

'A real rarity' Women run this car garage

By JIM GERSBACH
Of the Emerald

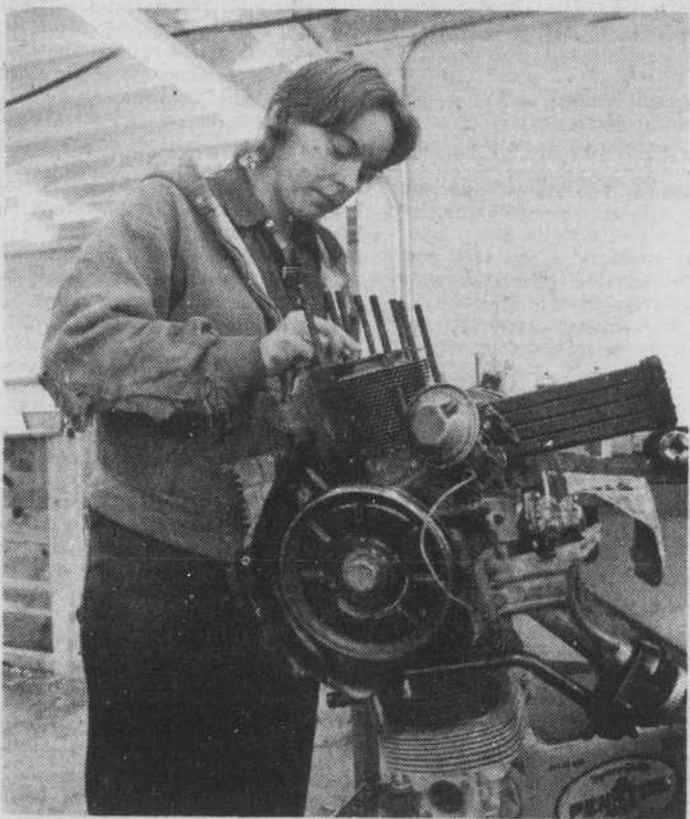
It's a small garage that smells of grease, damp concrete and stale exhaust fumes.

Outside, trucks and pick-ups roar by on W. 11th Avenue, an industrial strip of gas stations, garages and auto-body shops. On a billboard across the street, a rugged man wearing a hard hat is pictured smoking a Winston cigarette in front of a giant dam.

Inside, mechanics dressed in gray-blue workclothes tinker with engine parts. With sprayed-on insulation covering its ceiling, the garage takes on a cavernous look. The dim morning light transforms the wrenches and metal tools into so many scattered mastodon bones.

What distinguishes this scene — the Country Volkswagen Cooperative — from neighboring garages is that all the mechanics are women.

The worker-owned and -operated foreign auto repair shop started seven years ago with a half-male,



Seven women own and operate Country Volkswagen, including mechanic Peri Sneyd.

half-female membership. During the cooperative's first five years there was a commitment to sexual equality.

But when the cooperative moved from downtown Eugene to its present location at 3144 W. 11th Ave. two years ago, resignations left just one man and three women. When the man left to work in the woods a year ago, the cooperative was left with all female mechanics.

"We're a real rarity, especially for a town this small," says Christine Frazer, one of the cooperative's seven active members.

Only a few other garages nationwide are run by women mechanics. In Eugene, only Vollstedt Volkswagen and Wildflower Garage employ any woman mechanics.

Like many women working in male-dominated fields, Frazer had to overcome sexist stereotypes.

"We all grew up with defined roles," Frazer says, standing in the chilly quonset hut that is the garage workroom. "I was supposed to be a bookkeeper, not a mechanic."

But Frazer says she enjoys working with her hands "and seeing an end product."

"My dad's an aircraft mechanic, and I used to watch him tinker with things," Frazer says. "I used to get high scores on mechanical aptitude tests, but what do you do with a girl who does well in mechanics?"

Jessie Savage is an apprentice mechanic at Country Volkswagen. A slight woman wearing wire-rim glasses, she also was interested in mechanics as a girl.

"A lot of times we'd find something people had thrown out, like old radios, and we'd take them apart and try to put them back together," Savage recalls. "When we used to go to visit relatives I'd fix their bicycles and vacuums."

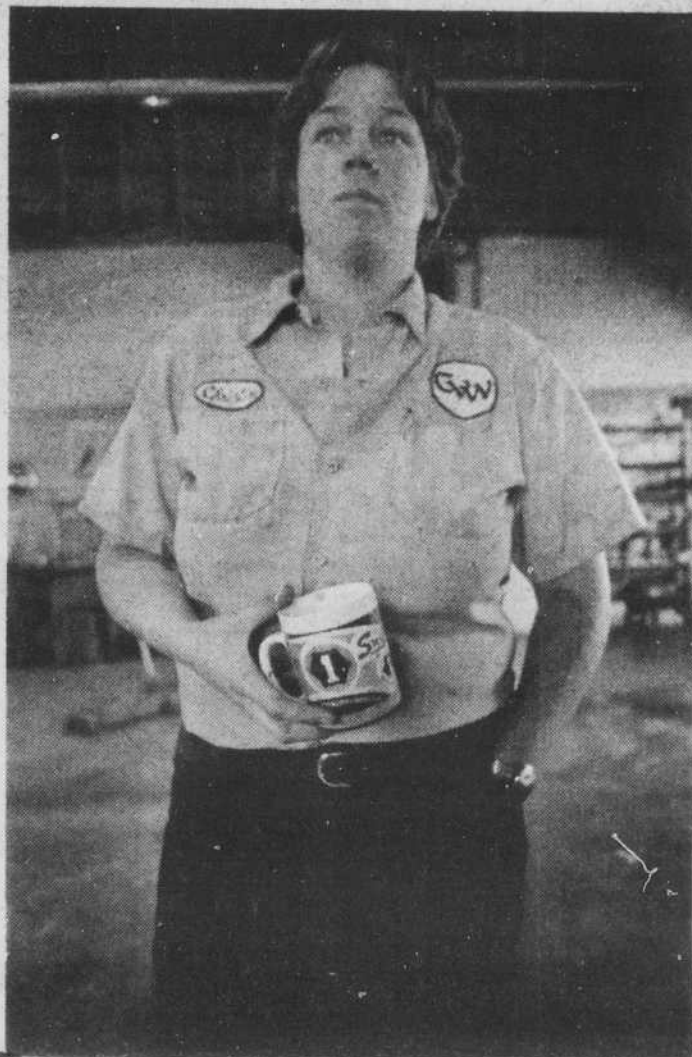
Savage's only encouragement came from an aunt or two who would pat her on the shoulder after she'd fixed something.

"My father was a decent back-yard mechanic," Savage says.

"I saw him pull engines and work on them, but he'd never ask me to help — even if I asked. 'Hey, you're not supposed to be out here,' he'd say."

Such attitudes make it hard on women entering previously men-only occupations.

"Most of the women mechanics I've met have had to work so hard against the psychological thing of 'Hey, you're not supposed to do this,'" Frazer says.



Christine Frazer
Photos by Debby Abe

Both Frazer and Savage got into mechanics on a do-it-yourself basis.

"Like many women, I really didn't start getting into mechanical things until I had my own car," Frazer says. "Then I started doing my own light maintenance. It saved money."

Soon friends and neighbors asked her to work on their cars. From there she went on to mechanical training at Lane Community College and finally joined the cooperative two years ago.

Savage started doing auto-engine work after a run-in with an auto shop.

"I blew up an engine coming cross country, and I got taken by a garage in the Midwest," Savage recalls. "I didn't believe people would rip you off with a smile on their face."

After that incident Savage replaced the engine herself.

Both women say male customers are generally receptive.

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Librarian checks out after 33 years of service

Eugene Barnes plans to spend his retirement squeezing cider and watching the grass grow.

Barnes, who has run the University library's acquisition department for 33 years, will retire on Dec. 31.

"Yesterday I just finished my 26th gallon of cider," says Barnes, 63. "I will be able to squeeze cider without feeling the pressure to get it done before I have to go to work."

Barnes began considering retirement when his son died in an auto accident June of 1979. He turned in his resignation seven months later.

"Thirty-three years is enough," he says.

Barnes co-workers, however, have been trying to change his mind. University Librarian George Shipman had lunch with

Barnes in attempt to persuade him to stay. But Barnes just shook his head, Shipman says.

Personnel in the acquisitions office have threatened to chain him to his desk.

"When I found out he was retiring, I just sat and cried," says Rhoda Beyerlin, administrative assistant.

"He's kind of a shy, retiring sort of person," says Carl Hintz, a retired University librarian emeritus who worked 25 years with Barnes.

Approximately 70 percent of the University library's collection was added during Barnes' stint as acquisition librarian, Shipman says. Acquisition librarians are responsible for ordering books, paying for them and making sure they aren't already included in the collection.

"He's competent as hell,"

says Gustave Alef, a professor of history who has known Barnes for 24 years.

Alef says Barnes has an intuitive knowledge of what materials are important.

In the 1950s, Barnes bought a large set of documents on French history. Many history faculty members were upset that such a "useless" set was purchased. But several years later, the school hired a French historian who was delighted to see the documents.

Barnes is modest about his work. "I've done the job, but let's leave out the adjectives."

And he doesn't seem sorry to leave the library. A library has a life of its own, and one individual's absence doesn't make any difference, he says.

"I just want to say goodbye, and let it go at that."



Eugene Barnes
Photo by David W. Zahn