

WOW Hall performances benefit local community



File Photo
WOW Hall, or the Community Center for the Performing Arts, is a historic Eugene landmark built in 1932. It has always been used as a gathering spot for the local community.

By Sean Nelson
Of the Emerald

Since 1932 the Community Center for the Performing Arts on Eighth Avenue and Lincoln Street has been a Eugene landmark, according to Jon Pincus, coordinator of the hall.

"It has always been a place for the community to gather," Pincus said.

In 1932 it became the local headquarters for the Eugene "camp" of the Woodmen of the World fraternal organization, which was founded in Omaha, Neb. in 1890. Members of the local organization included prominent citizens from pioneer families. They felt a new building was needed.

According to the old Eugene Morning Register, "...it was the most expensive building constructed (in 1932) at a value of \$8,000 and (considered) 'modern in every detail.'"

Prior to the construction of WOW Hall, a Seventh-Day Adventist Church was housed on the site. Built in 1867, it was on part of Eugene Skinner's donated land claim. Skinner had originally used the land as an orchard and a farm.

During the '30s and '40s, revelers joyously strolled in the moonlight from a site known as the "Wintergarden," a dance hall at Eighth Avenue and Charnelton Street, to WOW Hall. "They had Saturday night dances," Pincus said.

Today, as the Community Center for the Performing Arts, the hall is still a dance spot.

"To me this place is more like an old church than a sock hop," said Eugene resident John Gibbons, a mechanic and first-time visitor to WOW Hall.

"It's a community center with a focus on performing arts activities," Pincus said.

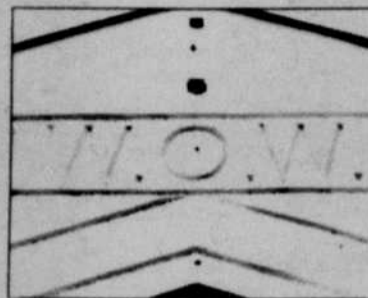
"There is always good music to listen to," said John Parry, another Eugene resident who is a regular at WOW Hall.

"We have all kinds of perfor-

ming acts," Pincus said. He added that "virtually every type of music" is played there.

"Our dance performances and our theatre program are also a very important part of what we do here," he pointed out.

"An important part of our work here is also an educational program in dance and theater



arts, Pincus added.

The hall is a training ground for volunteers in the production and operation of facilities involving the technical work of shows. Many technicians and production people have gone on to professional careers from their beginnings at the WOW Hall, he said.

All of this points to one fact: WOW Hall has become a Eugene institution as well as a landmark. "I think of it as retaining a lot of the same character of the time (the '30s)," Pincus said.

The community still gathers at WOW Hall, just like they did then, he added.

"It's an intimate kind of place that relates directly to the people living in the community," Pincus said.

An historical account of WOW Hall also mentions its "art deco" facade and a "simplified classical interior which reflects the architectural values of the time," Pincus said.

During the 1940s, numerous community activities were held there, from Boy Scout meetings

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