

Schools under siege

We have seen the glory of the burning of the school/We have tortured every teacher, we have broken every rule/We're gonna hang the principal tomorrow after school ...

If you went to elementary school in America, chances are you either sang this song or at least heard it. And what little kid hasn't walked to class after not doing his or her homework and fantasized about seeing fire trucks hosing down the school after a midnight blaze?

When an arsonist actually burns a school to the ground or vandals pulverize a third grade classroom, however, it's different. And recent events in communities surrounding Eugene have made Lane County residents wonder just what the world, and the attitude toward the nation's schools, are coming to.

The large color photo on the front page of Friday's Eugene Register-Guard says it all: five first-graders and their teacher stand behind a yellow tape barrier, looking on with grim faces at the charred remains of their classroom and the rest of an entire wing of Veneta Elementary School, torched by an arsonist the night of Oct. 1.

Late Thursday night, the madness continued. Unknown suspects sneaked into classrooms at Dorena Elementary School east of Cottage Grove and thrashed them, pulling posters and displays off walls, smearing the little desks with glue and scattering papers everywhere. Classes had to be canceled until the mess could be cleaned up.

The past few years have been grim for Oregon's schools. Teachers at the Veneta school, for example, had to do all the comforting in the week following their school's blaze, the counselor positions eliminated because of budget cuts. As it is, the cost of the fire will be about \$750,000, the last thing a financially strapped school district needs.

It all makes one wonder about the attitudes people have about their education system. Teachers are underpaid. Schools close for lack of sound funding. Student scores in the United States are falling against those of our international neighbors.

And now this. Sheesh.

These cases were not the work of a single person or group; the suspects in the Veneta case are 10, 11 and 12, while the people who ransacked the Dorena school were tall enough to steal a school bus and drive it a few miles before ditching it.

Parents, teachers, students and law enforcement personnel in the area should be watchful of their schools in the next few weeks, and hope that attitudes — and ways of spending a slow evening — change.



Eugene's sister city program is good idea

The Soviets have come and gone, and Eugene is the better for it.

This past weekend, five Soviet delegates from Eugene's sister city Irkutsk came to discuss and exchange opinions on various topics. In an informal question-and-answer session Saturday, the University staged its own form of Cold War thawing.

The delegates shared their views with a group of 75 interested local residents. Through an interpreter, the Soviets told of the problems facing the Siberian community. Among them; pollution and reduction of forest land.

Sound familiar? Pollution appears to be a major problem in Irkutsk. Apparently, a pulp and paper mill in the city dumps chemical waste into nearby Lake Baikal.

The solution? The delegates said the plant is being removed. Seems like a pretty good idea.

Well, the Soviet's have gone back home, and a little bit of them was left in Eugene. Their coming was just another step in the whole process of detente, *glasnost* and open-

ness. Eugene's sister city program helps bring people of two diverse cultures together.

The Soviets take this city exchange program seriously enough to send a vice-mayor and a local party official half way around the world to Eugene.

Among the delegates was a riveter from an aircraft company. He said the leaders of both countries are here for only a short time, but the workers stay.

In other words, if workers of both countries can make peace, so can the leaders.

After the meeting, the Soviets showed pictures of their families, and Eugene residents gave them gifts. And for all the various public posturing done by the U.S. and Soviet governments, this simple little cultural exchange was probably the most beneficial.

We don't know everything about the world and neither do the Soviets. But maybe if we get together and exchange ideas every once in a while, things will get done.

And that's just what the sister city program does.

Forum

Bush keeps rhetoric going on importance of drug issue

By George Bush

Summer is over and classes are back in session. As we begin the school year, our

Commentary

thoughts turn to the future — a future gravely threatened by drugs.

Who is responsible? Everyone uses drugs. Everyone sells drugs. Everyone looks the other way.

Some people used to call drugs just a benign form of recreation. They're not. Drugs are a real and extremely serious threat to our schools, our houses, our friends and our families. It doesn't matter where you live or what school you attend. No one is free from the threat of drugs. Inner cities, small towns, and college campuses are under siege — because America is under siege.

On Sept. 5, I announced the first comprehensive national strategy to end the siege — to fight drugs with tougher laws

and enforcement, and with improved treatment, education and prevention. The programs we've proposed are an all-out assault against the evil of drug use and drug trafficking. We are aggressively attacking the problem from every angle, and proposing a 1990 drug-budget totaling over \$8 billion — the largest single increase in history.

America is fighting a war against drugs. Yet the most important weapons in the war on drugs are the least tangible: self-discipline, courage, character, support from one's family, faith in God and in one's self.

Fundamentally, the drug problem in America is not one of supply, but of demand. We are taking strong new action to stop the flow of drugs into this country and to stop the dealers themselves; but as long as Americans are willing to buy illegal drugs, somebody, somewhere in the world will sell them.

Recently, I met with Mrs. Ev-

erett Hatcher, the widow of a veteran DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) agent who was killed by drug-using cowards. A woman of considerable dignity, she put responsibility for her husband's death squarely on "casual" users of cocaine. She's right — and there is now blood on their hands.

Similarly, President Barco of Colombia recently made an appeal to Americans to stop buying the cocaine causing the slaughter of innocent civilians in the drug wars there.

Every student in America at some point — at a party, in a locker room, in a dorm room — every student must choose to accept or reject drugs. But there is another choice that college students, as responsible adults, must make — whether to get involved in a personal way to end drug use, or to look the other way.

College campuses have long been centers of conscience and idealism in this country; places where students have raised their voices to protest oppres-

sion, injustice and human suffering around the world. Yet, no one would deny that often drugs go hand and hand with injustice, suffering and even death.

But where is the sound of protest? Innocent bystanders are killed at random on city streets. Babies are born addicted to crack and heroin. Young children are forced into the drug trade by addicts. What greater human rights violations exist? What greater injustices? Yet, recreational drug users on some college campuses are still ambivalent to the death and destruction they are financing.

We must appeal to the social conscience of every college student on every college campus in America. The way to protest

the misery and oppression brought about by drugs is to commit yourself to staying away from drugs — and working to keep them away from your friends.

Drug use doesn't usually begin the way most people would think, with young people getting their first drugs from an addict or a dealer. Instead, they get them free from "friends" who think casual drug use hurts no one. Peer pressure is what spreads drug use, and peer pressure can help stop it.

You can help stop it — if you get involved.

George Bush is President of the United States. This column was distributed by the Collegiate Network.

Commentary Policy

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