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Eugene's funniest people flock to audition

By Meg Dedolph
Emerald Contributor

A group of boys in baseball caps and identical black high tops flex imaginary muscles while making faces for an invisible camera. Ten feet away, three high school girls pull them after them from a large blue gym bag.

Three cushions, a polyester patchwork quilt, sweatshirts, a bottle of Hershey's chocolate syrup and a half-eaten bag of microwave popcorn ended up in a heap on the floor at Valley River Center.

"Do you know how stupid I feel?" one girl asked her friends.

"No. You're not the one sitting in the middle of the mall looking like this," answered her friend who had piled her hair into a floppy ponytail on top of her head — held by a purple elastic band — and from her double-pierced ears dangled mismatched plastic hoop earrings.

The potential to win \$10,000 for a 30-second television appearance on *America's Funniest People* drew a crowd to Val-

ley River Center on Sunday afternoon.

Jason Bourgault, an assistant producer for the show, said that between 75 and 100 people usually come to tapings like the one held Sunday, not including the people who come just to watch.

Eugene was the last stop for the show, which has traveled through Oregon filming segments for next season. The number of segments selected from Sunday's taping that would actually appear on the show depended on "how much funny stuff we get," said Frank Frenzel, one of the organizers.

"Between the ads and the emcee's stuff, we only show twelve people, and most of those acts are only 30 seconds long," Frenzel said.

Bourgault said he planned to highlight a few pieces, but that the executive producer would make the final decision.

"We just had a cute act," he said, referring to a girl and her younger sister who sang "The Locomotion" together. "That's got a good chance."

Bourgault said the types of segments that get onto the show

'Everybody laughs at my nose, so I decided to play a song on it.'

— Dianne Holmes

include "little kids telling jokes, and unusual, creative things — if you do a banana joke and come dressed as a banana, for example."

Fourteen-year-old Monica Wells left her banana suit at home Sunday, and chose instead to do a chicken imitation for Bourgault and his crew. She was filmed twice and by the second take, was clucking and squawking, and after some coaching by Bourgault, strutting back and forth in front of the camera, bobbing up and down, and flapping her elbows.

"You could do your chicken imitation," a woman remarked to her friend after watching Wells. "It's good, but I guess it's not very funny."

Wells, who doesn't watch *America's Funniest People*, came to the taping after she heard about it on the radio.

"Amy got me into it," she said, pointing to her friend and revealing the inspiration for her chicken imitation. After Amy shook her head, Wells added, "Well, something got me into chicken."

"I hope I win some money," Wells said.

Dianne Holmes, a clerk at the Springfield Safeway, who played "God Bless America" on her nose, said she would "probably faint" if her segment appeared on television.

"Everybody laughs at my nose," Holmes said, "so I decided to play a song on it," a skill she first developed after her daughter was born.

Like Wells, friends played a major part in putting Holmes in front of the camera. "My friends encouraged me, and so did my boyfriend," she said.

Pianist finds faceless INS

BEND (AP) — Pianist Dmitri Ratser easily leaves Russia these days to perform around the world, but he's having trouble getting into the United States.

Ratser has been billed to play Liszt's Concerto No. 1 in E flat on Aug. 7 at the opening concert of the Sunriver Music Festival in central Oregon.

But he's grounded in the former Soviet Union, waiting for a U.S. visa that would have arrived a week ago if the Immigration and Naturalization Service hadn't lost his paperwork.

Gershunoff has been calling senators, state department officials, anyone who might be able to speed things along, since he can't reach anybody at the INS. But he's listened to plenty of INS recordings.

Council: Records law needs help



(AP) — Exceptions to the Oregon Public Records Law are closing public access to files that the law intended to keep open to everybody, critics say.

Legislators have added more than 300 exceptions to the law in the 20 years since it was enacted, creating the need for review, says Rep. Jim Edmunson, D-Eugene.

"It has turned from a solid law into Swiss cheese," Edmunson said.

Edmunson is among the state lawmakers who formed the Public Records Advisory Council to examine the exemptions.

The council plans to propose bills to the 1993 Legislature that could start plugging some loopholes, says Secretary of State Phil Keisling, a Democrat who chairs the council.

But he says the council can only make recommendations, and there is nothing to prevent legislators from adding more exemptions — except public pressure.

"This is an effort to stop various parties from squirreling away exemptions based on their clout in the Legislature," Keisling said. "The main hammer we have here is the public spotlight."

Exceptions to the law vary in significance, from complaints filed against doctors to license applications to run a tree nursery.

The public records law was passed by the 1973 Legislature, along with other Watergate-era gov-

ernment reforms. It changed state policy by forcing the government to prove that records should be kept closed.

The law began with a short list of 30 exceptions, including police investigative files, lawsuits and industrial trade secrets.

The list not only has grown to more than 300, it has been spread throughout the 838 chapters of state law, rather than stated in one section.

It took months for Public Records Advisory Council staff to look through the thousands of pages of Oregon law to find them.

Many of the exemptions were added because the media dug hard for stories that embarrassed state agencies or big companies, says Les Zaitz, publisher of the Keizer Times newspaper in Keizer and a member of the records council.

"The issue is open government," Zaitz said. "The press leads the charge."

As a former investigative reporter for The Oregonian, Zaitz won a public records case against the state Banking Division in 1983 during his probe of a collapsed bank.

But the state agency and banking lobby slipped an exemption through the Legislature before Zaitz could get the records.

In 1989, lawmakers also closed tax records for hotels and motels after reporters for the Bend Bulletin wanted to see if a major resort had fallen behind in its taxes.

Fire near Rogue River joins list of Oregon blazes

GRANTS PASS (AP) — A forest fire broke out Monday outside the town of Rogue River, while on the other side of the Cascade Range crews closed in on a blaze that burned 3,000 acres on the Winema National Forest.

Two air tankers, three helicopters, eight engines and one fire crew attacked the East Evans Creek fire about 12 miles north of Rogue River, said Jeane Sanderson of the Oregon Department of Forestry.

The fire burned quickly through 300 acres of brush and timber, sending up a column of smoke visible in Grants Pass and

Medford. It was moving at a rate of about 1 mph northeast, prompting authorities to alert residents in the Ward Creek area. There was no immediate evacuation, Sanderson said.

Meanwhile, about 80 miles east in Klamath County, firefighters finished a line around the 3,000-acre Lone Pine fire, which threatened a rural subdivision before it came under check.

Fire bosses weren't ready to call the fire formally contained until crews burned out enough brush and timber along the lines to be sure they would hold, said Forest Ser-

vice spokeswoman Barbara Kennedy.

The fire started Sunday afternoon on private land about nine miles east of Chiloquin.

It jumped a road and moved quickly through tinder-dry sage brush and ponderosa pine on the Winema National Forest before firefighters finished a line around

A national team from the Mount Hood National Forest called in about 1,000 firefighters to fight the fire.

The blaze was originally headed toward the Moccasin Hills subdivision, located 15 miles southeast of where it started.

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CARE

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expenses, represents about \$15 from each student's activity fee.

The IFC trimmed a planned resource and referral program from the budget as well as other programs that don't directly affect the day care program's op-

eration, Parrott said.

The official said those programs might be replaced if a state block grant is approved this school year. Also, more services may open as the task force considers merging services with those of Lane Community College.

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