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# Oregon Daily Emerald

Friday, December 8, 1989

Eugene, Oregon

Volume 91, Number 70

## Wheelchair users praise access Eugene still has room for improvement

By Janis Joseph  
Emerald Reporter

Stepping up onto sidewalks, climbing stairs or reading signs is something people do every day without thinking twice. However, for people with disabilities these same activities can pose major problems.

"People who don't use (wheel) chairs, don't have that awareness all the time," said Mark Hansen, wheelchair user and staff member of Mobility International, an international exchange organization.

"If you use a wheelchair, it's something that affects you every day," he added.

Eugene is a fairly accessible city for people with disabilities, and Lane Transit District is one of the best transportation systems in the country, Hansen said.

"When people from other countries come here, they are amazed that every bus on the route has a lift (for wheelchairs)," said Linda Phelps, member of the Special Recreation Committee.

"I have nothing but good things to say about LTD. They've been very helpful and cooperative toward me," said Kelly Hodgkinson, a University senior who takes the bus twice a week in a wheelchair.

Eugene is a unique community, known for its accessibility, Phelps said.

Many people in the community are aware of the problems that people with disabilities face. They demand services to increase Eugene's accessibility, and they understand the city's access potential.

"This understanding is a catalyst for change," Phelps said. "People realize what they should have."

Last year, several Eugene committees dealing with access issues fought to get an elevator in

Fifth Street Public Market. It took a long time, but people realized that they had a right to access and did not give up, Phelps said.

Although Eugene's reputation for accessibility is good, there is always room for improvement, said Alicia Hays, who has a disability and works on the Eugene Commission on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

More curb cuts and increased accessibility in private businesses and on the University campus are improvements Eugene needs to make, Hays said.

Hansen said he did not know if Eugene has good access because of the large number of people with disabilities who live here, or if good access attracts more people to Eugene.

"It's the chicken and the egg syndrome," he said.

Per capita, there are a lot of people with disabilities in Eugene, Hansen said. When walking on the mall, a person might see one or two people using wheelchairs, which is unusual in other cities, Hansen said.

For the last six years, the city has used a \$50,000 federal grant to improve access in Eugene for people with disabilities. Last summer, the money was used to create a completely accessible playground at Amazon Park, said Linda Dawson, staff member for the Community Development Committee.

This winter the city is using the money to build a specialized recreation center, she said.

Dawson said the committee is also working to promote building access in Eugene.

The current building codes are the bare minimum needed to be legal. However, people need to look beyond the minimum and do what works best for people with disabilities, Phelps said.

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Photo by Andre Ranieri

Senior history major Kelly Hodgkinson, a regular Lane Transit bus rider, had "nothing but good things to say" about LTD and its service for people with disabilities.

## Wide group of students to celebrate Earth Day

By Brian Bloch  
Emerald Associate Editor

The Earth Day 1990 Coalition geared up a notch Thursday as representatives from a wide and diverse range of student and community groups gathered for the first time to discuss plans for the April 22 celebration.

The meeting was a giant success for coalition planners who've spent the last month and a half meeting with representatives of approximately 40 student and community groups, many of which have never been involved in environmental issues.

Brian Hoop, coalition coordinator, said planners have placed new emphasis on reaching out to groups that traditionally have had no involvement in the event or any environmental issues.

"This year we're going beyond traditional environmental groups and listening to some non-traditional views," Hoop said. "We want to involve the women's groups, international student groups and ethnic and racial groups in Earth Day."

According to a coalition flyer, "We are inviting your participation at this early date to insure Earth Day 1990 is truly representative of a broad spectrum of the student body population. We are encouraging the participation of student groups and individuals who have not traditionally been represented in the environmental movement or who's contributions have gone unrecognized ... groups who share many common bonds with the environmental movement and have contributed much toward social and environmental change."

Non-traditional representatives from the Greek system, Jewish Student Union, Muslim Student Association, Women's Center, Student Campaign for Disarmament, Campus Interfaith Ministry, Students Against Apartheid and Stu-

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## Couple awaits family housing decision

By Chris Bouneff  
Emerald Associate Editor

For Natasha Brady and Robert Fueher, the extension of their Dec. 26 eviction date from the University's Westmoreland Family Housing was welcome news.

The couple, along with Natasha's 2-year-old son, Brendon Patrick Brady, live together in a Westmoreland apartment reserved for University student family housing. Both attend the University, and both are raising Brendon.

Natasha, 21, and Robert, 26, appear to be a family from an observer's point of view, but the University doesn't see it that way. To live in the University's family housing, you have to be part of a family, and the University uses a marriage certificate to define what a family is.

The first eviction notice came in late October when University housing officials discovered that Robert and Natasha did not have a marriage certificate. The notice gave the family until Nov. 20 to move out or to get married.

Instead, the couple produced a domestic partnership agreement, a contract that legally defines the responsibilities each of them has in their relationship, but the University doesn't

officially recognize domestic partnerships as being classified as a family.

This has sparked a debate between the tenant policy boards for Westmoreland and Amazon family housing and the University administration.

Both policy boards passed proposals permitting domestic partnerships in family housing, but University housing was apprehensive about approving such a policy and passed the plan to Vice President Dan Williams' office.

The proposal presently sits in University President Myles Brand's office, and it has become a larger issue than just permitting Robert, Natasha and Brendon to live in the University's subsidized housing.

"It's an extremely complicated issue in terms of the implications," said Williams, vice president for administration. "The legal issue is one of a number of questions that need to be addressed."

The legal issue in question is discrimination and whether the University, in its role as renter, is immune from both an Oregon Administrative Rule and an Oregon statute passed by the state legislature that prevents any form of discrimination when renting property.

The OAR, which was promulgated by the Oregon State

Board of Higher Education, defines discrimination as differentiating among persons on the basis of age, handicap, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation or marital status.

The rule also prohibits discrimination in all higher education programs and services, but it is unclear whether discrimination is allowed in family housing.

The Oregon statute is more specific. It states that in renting or leasing property, the renter cannot discriminate based on marital status.

However, the law bypasses this statement by saying a renter can discriminate against renters if they are of the opposite sex and are not related or married. Talk about clarity.

A 1976 decision by the state attorney general, which was requested by the University and the OSBHE in response to a similar situation, said the University can discriminate against unmarried couples of the opposite sex when renting family housing units.

The attorney general's opinion, however, was issued before the idea of domestic partnerships was ever considered.

"This raises some really fundamental questions of why we're in this business of pro-

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