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City studies anti-racist ordinance

By RICHARD WAGONER
Of the Emerald

Recent outbreaks of racism have prompted Eugene city councilors to investigate the possibility of adopting an ordinance that would make racial and ethnic harassment illegal.

"This is a problem many of us thought belonged to the bad old days, but it's still with us," Baruch Fischhoff, president of the Eugene Human Rights Council, told the city council Wednesday.

City staff began investigating current laws prohibiting harassment and physical attacks after the distribution of racist literature in some Eugene neighborhoods and threats against black families.

At least two Eugene families have been threatened by racist callers, said Willie Polite, president of the Eugene chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. One of those families is black. The other is a white family that has adopted two black children.

The callers told the white family that their adopted children were the "lowest things in the neighborhood," Polite said.

Racism is a problem government leaders can't ignore, he told councilors. And Polite said there is strong public support for an ordinance that would assign criminal penalties to racial harassment.

Since last month, more than 200 letters and 75 phone calls have poured into the local NAACP office by Eugene residents

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expressing concern and sympathy for a black family that has been the target of racial threats and harassment, Polite said.

Too many people say "this happens in Atlanta, it happens in Georgia, but it can't happen here," he told councilors.

Four bills that would make racial and ethnic harassment a crime are being considered by the Oregon Legislature. But some councilors said they don't want to wait for the state to tackle the problem.

"I, for one, am hopeful the state legislation will pass," said Councilor Betty Smith, "but I don't want to sit back and wait for it to happen."

Councilor Mark Lindberg agreed. "It's very clear that over the months there seems to be a growing enthusiasm for this type of harassment," he said. "It's incumbent upon various elected officials of Eugene to show that we think these actions are deplorable."

The council directed the Human Rights Council, the city's human rights staff and the city attorney's office to study the legislation being considered in Salem and to draft a city ordinance dealing with harassment.

The proposed ordinance would then be brought before the council for a public hearing and possible adoption.



Photo by Steve Dykes

The price was right

It may not have been home cooking, and it wasn't exactly authentic Italian, but the price was right — enough so to draw a sell-out crowd to Wednesday's first 99-cent jazz night and spaghetti feed. The 250 tickets to the dinner were sold out Wednesday afternoon — a surprise to many hungry students and Cultural Forum folks who sponsored the event.

In West University area

Neighbors battle park crime

By LESLIE FARRIS
Of the Emerald

West University neighbors launched a crusade against crime Wednesday with plans for whistles, safe houses and contact groups.

The plans were drawn at the third meeting held by neighbors to outline how to reclaim the park on East 14th Avenue. About 50 area residents first met last week in the West University Neighborhood Park to try to stop harassment by vagrants who had been staying in the park.

Since the original meeting, neighbors

agree the park problem has improved considerably. But because panhandling — along with verbal and physical harassment — has been a recurring problem in the park for three years, the neighbors are looking at specific, long-term solutions.

One plan calls for distributing distress whistles to interested residents near the half-block community park. Skip Stokes of the Eugene Police Department's Community Officer Patrol team brought sacks of free whistles to Wednesday's meeting.

Neighbors are hoping to inform enough residents of the whistles' purpose

that a distress whistle is sounded from the park, those living nearby will respond. The whistles are available free at the West University Neighborhood Center, 1458 Ferry St.

Another solution will be to establish neighborhood safe houses like those in Eugene's Whiteaker Neighborhood. The houses, located around the park, will have "safe house" signs in their windows and will be shelters for assault victims or near-victims.

Pam Ford, neighborhood crime prevention coordinator, said safe-house volunteers will learn how to handle emergencies at a crisis counseling session conducted by the Rape Crisis Network.

"Even though it's only been used once there, Whiteaker thinks the houses definitely have been a deterrent against crime in their neighborhood," Ford said. "Just the signs are a deterrent. They show the neighborhood's united."

Stokes said police encounter trouble combating the vagrant problem because people who report violations often wish to remain anonymous. Fearing retribution, they refuse to identify or sign a complaint against the offender.

So, park-area residents plan lists of neighbors to contact who are willing to serve as co-witnesses in filing complaints against vagrants. Neighbors hope that by acting as a group, the vagrant won't know whom to retaliate against and may be intimidated by the numbers.

"The key to whether or not you're going to have a safe park is ongoing citizen participation," Stokes said. "As long as the transients feel they can take over the park, they'll continue to do so. But if the word gets out that the neighbors aren't going to tolerate it, you're not going to have a problem."

Former coach testifies

Former assistant basketball coach Ron Billingslea took the stand in his own defense Wednesday, claiming he thought \$1,680 that Bronson Travel Agency gave him for unused airline tickets was a "fringe benefit" and not money that should have gone back to the University.

"I didn't think any University money was involved," Billingslea testified in Lane County Circuit Court. "Maybe I was a fool. I would certainly have no reason to rip the University off."

Billingslea is accused of stealing state funds by accepting the money from the travel agency.

Billingslea — an assistant to former head coach Dick Harter — said he returned unused tickets that had accumulated in his desk to the agency after learning Harter might take a job with Pennsylvania State University in

March 1978. After turning in the tickets, Billingslea said travel agent Peggy Hamlin called him and said the agency had money for him.

He said he received two checks from the agency, one for \$440 on March 2 and another for \$1,240 on May 5. He didn't question why he was receiving the money, he said. "I was just following what she (Hamlin) told me to do."

In testimony Tuesday, Hamlin said she didn't recall any checks issued to Billingslea.

Billingslea also said he gave Harter a batch of unused tickets in June 1977 as possible payment for flying Felton Sealey from Philadelphia to Eugene — a violation of NCAA rules.

Jury deliberations are expected to begin today.