

Bingo!

**With fingers crossed
a winner might come up**



"I'm a retired citizen," says Evelyn Lester. "I can't see sitting at home twiddling my thumbs when I could be doing something."

"The main reason they play bingo," says Marilyn Paxton, manager of ARC bingo in downtown Eugene, "is that they're gamblers. Second, it can be a reasonably inexpensive entertainment for an evening. We've got a lot of elderly people on fixed incomes that can come in for three or four or five dollars a night."

"They meet a lot of new people," Paxton says. "Travellers staying in a local motel check the phone book for bingo. They have something to do instead of sitting around in the motel. They come out and meet the locals. We have people in from Albany and Florence. We've had them from as far away as Holland and Australia."

"Some of the players are lined up outside at five o'clock to get inside early to pick out their cards. They have all these gimmicks and trinkets that are good luck charms they bring along with them. Some of them will only use one particular color dauber because they think it's lucky. They sit in the same seat every night."

"I'm going to my horoscope for my number," says one woman as she selects her cards. "You have certain lucky numbers, depending on the day, the year, and the time you were born." Born May 5, 1925 at 5:00 p.m., her lucky numbers this month are one, 10 and 19. "I don't know whether it's going to work. It won't hurt anything to find out. I haven't done any winning here yet."

Open four nights a week since last Aug. 1, ARC Bingo is across



Top right photo: A man crosses his fingers in anticipation of a winning number. Above: This woman won \$40 on one of her three cards, the first time she's won this month. Bottom left: Filling in the right blanks is the way to win, which is what this woman, bottom center, has done. Bottom right: A woman calls out the bingo numbers.

W. 10th from the Atrium. As in all efficiently run gambling operations, the house makes a considerable profit. Oregon law allows only charitable organizations to set up shop in the bingo business. The proceeds from this game provide 15-20% of the budget of the Association of Retarded Citizens of Oregon.

"We have some people who spend \$75-80 dollars consistently, three or four nights a week," Paxton says. "I don't think there's anybody who's ahead over the long run."

"I win once in a while," says one retired man who didn't want

his name used. He and his wife play at least twice a week. "The biggest thing bingo does is help the charities. We play as a social activity. There's always the anticipation of winning too. The odds are fantastic against you. It's still a kick in the pants when you win. It's a kick to see different kinds of people winning. Some of them nearly have a nervous breakdown."

The players range in age from 18 to 85 years-old. The majority are over 60. Many of them take their vacations in Reno and Las Vegas. A number volunteer to work the bingo game on nights when they're not playing. A

recent Saturday night's crowd included about 160 players.

The standard "payout" to a game winner is \$40, but the rewards of victory vary according to the winner's investment, the number of victors, and the type of game being played. The largest payout is \$1,000 if you "blackout" a \$1.50 "throwaway" card in 49 numbers or less, a 400,000-1 possibility.

The playing room, built originally as a Dodge dealership and first converted into an ice-skating rink, is cavernous, brightly lit, and heavy with cigarette smoke.

Above the quiet conversations and the murmurs of the players, the caller's voice issues in fifteen-second intervals from two speakers that hang from the rafters.

"I-26. That's I, two-six."

"O-73. O, seven-three."

Kris Anderson, 21, is among the younger patrons of ARC Bingo. "I play in hopes of winning, and to use up some time," she says. "I haven't got a job or anything. There's nothing else to do. The first night I played I won \$87 on the early bird. Since I won the very first game I played I got hooked. I've turned on about ten people to playing bingo."

"Bingo has been called on B-14," says the caller.

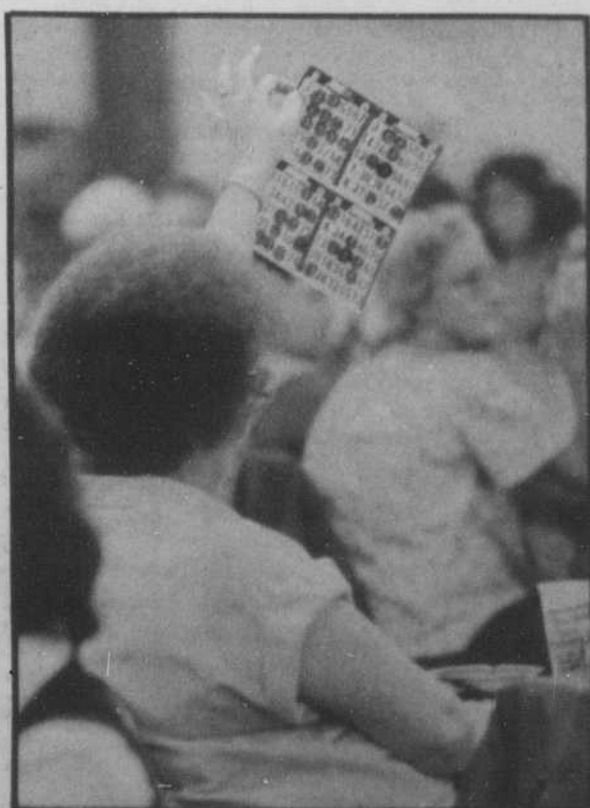
A volunteer reads off the row of numbers. This confirms the victory.

"Does anybody else have bingo?" the voice says. "Okay, this portion of the game is closed. Pay the winner \$25. Go on to the blackout."

A night's play, between 6:15 and 10:00, consists of 20 games.

A bingo circuit exists in Eugene. The county fairgrounds, Marist High School, the Elk's, Moose Lodge, Eagle's and Veteran's clubs have games. As a low cost form of entertainment, bingo has widespread appeal all over the world. The chance of one player winning decreases as the number of participants increases.

"The majority are regulars that are here early and never miss a night," says Marilyn Paxton. "Some haven't missed a night since we opened. One fellow who's 84 years old got out of the hospital on a Thursday afternoon and took a cab directly here."



**Story by Randy Malat
Photos by Bob Baker**