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FASHION

Market vendors tie-dye Eugene

Rain falls on the tents of merchants at Saturday Market.

A woman dressed as the Statue of Liberty casually walks by; her crown dripping wet as she stops to look at homemade garments for sale. A troubled man struts through the market strumming his guitar, yelling that the end of the world is near. Tie-dyed men's underwear hang by clothespins from a line, selling for \$5 a pair.

It's business as usual for Steve Oppenheimer as well as other vendors, who stand out in the rain waiting for customers to buy handcrafted garments and items.

Oppenheimer, who has been selling his clothing in the same spot at the Saturday Market for five years, said many people in Eugene wear unique clothing. Tie-dyes are just one of the various original styles for which he has developed a large clientele.

"I don't think it's any more popular than polyester clothes that Frederick and Nelson imports," he said. "It's just more creative and unique which makes it more noticeable."

Oppenheimer sells batik clothing, in which he makes a design on the garment with wax. He then



Photo by Kim Nguyen
 Tie-dye fashions are popular with young and old alike.

dyes the garment, and boils it to remove the wax — leaving the design in the fabric.

Oppenheimer said it is his relationship with his customers that sets the market business apart from those in malls and shopping centers.

"You get to know me when you buy something from me," Oppen-

heimer said. "I can tell you how it was made, and what it means to me."

"That's a lot different than going into Target, Penny's or The Bon, and buying some impersonal garment off the rack that was made 2,500 miles away, by someone who's getting paid three cents a day," he said.

The close customer relationship is also part of business for Steve DeMeritt, who sells tie-dyed clothing at the market and knows many of his customers by name.

Satisfied customers such as Jimmy Hendrick of Florence spread word of DeMeritt's talent. Once when Hendrick came to pick up a jacket that DeMeritt tie-dyed for him, he brought a pack of new sheets to have tie-dyed as well.

DeMeritt achieves the tie-dyed effect by binding fabric with rubber bands, and applying the dye with squeeze bottles.

He does not create designs solely for other people. There are many items he dyes for himself, such as shirts, fanny packs and even tie-dyed dollar bills, which

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