

International meet will give Eugene prestige

By Andy Sorensen
Emerald Contributor

The world is coming to Eugene.

More than 6,000 runners, representing 60 nations will invade the Eugene/Springfield area for about two weeks to compete in what organizers say will be the largest track meet in history: the eighth World Veterans' Championships.

The Veterans' Championships, which will be held July 27 to Aug. 6, is the international meet named for masters athletes. To be eligible for masters competition, males must be more than 40 years old, females, 35.

With another 4,000 people expected to come with the com-

petitors, the championships will pump an estimated \$10 million into the Eugene/Springfield economy. That figure is a modest estimate, said Barbara Kousky, co-director of the World Veterans' Organizing Committee.

"We based our figures on what a visitor usually spends per day, which is about \$120," she said. "We chopped that down to \$100. Plus many of the competitors come to the games to sightsee. So many of them will stay longer than 10 days."

The competitors, 50 percent of whom will be foreigners, will put to the test many of the area's restaurants, hotels and retail outlets, Kousky said. "I was at the 1987 Championships in Melbourne (Australia), and it

was amazing to see the impact of all the competitors on a city of three million people. You could pick out all the sweatsuits in the downtown area," she said. "So you can imagine what 10,000 people are going to mean to Eugene."

Housing is a major concern for the organizing committee, but Kousky believes everything is under control. Every available dorm, hotel and motel will be used for the championships, she said.

In some cases, the committee has even contracted the use of sororities to house large foreign contingents. She added there have been many inquiries on the use of recreational vehicle facilities.

If you're planning on book-

ing a room for the championships, it will be very difficult, said Linda Westin of the Eugene Convention Bureau. "We're literally bursting at the seams."

In response to demand for a shuttle system between venues at Silke Field in Springfield and Hayward Field in Eugene, the Lane Transit District is offering free service for all athletes.

Kousky said there are numerous volunteer opportunities for community members and students. The committee needs office assistants, meet officials, interpreters, medical personnel and tour guides. Kousky figures she needs 3,000 volunteers to create a "spirit of goodwill among the participants and residents" and make the championships a success.

Multi-lingual students are also encouraged to volunteer at staff information booths, translate race material and guide tours. Kousky said several bus tours will be offered during the championships to various scenic spots, including the coast, Crater Lake, Sisters and the Wildlife Safari.

The organizing committee had to go through a lengthy bid process that began in 1986 with a presentation to the U.S. Selection Committee in New York. Competition from several cities was stiff, but the choice ultimately came down to Los Angeles or Eugene, Kousky said. Eugene won for several factors, she said.

"Eugene has a reputation for holding major track meets like the Prefontaine Classic. Hayward Field has excellent facilities and there would be more local press coverage than in

LA," she said. "Plus the 'real America' was better here in Eugene."

After winning the bid to be the first American city to host the championships, Kousky and Tom Jordan, the other co-director, still had to convince the International Committee. They did so after a presentation to the committee during the championships in Melbourne in 1987. Kousky said the Australian director visited recently to see how Eugene is planning for the championships.

"He's given us good marks," she said.

The championships should produce some good marks on the track as well. There will be an "Olympic flavor" added to the competitive field. Al Oerter, a former Olympian in the discus, Frank Shorter and Bill Rodgers, two long distance runners from the U.S., and Earl Bell of Great Britain have indicated they will compete.

The meet also boasts a certain feeling of good will and camaraderie among participants, though there is a great deal of competition among them, Kousky said. There are all levels of competition involving ages and times so that the competitors are evenly matched. That makes for some spirited and rousing events, Kousky said.

"Most of the competitors are from 40 to 50 (years old), and you would be surprised at how in shape these people are," she said. "They take this meet very seriously."

Some simply cannot leave a sport they love so much. "In Melbourne, there was a 95-

Turn to World, Page 11

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