

Should we celebrate Ericson Day?

By JOHN CROWLEY
Of the Emerald

To the day of his death in 1506, Christopher Columbus insisted he'd landed on an unexplored eastern part of Asia.

His crew was just about to make shark food of him on October 12, 1492, when one of them spotted a distant limestone cliff in the moonlight. After that they groveled at his feet, begging for forgiveness.

The man from Genoa is the most publicized of the several candidates believed to have discovered the New World. He was one of at least five children born to Domenico and Susanna Colombo. His father was a third-generation master weaver who closed his shop when business was bad and took his kids fishing. In addition, he was the best customer of his own wine business.

Had he been more "successful" at the loom, his

son Cristoforo likely would never have gone to sea, but followed his dad in the family business.

But Columbus, a visionary, charismatic captain, embraced the notion that the world was round, and that by sailing west, he could reach the Indies.

"Discoverer of America" was never a title Columbus sought.

Doubtless he remains motionless in his Santo Domingo grave as members of the Leif Ericson Society seek to erase Columbus Day from the American calendar. Leif, they say, landed on the continent first, after being blown off course en route to Greenland around the year 1000 A.D.

In the final analysis, Colum-

bus was just looking for a way to get rich. In exchange for little bells, metal tips for laces used in clothing and on shoes, and wine, the Indians gave him marbles, masks and nose plugs, all made of gold. He explored the Bahamas, going wherever the Indians told him there was gold.

He probably would have been happy doing this the rest of his

life. He already had a fancy title (as part of the king and queen of Spain's orders, he became an admiral when land was sighted).

But he ran into bad luck. The Santa Maria was wrecked one night, a boy at the helm, the crew below in a drunken stupor.

He made a few more voyages after limping back to Spain in the Pinta, but never achieved the wealth he dreamed of. He died penniless in Spain. In his will, Columbus directed that a payment of one-half mark in silver be made to "a Jew who lived at the entrance to the ghetto in Lisbon, or to another one who may be named by a priest."

Poor guy.

And now the Leif Ericson Society wants to obliterate Columbus Day from our calendars.

Next they'll start a campaign to rename the town Leif Ericson, Ohio.



Graphic by Tom Ettel

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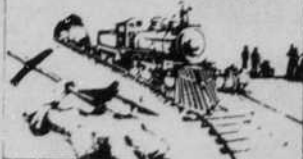
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Rape on bike path reported

A 21-year-old Springfield woman was grabbed from behind, dragged into some bushes and raped Wednesday afternoon after crossing the footbridge near Valley River Center and walking west on the south side of the Willamette River at 12:30 p.m.

Afterward, the woman walked to a nearby residential area and caught a bus home.

The woman, who moved to Springfield last year after living most of her life in a rural area of New York, was told by friends that she could walk safely on area bike paths in daylight, according to police.

The suspect is described as a white male in his 20s with black shoulder-length wavy hair and a mustache. He was wearing cut-off shorts.

This is the second daylight bike-path rape reported to police this year.

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