

# Can 'The Bugle' blow the horn on what it sees?

## New magazine seeks to fill editorial void

So you want to start a magazine? It's not an uncommon wish. Current research carried out by "Folio Magazine" indicates that 300 new magazines start up every year. Of those, about 10 percent make it to the second year. And of those measly 30, it takes about four years to break even. Perhaps there are no fail-safe formulas for success, but there are some irrefutable requisites: a strong editorial focus, a specific audience and money — lots of it.

Mocking the odds, a new Eugene magazine has gotten its first issue off the ground with none of the above. "The Bugle" is the brainchild of Ken Babbs, a self-employed writer perhaps best recognized for his close connection with Ken Kesey. The two of them edit another literary endeavor, "Spit in the Ocean."

Last April Babbs got together with a group of his friends and a few rounds of beer at the Vets Club to talk about his plans for the magazine. At the time, he wasn't overly concerned about money. The meeting coincided with the demise of "Running Magazine" and, according to Babbs, there was a lot of unattached talent



Ken Babbs, a local writer best known through his association with Ken Kesey, has started a new Eugene magazine, "The Bugle."

in the idea of a Eugene-area magazine, but little faith in the future of "The Bugle."

"This area needs a magazine," Perry said, "and Babbs has always wanted a magazine ever since I've known him. A lot is going on that's not dealt with by the standard media, and Babbs is right about that. But he needs to get a handle on 'The Bugle.' The magazine's lagging in graphics, it has no organization or focus, and it needs to find its audience."

The magazine is an unpagged black and white 8 x 5 publication, stuffed with fiction and reviews of such things as an old Bob Dylan movie and a Grateful Dead concert. It ran several photo-essays, one which chronicled a '63 Mercury convertible, an

unusual car that belongs to the editor himself. The writing is lively and reminiscent of Jack Kerouac's; the design is amateurish, error-ridden and disorderly. In short, "The Bugle" is rough around the gills, but Babbs insists that the magazine fills an editorial void that the established press has created.

Perry agrees with Babbs on this point, but making a magazine work takes more than finding an editorial void.

"You can't just say 'Hey, hey hey, I want to start a magazine,' and make it happen," Perry said. "Babbs doesn't care about his market or try to understand it. Maybe it will happen — but only once or twice."

Several readers mention that the

magazine showcased some of the best locally produced fiction-writing that they've read for years. But others have harsher criticism for the fledgling publication.

"It's an exercise in journalistic masturbation," said writer Cort Fernald, who contributed to the first issue. "It seems to be for a very small, isolated group of people — Pleasant Hill Mafia or washed-up Merry Pranksters."

Whether Ken Babbs is aware of this criticism, his enthusiasm for the publication is unflagging. He sees himself as a "player-coach," passing the ball from one talent to the next, but participating in all the action himself.

Babbs helped type the copy on Ken Kesey's IBM composer, strip negatives, design ads. He laid out the book and wrote many of the articles. (There are rumours that other stories were dictated to him in rough form over the phone, and he wrote them up in final draft.)

With all the work, there were still typos and production glitches. Little care was taken with submitted manuscripts according to Fernald and another contributing writer, Cindy Hanson. Perry claims that one of the pages of his manuscript wasn't

**'It's a concept connected with jazz and improv. You don't have to have prepared anything. You just blow from the tip of your tongue and the top of your mind.'**

— Ken Babbs

typeset. And there were problems with photo releases and credits. Though seemingly naive about the process of magazine-making, Babbs remains undaunted.

"I don't want 'The Bugle' to be ugly, but circumstances dictated it," Babbs said. "You worry about it, but what are you going to do about it? It's like having a big zit on

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Story by Angela Allen Morgan  
Photo by John Bauguess

around. But instead of talking finances, Babbs talked sports.

"It was more like forming up a softball team in the City Leagues," Babbs recalled. "Most people get the money together and all that, but we just had all these players who weren't playing on a team at the time."

One of the players without a team, who to his surprise found himself listed on "The Bugle's" masthead as Travel Editor, is Paul Perry, former editor of now-defunct "Running Magazine." Perry, an established freelance magazine writer, has a lot of faith

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