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**Cheerleading squads get high on spirit**

By **MIKE LEE**  
Of the Emerald

Valerie Burke believes in cheerleading. So much so that she doesn't mind spending two months on the road away from her Kentucky home to preach the rally gospel to young cheerleaders all over the West.

Burke and her three assistants — Don Berrume, Sue Suttlesworth and Palisa Williams — are in Eugene this week to lead their seventh straight week-long high school cheerleader camp. More than 170 cheerleaders from around the state are on campus to learn 12 cheers, 16 chants, two dance routines and a host of spirit-initiating techniques.

*'There's no dope or alcohol — we're going to be high on spirit all week.'*

The camp itself is full of spirit techniques. Each day, three Spirit Frisbees are awarded to the "most fired-up squad." Be careful not to drop it. "One time a squad dropped it," says Williams, "and had to wear their clothes inside-out all day."

Also, Spirit Frogs are awarded daily as congeniality awards, while the Spirit Bell is rung to change classes. None of these compare to the "super-duperest" award, a large toy firecracker called the Big Wig.

All it takes to win is a heaping helping of PMA — Positive Mental Attitude.

"What we try to stress is that they believe in themselves," Burke says, soft-spoken after an hour of yelling.

"If they believe in themselves, it not only applies to cheerleading. If they cheer and they believe in it, then it'll stick with them — it'll be in their personality."

That's a tall order, but Burke has a summer of experience to back her. Her group — one of 16 roaming the country — was selected from thousands of applicants by the International Cheerleading Foundation, a 12-year-old Missouri organization.

At the beginning of each summer, the ICF holds its own camp where the chosen few discuss the routines they'll be spreading across the land.

From there, each group is on its own. Burke's group, none older than 21, started in South Dakota before working its way to the coast. Burke says the West circuit is the most popular,



Three spirit-filled cheerleaders rise above the rest at a special cheerleading camp held on campus this week.



Photos by Bill Wack

Members of the Tigard High School varsity basketball squad learn a new routine to take back to their school this fall.

because most of the students live in the South and have never seen the Pacific Ocean.

The trip is a chance to go sightseeing on company time — when they have the time.

Driving an ICF-supplied car from camp to camp, the foursome must arrive in each town a day early to work out logistics with campus personnel.

Then, on Sunday when the cheerleaders hit town, they must act like they just entered Disneyland for the first time. During the introductory meeting, the four jump, dance, and admonish the kids against being anything but high.

Naturally, of course.

"There's no dope or alcohol," Burke tells the assembled cheerleaders at their first meeting.

"We're not gonna need it anyway — we're going to be high on spirit all week."

But is that possible after seven weeks? Burke says yes, with a qualification. She says the closest she came to "faking it" was when her mother called four weeks ago to say that a close family friend had died.

"I talked to her early that morning before warm-ups," Burke recalls. "It was like I wanted to take off two hours just to cry, to get it out of my system."

"But I knew that I had to do it, and I knew it was part of my job, and that that's what we teach — PMA the whole time — so I just forgot about it and said, 'Tonight, after staff meeting when I have time, I'll have a good cry.'"

Burke takes her cheerleading seriously — it's much more of an institution in the South than here — and that's why she can go out every day loaded with PMA.

"Cheerleading, in a way, represents to me how you should feel about life," she explains.

"Everybody needs to work together, and if you can spread happiness or cheer, or get people interested in something — maybe make somebody smile, or have a good time, or support somebody else — then that's what makes it so much easier."

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