

Hostels offer comforts of home to weary and lonely travelers

By Carol McCauley
Of the Emerald

For people on the road, hostels can be a home away from home.

"It's just a great place to meet and talk with other people," said Diane Schnell, manager of both the Mill Street Hostel in Springfield and the local office of American Youth Hostels Inc. (AYH).

The Springfield hostel has 13 beds, divided into two separate dormitories upstairs for men and women. Each dorm has a kitchenette and separate bathroom with a shower. A comfortable meeting room downstairs, called a common room, has books and magazines for the hostellers' use.

Hostellers are required to use sleeping bags or sleep sacks, and alcohol and drugs are prohibited. Each hosteller is assigned a chore that he or she must complete before leaving, such as cleaning a shower or sink. Because of its small size, Schnell's hostel hasn't experienced stealing or other problems larger hostels face.

Extras offered at the Mill Street Hostel include sleep sack and towel rentals, laundry facilities, free swimming pool passes and bicycle usage, and listings of area movies, grocery stores and local restaurants.

Gerald Bethke, 62, described the Mill Street Hostel as "a place to sleep, and wash, and do a little cooking." He is in the midst of traveling cross-country by bicycle from Wisconsin to California and had never stayed in a hostel before.

Alice Murningham, 20, is traveling alone from Montreal and said she stays in hostels because "it's a lot cheaper" and "to meet more travelers rather than tourists." Traveling "by plane, by ferry, by bus, sometimes hitchhiking," Murningham said she was spending about \$150 a week for expenses. Cooking meals in hostel kit-

chens helps her save money, she said.

Companionship is another reason to stay in hostels, she said. "Sometimes you'll meet up with someone who you'll want to travel with, if you're going the same direction."

Youth hostels originated in Germany in the early 1900s to provide places for students to stay at reasonable prices, but demand for the inexpensive accommodations grew, said Shirley Duncan, assistant office manager of the Oregon Travel Office of American Youth Hostels, Inc.

"The youth hostel movement started out as exactly that — youth," she said.

"Now there is no age limit. There's only one place in the world that you need to be a certain age to stay there. If you go to Bavaria, you cannot stay in a youth hostel if you are over 26," Duncan said.

AYH, a non-profit organization with headquarters in Washington, D.C., was founded 51 years ago, Duncan said. An AYH council office is located in each of the 42 states with member hostels. The Oregon Council oversees AYH development in Oregon, charters and revokes hostel memberships, and conducts yearly health inspections of the seven AYH member hostels in Oregon, including the Mill Street Hostel, Duncan said.

There is much that goes into operating a hostel, she said.

"You would have to be people-oriented, for one. You would have to be a stickler for organization, cleanliness, filling the needs of someone who is traveling. When these people arrive, they're tired," she said.

The main office of the Oregon Council of AYH is also home to the AYH Travel Office, relocated in Eugene's Atrium Building after a fire destroyed the former office in March.

The AYH Travel Office offers

flights to Europe, Eurail and Britrail passes, travel books and brochures with hostel listings worldwide, Duncan said.

The hosteller's equivalent to an "express card" is an AYH Membership Card, which is valid in more than 5,000 hostels affiliated with the International Youth Hostel Federation (IYHF).

"If you have one of these passes, it's good anywhere in the world," Duncan said.

AYH Membership Cards are \$20 a year for those 18 to 59 years old. Special rates for senior citizens, families and children also are offered as well as free passes offered until

Continued on Page 6

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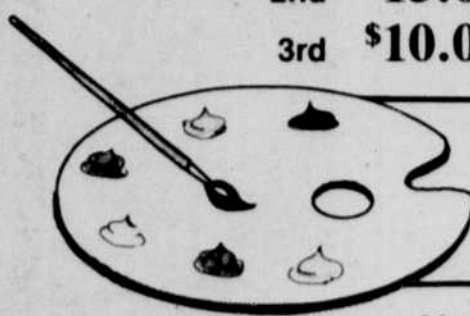
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