

**COMMENTARY**

# Amazon Housing must be rebuilt

By Mark Serhus

**A**s a resident of Amazon Student Family Housing and an officer of the Amazon Community Tenants Council, I am very concerned about the bond money allocated to rebuild our units. We, as residents, and you, as taxpayers and students, should demand the money be spent now, and in the fashion it was approved for!

These units are dilapidated and unsafe. The University populous looks at our complex as an eyesore. Most people wonder "What those shanties are" north of South Eugene High School. When you tell people, "We live in Amazon," the reply is either, "Oh, cool!" or a sheepish, "Oh?"

Well, they are our homes. We are proud, as a majority, to live in these bohemian domiciles. My wife and I have fixed our unit up quite nicely, and overall, we feel fortunate to live there.

Actually, we pulled out our roots from the other side of the country, and decided to study in Eugene based on the affordability of student-family housing. As a financially independent married couple, the University's low rent has made education affordable for us.

But we are in a quandary. This is where Shangri-la meets reality. Granted, our rents are low, but aren't they indeed too low? And, oh yes, we get what we pay for in these funky, "very Eugene" apartments.

Our low-rent situation has us in a quagmire. We are in a position where it will be very difficult to adjust to a realistic situation. As recipients of a true bargain, we cannot even consider paying twice or triple the rent for decent or even brand-spanking new units. But, "quid pro quo" is not an acceptable condition for Amazon residents on the whole.

In response to housing surveys, a majority of Amazon residents, in fact, did not approve of a replacement to the complex. But the University Housing residents of the Westmoreland Complex and the East Campus houses responded in favor of demolition.

In reality, we live in 50-year old structures built as tempo-

**If the University is to provide housing, it should be safe. If the only impetus to complete this project is the modern-day fear of countless lawsuits — then so be it.**

rary post-war housing units. These timber and fiberboard structures, which stand on faulty foundations, have minimal or no insulation. These all-electric units are equipped with one wall heater — on a wall farthest from the cool, drafty bedrooms. These bedrooms, especially in January, ask to be heated by an additional source: those little electric units that cause fires nationwide.

The antiquated electrical system, with its sparse placement of electrical outlets and lack of grounded outlets, causes overload problems in today's appliance and electronic-laden homes. Our fiberboard ceilings and walls are ancient building materials that burn at an alarming rate of speed. In most units, closets don't have doors and bedroom doors can't be fully closed.

This all creates a nightmarish scenario that scares me to death. A horrific winter-time fire where young adults, young children and helpless babies perish is shocking and unsettling news. But we are set at ease with a plethora of fire-warning devices, smoke detectors and heat sensors. Self-activated stairwell alarms are retrofitted in all units. Unfortunately, they are a cheap attempt at covering up the real problem: We live in a proverbial tinder box.

If this safety concern doesn't upset our institutional bureaucrats, the presence of asbestos and lead-based paint does. When we first moved into these funky apartments, we started on the task of repainting our entire unit. The trade-off is apparent; low rent in exchange for a self-determined taste. Eleven gallons and many coats of paint later, we felt at ease with the lead-based paint issue.

The paint chipping in the common stairwell makes us

suspicious, though. Just don't attempt to sand the doors and cabinets, or trim with a young child in the room — lead dust is debilitating to the young.

Furthermore, the aesthetic blight raises eyebrows. The hardwood floors have large gaps between the floorboards — some big enough for little curious hands. Metal shower enclosures, having bare concrete floors and archaic interior lighting with pull strings from tacky porcelain fixtures, become reminiscent of old garages and dusty basements that are common amenities in every unit.

Counter tops and linoleum floors are dried out and cracking — baring old, musty wood. The gaps and cracks throughout our homes let us know "who is talking to whom" in the parking lot without having to look out our windows.

But our attitude here is one of contentment. Our area office is personable and caring, maintenance is top-rate, and most people know each other on a first-name basis. The community is aware and active, and most feel a true sense of home.

The bond money has been approved. A prominent architectural firm with intimate experiences with our campus and our unique lifestyle has completed its design, and the University's own "Center for Housing Inundation" has been consulted for appropriate applications in this project. What gives?

We must rebuild Amazon, even if a rent increase is necessary. Let us sacrifice this so our children will have a safe and affordable place to live when they choose to pursue their education. Let's not be so shortsighted and thoughtless.

This is a decision that will impress generations. Let's not see this money go to anything except for what it was intended and for where it is badly needed, because we may not have another similar opportunity for a long time.

The opportunity is now. If the University is to provide housing, it should be safe. If the only impetus to complete this project is the modern-day fear of countless lawsuits — then so be it. Stop turning your back. Rebuild Amazon now!

Mark Serhus is a member of the University's Housing Board.

**MID-TERM SPECIAL**  
**\$5 OFF**  
**ALL HAIRCUTS**  
PRESENT THIS COUPON JAN 27th thru FEB 3rd  
**WOMEN** ~~\$20.00~~ \$15.00  
**MEN** ~~\$15.00~~ \$10.00  
**Duck Tails Hair Salon**  
 343-8219 • Ground Floor EMU  
Not valid with other offers

**COUPLES IN ACADEMIA:**  
**TIPS FOR JOB HUNTING**  
 Workshop for graduate student couples seeking academic employment. Come for information on trends in university hiring and employment assistance for spouses and partners.  
 With Lorraine Davis, VP for Academic Personnel  
**WHEN:** WED, JAN 29, 12:00 - 1:00 PM  
**WHERE:** EMU - CEDAR ROOM A

**KAMPUS BARBER SHOP**  
 HAS BEEN SERVING THE CAMPUS COMMUNITY FOR THE LAST 69 YRS. OFFERING 3 BARBERS WITH COMBINED BARBERING EXPERIENCE OF 84 YRS. IN ALL STYLES OF MEN'S AND WOMEN'S CUTS.  
**\$8.00** HAIRCUTS/ NO APPTS.  
 MONDAY-FRIDAY 8AM-5:30 PM  
 851 E. 13TH 343-7654

**THE FAR SIDE** By GARY LARSON

"Bad guy comin' in, Arnie! ... Minor key!"

**RIGHT ON RESULTS**  
**TARGET!**  
 Call the Oregon Daily Emerald Advertising Department at:  
**346-3712**

**SPECIALS FOR YOU EVERY DAY OF THE WEEK!**

<b>MONDAY</b> 3.95 One Item Small Pizza! Additional Topping Only 55¢	<b>TUES</b> See Tuesday's Paper For Track Town COUPONS!	<b>WED</b> 5.95 One Topping Medium Pizza The Saga Continues!
<b>THURS</b> one FREE topping	<b>FRI</b> FLYER DAY! watch for our flyer around campus with special savings	<b>DAILY</b> All You Can Eat PIZZA & SALAD BAR! \$4.95

**TRACK TOWN PIZZA**  
 Free Delivery within 50 purchase limited delivery area  
 484-2799 1809 FRANKLIN BLVD