

## Commentary

# Hospital expansion threatens Eugene's history and heritage

Imagine a university a few years in the future crowded with brick boxes 10 stories high, the stainless steel and formica pushing out any life — any sense of where we came from. Modern office buildings have their place. But the rule of modernism seems to be that everything must fall in its wake — the old and the traditional survive only as long as they stay out of the way of progress.

Surely, such a monolithic future can be dismantled. Historic structures can be preserved. Others can be bought. Although scattered protests after the fact have little effect compared to Sacred Heart's daily pressure, an organized effort directed to save much of the University's best housing does not need to be a campuswide movement.

One historical researcher identifying and documenting a neighborhood's past might convince Sacred Heart's planners to avoid the most historic houses simply by making the information available. A building soon to be designated a historic site will certainly be a poor prospect for expansion.

At the same time, a restored house not only commands high rents from businesspeople and professionals, people ultimately more beneficial than some corporate giant, but adds to Eugene's heritage, attracting new people and business while improving the quality of life for those already here.

Sometime this spring, Sacred Heart General Hospital will demolish the block on 14th Street housing the Mayflower Theater and Tom's Tea House to make room for a medical laboratory. At the same time, the Courtyard housing Poppi's restaurant will be torn down along with a few other long-established University-area

businesses.

To lose an entire block, its architecture and stores that reflect probably 50 years of University life, is a significant loss. We are expected to balance a landowner's right to use the land against the need to preserve University traditions and Eugene's history — the history always running a distant second.

Those buildings can never be replaced. Once Sacred Heart's parking lots are built and their lab finished, what will happen to those well-crafted old houses built when my grandmother, a girl on a porch swing, was being courted beneath a harvest moon — the houses with bay windows, turrets, wood floors and stained glass?

More money can be made preserving what is already here than can be made by the tear-it-down, throw-it-up method. And judging by the work done at the corner of 11th Avenue and High Street, Eugene's craftspeople are skilled in preserving old houses.

Later, a student corporation might be formed to direct Sacred Heart's expansion plans by purchasing those houses that for some reason are ineligible for historic status. By careful selection, Sacred Heart's growth can be directed into areas creating the least impact on the University.

Whatever decision is ultimately made, Sacred Heart's growth will not stop at its present boundaries. The future inevitably holds more expansion, and unless the hospital chooses to grow upward, it will surely undercut University neighborhoods.

By Robert Massey

Robert Massey is a University student.

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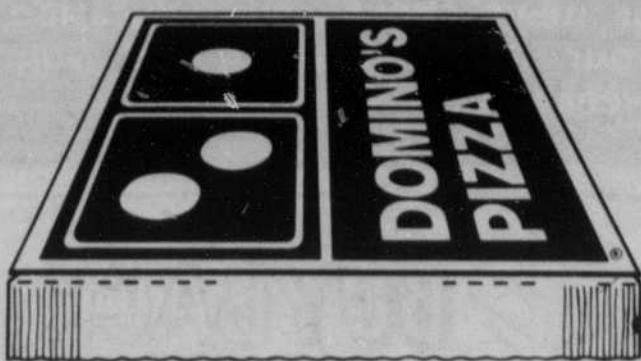
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