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Eugene may see transient increase

By Roland Giller **Emerald Contributor**

Homeless people may be migrating from Portland to Eugene because of a human services campaign, city ordinance, and drug availability.

In addition to a city ordinance prohibiting drinking in public parks, there is a campaign by Portland's human services organizations to encourage homeless people with drug and alcohol problems to accept

Sgt. Tim McCarthy, community affairs director for the Eugene Police Department, believes Portland's human services campaign will bring more homeless people to Eugene than the park ordinance will.

Homeless people with drug or alcohol problems "hate" having confrontations with human services groups and will either accept treatment or go where they won't be hassled, he said.

McCarthy said it has been the experience of human services groups that a campaign to make homeless people deal with drug or alcohol problems leads to about 10 percent accepting



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treatment. Another sweep of the remaining 90 percent again leads to another 10 percent accepting treatment, he said.

The Eugene Police Department and local human services groups are mobilizing for an increase this summer in the number of homeless people with alcohol problems because it lies on the Interstate 5 corridor and on a major north-south railway. McCarthy said.

He said homeless people are also attracted to Eugene because the University community is very tolerant of them and because the city has good emergency housing services

But according to Dave Kelley, an unemployed roofer who has been homeless for three months. Eugene will see an increase in the number of homeless people with drug or alcohol problems because of different reasons

"Eugene is the meth (methamphetamine) capital of the he said. "People don't want to hear it, but it's true."

Kelley believes the availability of drugs together with food and shelter assistance to homeless people will bring more homeless people who use drugs to Eugene. He said he does not believe the Portland city ordinance or the human services campaign will have much of an

Kelley said that when many homeless people leave Portland they come to Eugene because it is the nearest city south where residents are "hippified" to the plight of the homeless. He said Bakersfield, Calif., is the nearest city south of Eugene that the homeless frequent.

'I can go to almost any church in this town and get two or three bags of groceries.

Kelley said he believes the homeless should be helped. But, he said until the drug problem in Lane County is solved, "This is the wrong place to be giving free food."

The Portland park ordinance reports that the rule prohibiting drinking in all parks was started on April 26 because "excessive consumption of alcohol has led to problems with noise. vandalism, antisocial acts, litter, harassment and reckless driving."

In Eugene consumption of beer, wine and malt liquor is permitted in city parks, but hard alcohol is not allowed. The city does not allow any alcohol in children's playground areas, athletic fields, wading pools, swimming pools, tennis courts, parking lots and restrooms.

Most parks have specified rules outlining areas that exclude alcohol in addition to the areas listed in the ordinance. For example, in Alton Baker Park alcohol is "prohibited throughout, except for the picnic shelters." according to the ordinance.

Violation of the ordinance results in a citation, although police do not take individuals into custody for violation.

McCarthy said that over the years, "alcohol has become more and more of a problem' in Eugene parks and that it has "chased away many of the parks' rightful users.'

He said alcohol-related problems in the parks have typically been associated with the transient population.

Some people in the city want to tighten the rules because they are tired of transients looking through trash cans and spending too much time in parks, said Tim Birr, public information officer for the Eugene Police Department.

"What people don't realize is that the law is the law and it applies to transients as well as people at company softball tournaments," Birr said.

However, according to 'Scarecrow,' a homeless man from Eugene who has received 15 citations for illegal drinking in the city's parks, the ordinance is a "reason to throw you in jail, especially if you're homeless.

He said many homeless people drink in public parks because they have nowhere else to go. "We could squat in an alley, but it's more comfortable here, (in the park).

The actions of "one bad person brings bad things to us all," Scarecrow said. He said many times alcohol-related problems in Eugene parks are often caused by people who are not homeless.

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