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Millrace flock thrives on attention

By Rivers Janssen
Emerald Editorial Editor

Trudi Richmond knows the Eugene Millrace ducks and geese — and they know her. After all, she has been feeding them for the past 15 years.

Richmond drives in from Fall Creek every Monday, Wednesday and Friday and gives them several bucketfuls of bread and grain. It costs her about \$8 for each feeding frenzy.

"I save the grain for last," she said. "It keeps them from following me to the car."

The ducks and geese eat up the attention. Everyone who comes by with food is treated like the best-loved person in Eugene.

The well-fed birds have nested themselves into the city's consciousness. Just as New Yorkers are known for feeding their Central Park pigeons, Eugene residents cuddle their millrace ducks.

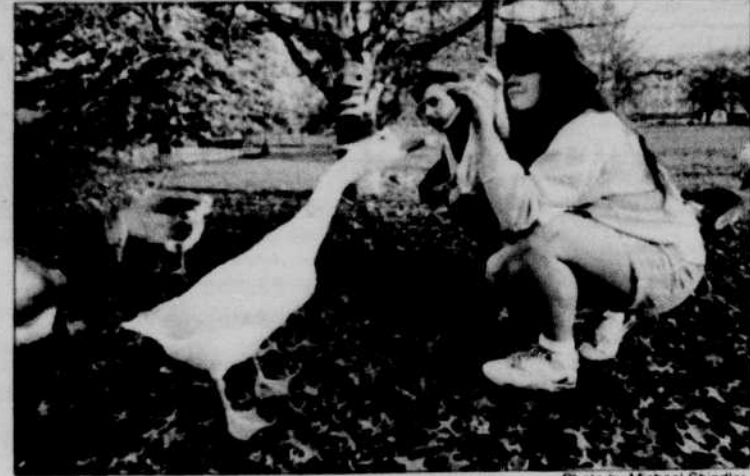
On sunny days, families stop by to give children their first exposure to wild animals. Or sometimes long-time residents come once a year for a visit. The birds have become so essential to Eugene that they've been adopted by the community.

Art and Bernice Carlson count themselves among the millrace's visitors. They come by every winter to check in with the birds, to feed them and watch them play.

Every time Bernice drops a few bread crumbs, ducks and geese from all over the pond swim over, cutting several v-swaths in the water. One by one they hop up on the shore as Art snaps Bernice's picture amid the swarm.

"You certainly get a lot of attention," Bernice said.

The ducks and geese are the ones getting the attention said Pat



Senior Jana Herd, alongside Danny Corzine, reaches out to feed an anxious goose a piece of bread near the Eugene Millrace. Jana feeds the ducks day-old bread from Williams Bakery.

White, a customer service worker at the University Physical Plant, which is located behind the millrace. "Those ducks eat better than you and I," White said.

White said plant workers don't feed the animals themselves — the public takes care of that — but they do care for them if they're injured. Workers send the wounded birds to an animal organization and dispose of the ones who die.

Workers have also had to rescue ducks from ice blocks during the winter. "They paddle out in a canoe to free the ducks," White said, "and they just fly back and get stuck again."

KUGN radio's Ralph Steadman also fields a number of calls on the birds. On his radio show a few weeks ago, he asked the public what it thought of the birds' occasional jaunt into traffic on Franklin Boulevard.

The response was mixed. Some people seemed genuinely con-

cerned that the ducks and geese have too much pull in the community. After all, nobody is trying to stop them from crossing, nor is anybody eliminating the birds' motivation for crossing — the grass in the street's divider.

Other people, however, thought the issue was more humorous than troublesome. Count Steadman among them. "They live here too," he said. "They have a right to go where they want."

Williams Bakery, located only a few blocks from the millrace, does its part by selling old bread to people interested in feeding the ducks. It costs only 10 cents a loaf, or \$5 for a grocery-cart full. Penny Cash, who works at the Williams thrift store, said a number of customers buy wheat bread for the ducks because it's more nutritional.

Cash's best customer has been

Turn to **DUCKS**, Page 6

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