

Crisis links University, city

Poor economy joins duo in high-tech industry hunt

By Harry Esteve
Of the Emerald

Thrown together by economic crisis, the University and the city of Eugene are forging a partnership with one overriding goal — survival.

Until recently, the symbiotic relationship between the University and its host city has been taken for granted. For more than two decades the University has been the single largest employer in Lane County.

Each October, thousands of students poured into Eugene, spending their money hand over fist for apartments, food and entertainment.

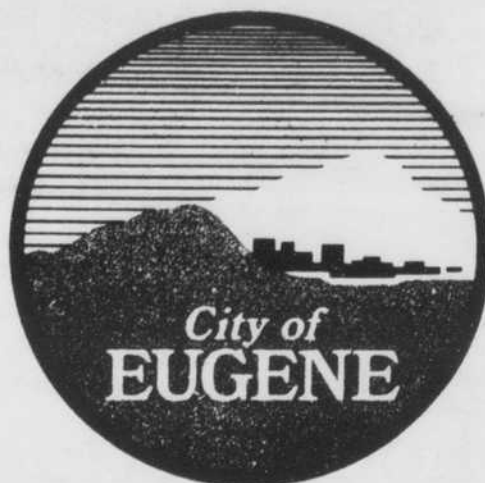
In return, Eugene was considered one of the best cities in the United States to live in. Crime was low, the streets were clean and there was enough money to build the "Eugene Centre" and dream about building the Emerald Canal.

Now, both Eugene and the University are struggling to make ends meet. Fewer students are enrolling, and those who do have less money to spend. The University's budget has lost ground to inflation and cutbacks.

In Eugene, unemployment hovers consistently above the national average. Citizens are beginning to trickle away, causing the tax base to shrink.

No one can say which has suffered more, but officials from both the University and the city agree they need each other.

The University's "man in Eugene" is



Gary Long, the city's administrative services director. A University graduate, Long sees the institution as Eugene's "most important economic development chip."

He helped coordinate legislative lobbying during the last regular session and during the following special sessions. His bias toward the University was no secret.

"Our number-one issue was preservation of the University," he says. City lobbyists rallied hard for better funding for higher education.

"I believe we had some influence to minimize the damage done to the University," Long says confidently.

But the city's main effort is aimed at economic development — and that's where the University comes in. That's



also where the economic buzz word for the 1980s — high-tech — comes in.

In every state north of the Sunbelt, there is a shared vision among heads of universities and city administrators, a vision of clean, light industry — attracted by a good community and a solid liberal arts university — establishing its business and bringing with it hundreds of job openings and plenty of taxable dollars.

The vision is very much alive in Eugene.

What city and University representatives have in mind is something similar to the Research Triangle in North Carolina or Silicon Valley in California, where large tracts of land are devoted to high-tech industry. Thousands of people are hired to produce computer and satellite components and other technology of the

"information age."

The Research Triangle was instrumental in turning around North Carolina's economy, Long says, and the universities in North Carolina were instrumental in getting the businesses to locate there. Corporations in California's Silicon Valley were lured by Stanford University and the University of California at Berkeley.

The University could play the same role here, Long says.

The "wave of the future" is high-tech and bio-tech industry, agrees Charlene Curry, director of governmental relations for the University.

Oregon legislators should wake up to the fact that higher education will play a major role in attracting those industries, Curry says.

"It's absolutely absurd to talk about economic development and cut back higher education. It doesn't make any sense," she says. "Obviously the two go hand in hand."

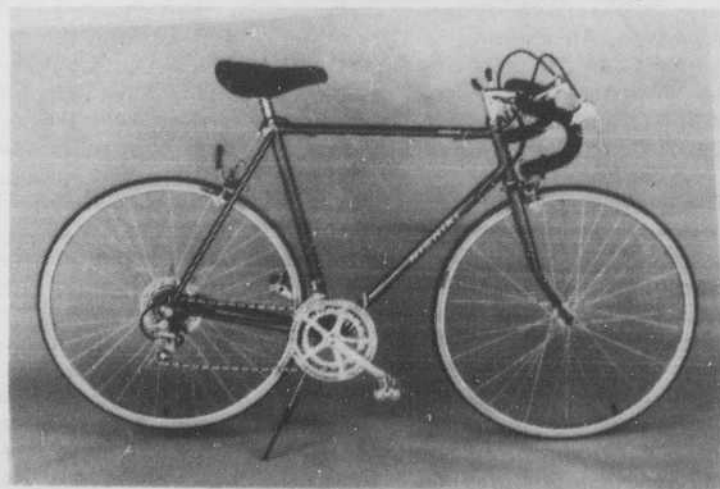
Curry, like most University administrators, gets impatient with the frustrating catch-22 of University/state economics. Simplified, the catch goes something like this:

Without a healthy economy, higher education loses funding, and its quality and reputation deteriorate. But it will take a solid higher-ed system to ensure economic development and boost Oregon's dilapidated treasury.

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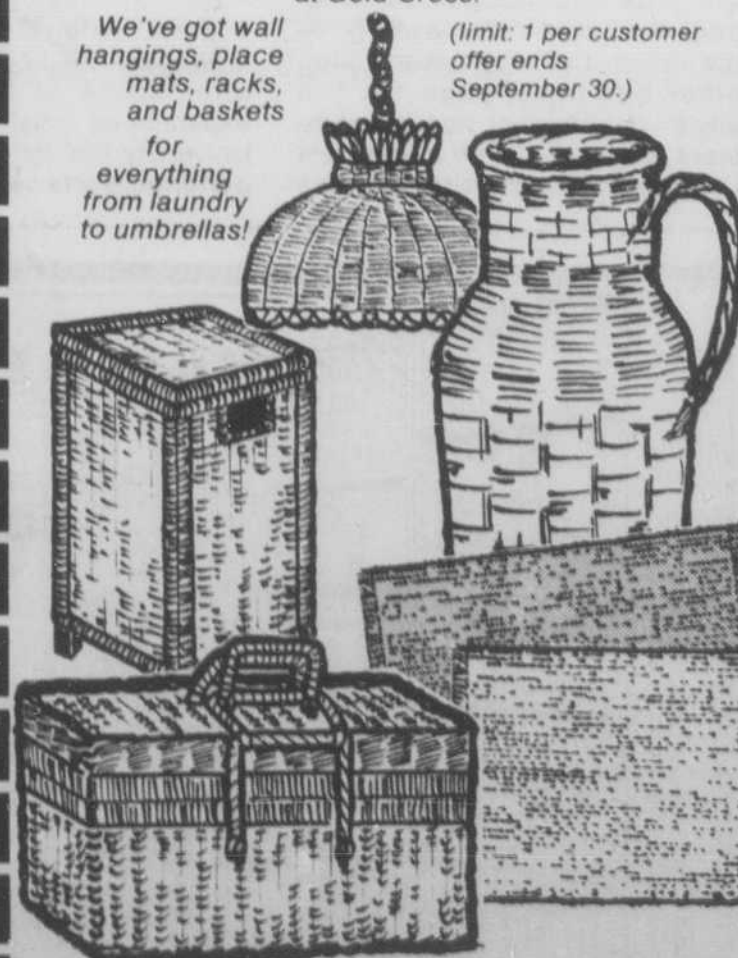
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