



Fourth-dimension cartoonist draws laughs

By **TRACY DUNCAN**
Of the Emerald

Now that "Sparrow" has flown the coop and "Peanuts" has found a home in the classified section, the Emerald's newest comic strip, "Mixed Nuts," is holding down the much contested spot on Page 2.

"The Fourth Dimension, that's where I'm from," says Steve Lafler, creator of the strip. "I'm stuck in the Third Dimension."

Lafler, 23, moved to Eugene from Massachusetts in October. Lafler happened to run into Emerald Editor Ken Sands, who remembered Lafler's strip "Aluminum Foil" from the University of Massachusetts' Collegian.

Sands suggested Lafler submit a strip, and that night Lafler created the first five installments of "Mixed Nuts."

Although "Mixed Nuts" replaced "Sparrow," which had earlier replaced "Peanuts," Lafler says he likes both of the earlier Emerald features.

"I support people who are trying something out," Lafler says of Alan Baral, the local cartoonist who created "Sparrow." "It's important to have a place to be printed."

Lafler says one of the reasons he chose the name "Mixed Nuts" is that it might bother some "Peanuts" fans. But he also chose it because it describes the "crazy ambience" of the strip.

In "Mixed Nuts" so far, politics is only a sidelight, with an occasional reference to Reagan and multi-national corporations. "I just try to make my little dreams come true in my comic strip," Lafler says.

To create "Mixed Nuts," Lafler says he gets "into a state of mind where I divest myself of any

assumptions about the nature of reality or our society."

A reader of "Mixed Nuts" must be prepared for anything to happen and for the strip to suddenly change plots. For instance, after Ernie Electron, typical physics student, found his way into the Fourth Dimension to have more time to study for a test, he met a pail-headed being named Pailface.

Suddenly, Dr. Free took over. "Who is this Dr. Free?" the strip asks. "Well, he travels about, performing tasks for people like you and me ... for free!"

Lafler says he switches around to jerk people's consciousnesses out of the routine, to make them laugh or say "Whaaaaaaat?"

Lafler says he's been feeling his way through the strip, finding which characters to develop and which to eliminate.

"I have to put them through adventures and breathe life into them."

Since he's paid the standard comic strip rate of \$8 a week, Lafler's main income is from his T-shirt business. He silkscreens shirts in his apartment, doing large jobs for groups or selling the shirts individually.

Lafler says he hopes to support himself by cartooning someday. He's already published one comic book — a collection of his strip "Aluminum Foil," available at Son of Koobdooga book store.

With "Mixed Nuts," Lafler says he wants people to know that they can form their world to their liking.

"People work hard to form anxiety-ridden worlds for themselves," he says. "People need to be creative in their lives."

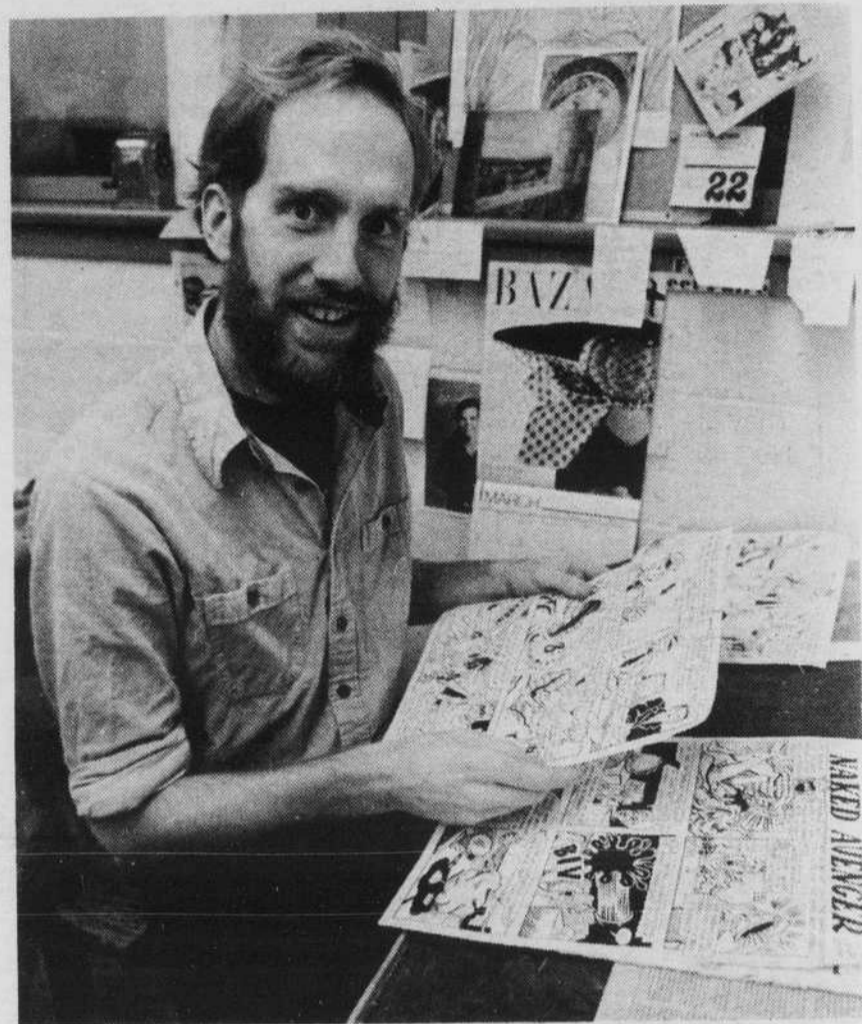


Photo by Erich Boekelheide

Steve Lafler

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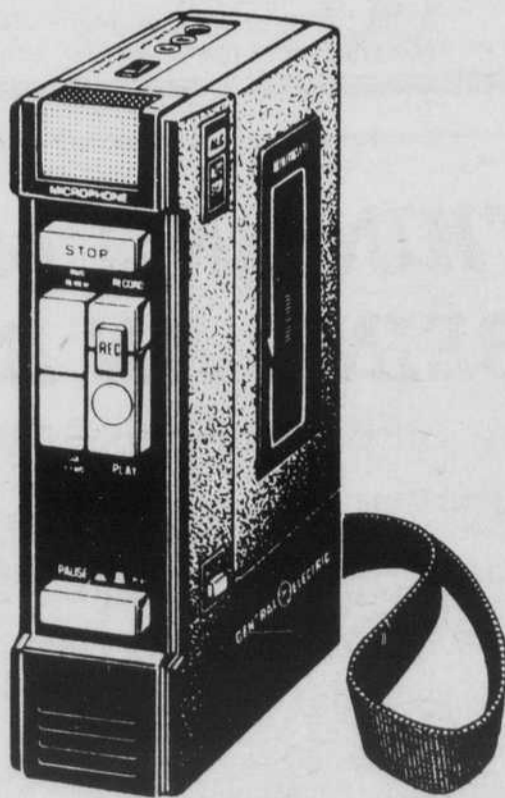
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