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Group of Eugene citizens help troubled Cougar Hot Springs

By Michele Matassa
Of the Emerald

During the blistering summer heat last year, as many as 100 Eugene-area residents a day took off from their jobs and classes and headed to the calming, healing waters of Cougar Hot Springs. But for many of these rest and recuperation seekers, the trip was not so healing and definitely not calming.

In the last three to four years, increasing armed robberies, threatened rapes and "lots of thievery kind of activity" have spoiled the fun of many hot springs visitors, says forest service recreation manager Chuck Anderson.

Dawn Lewis not only agrees with Anderson, but she has decided to do something about it.

Who is Dawn Lewis?

She is part of the newly-formed Friends of the Springs, a group of 15 to 20 concerned citizens who are trying to change the management of the springs in order to more closely monitor crime in the area.

Probably this week, Lewis will pack up her two-year-old son and move to the springs, 65 miles east of Eugene, where she will be a full-time "caretaker" of the area.

The site is patrolled by the Blue River Ranger station, a division of the U.S. Forest Service. But spot checks of the grounds haven't prevented theft in the north parking lot, overnight camping in off-limit areas and general problems with cleanliness, Lewis says.

As a volunteer caretaker, Lewis will try to educate users about the dangers they face and try to encourage safety precautions, she says. She would like to decrease heavy drinking because slippery surfaces around the pools present hazards to drinkers.

Lewis will move her geometric dome to the springs until money is raised to build a cabin. The dome won't be seen from the water, but "I'll be within earshot of the hot springs," she says.

"If people know that there's somebody watching," they should think twice about bending the law, she says.

The caretaker and any helpers at the springs won't act as policemen but can call the Lane County Sheriff's office if necessary, Lewis says.

Lewis' services are free, but Friends of the

Springs needs money to accomplish many of its goals.

The group wants to build a "kiosk," a type of information booth, at the beginning of the trail to the springs. The person stationed at the booth could watch the south parking lot for theft and also help visitors with questions, Lewis says. The north parking lot will be closed because it is too vulnerable to crime.

The friends of Cougar Hot Springs also want to build decking and a place to hang clothes. They only want to make minor changes, "not do anything drastic to the site because we want to keep it as natural as possible. . . just little improvements that are nice," Lewis says.

A lot of Blue River citizens wanted commercial development of the springs, partly because they are conservative and don't like the nudity that is encouraged by the natural surroundings, she says.

"But there are so many people around the area who just love the hot springs the way it is. So what they're doing is giving us a chance to get it together."

Anderson, who patrols the springs along with other forest service personnel, says he hopes the caretaker system will not only reduce crime but reduce the need for forest service management of the area.

Anderson says "on paper" the forest service thinks the caretaker plan should work, but "we're a little skeptical and we're going to be monitoring it closely."

In the fall, "after the heavy-use season," the forest service will have to consider the success of the program before it signs another permit for Friends of the Springs, Anderson says.

It also will have to "measure how the local community feels about it" and what its users have to say, he says.

Despite Anderson's cautious approach, Lewis is confident about the plan's support.

"Eugene as a whole is really supportive of what we're doing," she says, emphasizing the group's main problem is raising needed money.

"We need people to come out and help — work parties and also just dollars," she says.

Membership in Friends of the Springs costs just \$10 per year or only two days of work per year, Lewis says.

Call 683-9071 for more information.

Butte to Butte deadline nears

Runners will have to pay an extra \$2 after Saturday if they plan on entering the Oregon Track Club's July 4 Butte to Butte Run.

Those runners who register for the annual 10-kilometer run before Saturday will pay \$6 and will be eligible for a random drawing of about 130

prizes donated by local merchants. Late registrants will pay \$8 and will forfeit their chance in the drawing.

Registration forms are available at local sporting goods stores. They may be mailed to OTC Butte to Butte, P.O. Box 1107, Eugene, OR 97440 or turned in at Nike Eugene, 99 W. 10th Ave.

About 6,000 runners are expected for the tenth running of the Butte to Butte. The race will begin at 8 a.m. at Spencer Butte Junior High School and finish 6.2 miles later at Skinner Butte Park.

Volunteers are needed to help with the race and registration. Call 343-1563 for more information.

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