



Photo by Steve Crowell

Television, radio and newspaper reporters took to the 1984 Oregon Primary like a hacker to a computer, and in some cases, the hackers were the reporters.

Media transform Harris Hall into election eve shark tank

By Julie Shippen
Of the Emerald

It resembles a shark feeding.

Once every hour, a non-descript man scuttles into a corner of Harris Hall bearing a stack of computer printouts. Barely missing the onslaught, he passes off the sheaf of paper at the first opportunity, disappearing into the nearest exit.

Every second seems to count as the runners and reporters scramble to get to one of the sheets of green and white paper. These are no ordinary printouts — these carry the latest numbers from Tuesday's primary election. Every person in the busy room wants to get a hold of one.

Camera lights teeter, hands shoot up in the air and the cord-covered floor moves like a pit of snakes as people dash back to their seats to phone the results in to papers, radio stations and election offices around the state.

Then, as quickly as it began, the room dies down and waits for the next hour's tallies. And during this period television reporters chase after those candidates brave enough to show up.

"You appear to be taking a good lead, Mr. Rust. What do you think of the latest polls?" began one of the pressed and cosmetically-perfected reporters. About four of these hotly-lit scenes border each side of the room, leaving the areas in the middle and back of the room for newspaper and radio interviews.

Responsible for the coordination of all this is Arlene Marshall, administrative assistant for the Lane County Board of Commissioners.

"This is probably the most media that's been here in the last two years," Marshall said. It is Marshall's duty to see that all the television stations have room for their equipment, as well as making sure other media are without complaints.

"The demands are greater, so it's a whole lot more hectic. The biggest complaint is that

they (television crews) don't have enough room or that they didn't get the choice spot," she said pointing right to the larger space. "And everything has to be dismantled and out of here before 9 in the morning," she added.

According to the majority of the crowd, however, this year's election coverage is a quieter version.

"This one's a little mellower down here than usual," said Bob Zagorin, a KEZI reporter who is familiar with this scene. "I'll be here until 11:30 and then I'll probably go back to the station and collapse," he said.

The situation appears similar with other media personnel present.

"I'm just running around here trying to keep up with everything," said Bob Valdez, reporter for KUGN radio. But Valdez, like the others, has made considerable preparation ahead of time. "The busy work has to be done — we did all of our footwork days ago," he said.

For the candidates, Harris Hall is more pleasure than pain — especially when they're leading in the polls.

"This is fun. It's meaningful and it's exciting," said Jerry Rust, the incumbent Lane County Commissioner who by the first results collection at 8 p.m. was far ahead. "There's a lot of electricity here, a lot of political energy around," Rust said.

Candidates usually stop at Harris Hall first before heading on to the Hilton, the Oregon Electric Station or other restaurants where the campaign parties are located.

"It's fairly traditional to come here," Rust says. "To me, this is like facing the music. It's good news and bad news time."

And they come there knowing they will be at the disposal of the press.

"Here the objective side — the reporters — outnumber the candidates," Rust said. "The whole electronic and print media of Lane County is here tonight."

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