gas crisis. People may see that they can travel more cheaply if they pool their resources and share."

Switchboard is primarily information and referral oriented, says Powell. But, he adds, due to recent funding cutbacks at Client Assistance Referral Evaluation Systems (CARES) it is taking more "problem solving" calls.

"It's quite often a self-help thing. I give the caller a pep-talk and suggest different avenues to try. People with financial problems, for instance, can go to several different agencies which will help them to consolidate their debts. But I also suggest their church. You'd be surprised how many people never think to go to their church for help."

Powell says that Switchboard is not equipped to handle crisis and suicide prevention calls. "Often it's a matter of appropriately getting the caller to call CARES or Whitebird."

He is starting a volunteer training program which will involve some basic training in crisis and suicide prevention.

"Ride referral is our biggie...We get about 50 ride calls per day, many from University students." He says that Switchboard also has job and housing information. They also help people locate lost and found pets and personal items. Powell says that he works closely with Tri-Agency Animal Control to help people locate impounded pets.

While Switchboard is improving, Powell still sees some problem areas. "We have trouble getting good volunteers who will stay for awhile. Sometimes, like on Saturday, we have to close at 5 p.m. rather than 8 p.m. Who wants to work on Saturday night? Many volunteers don't. We do have copiphones that give taped basic referral telephone numbers during the night."

Powell added that some volunteers, needing paying jobs, find work through Switchboard's job information files or are "picked off by employers who stop by and see a good worker."

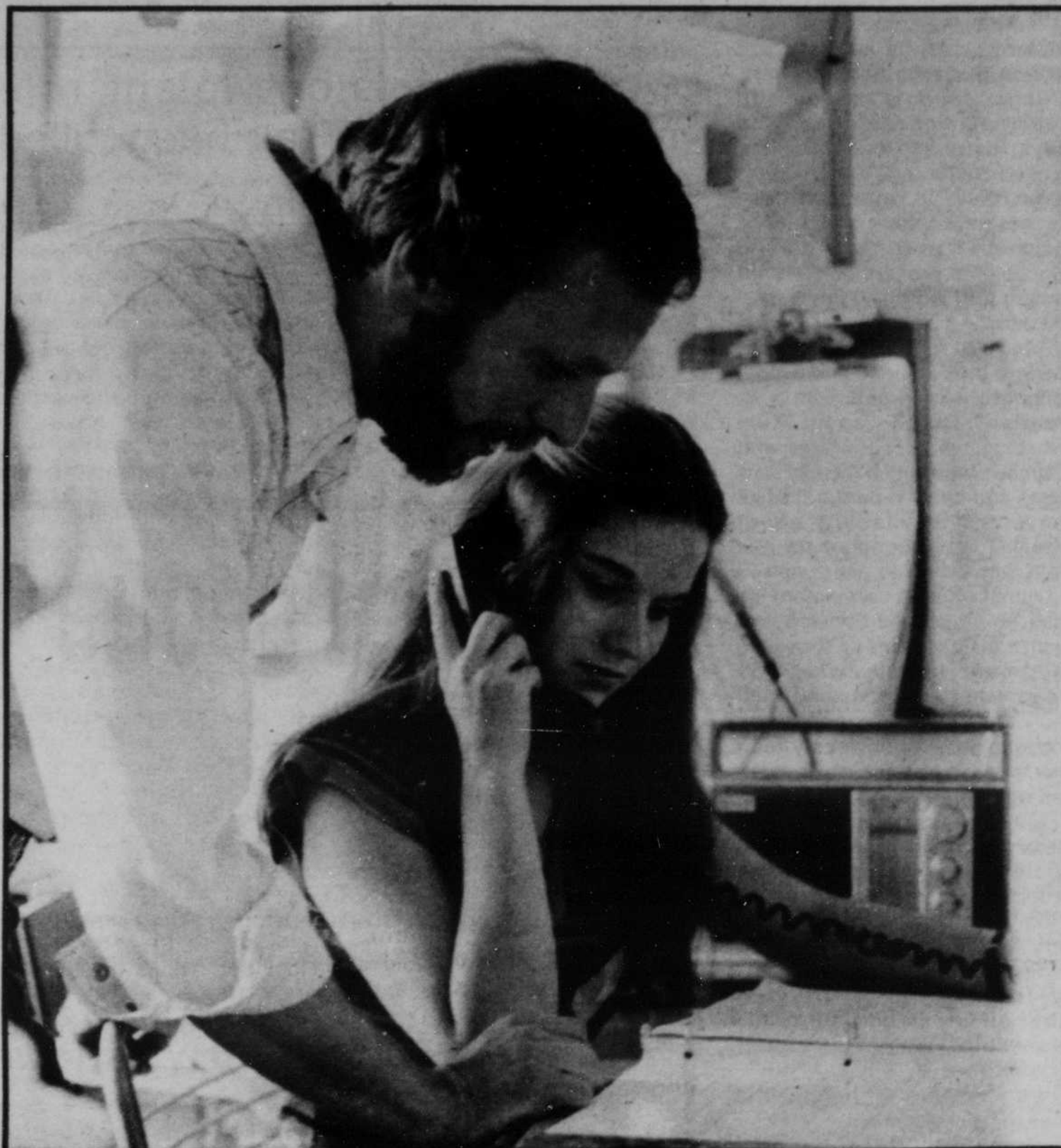


Photo by Jeff Patterson

Switchboard volunteers are primarily involved in information and referral, contacting people with local agencies, emergency help and rides from Eugene to the world.

about 25 people — the exact figure changes because most of the workers are volunteers who come and go.

Switchboard has two additional paid full-time workers through the Summer Youth Employment Program.

The remainder of the staff come from three areas: people referred by Lane County Corrections Agency to do community service in lieu of a jail sentence, volunteers from the University ESCAPE program and "volunteers off the street."

Stutz explains that 10 years ago a man named Joe Sage moved to Eugene from San Francisco. "He saw a need for a referral network in this town and started Switchboard. Over the

"You couldn't always call here when we were supposed to be open and get somebody, but now you can."

Stutz added that the ASUO has solved part of Switchboard's funding problem by paying the monthly telephone bill. "I think the idea is that a lot of University students use our ride service. I like to thank them (ASUO) whenever I can."

Maloney agrees with Stutz. "There hasn't been any paid staff (other than one director) here in the past year. As a result many things never got done. Now there is someone here

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