

## 'Homeless' kids keep playing the con game

■ **OUR OPINION:** 13th Ave. clean-up will work if we stop handing out our spare change

Eugene police recently launched a "zero-tolerance" campaign along East 13th Avenue aimed at jaywalkers, litterbugs and other violators of pedestrian-related laws.

Persuasion, street-side counseling and education all failed to keep aggressive panhandlers and "excessive loiterers" off 13th Avenue during the summer. The situation got so bad that police sent a seven-member community-response team to make a sweep of the area in August.

Well, the sweep worked and street kids moved — one whole block away.

Now, many of the tangle-haired, money-begging street folk have found a new home in the west University park area on East 14th Avenue between Hilyard and Patterson streets. Wonderful.

As effective as this program may seem, it is only a quick fix for a long-term problem. Recognize and realize that most of these street urchins are scamming us, and the sooner we start saying "no" to free loaders, the sooner they'll pack up and leave for good.

For the sake of the argument, we are talking about the younger people, with their dreadlocks and wild, dirty clothes, who prefer to hang out in small groups and ask for "spare change" from the people who actually work for it.

These people have chosen the life they are living — or not living, depending on how you look at it. They are

not displaced timber workers or people that society has collectively dumped on; they are living the way they want to live — off of everyone else.

Have you seen all the help wanted signs in the windows of area fast-food establishments? We wonder how many of our street friends have gone to their favorite public restrooms, washed up a little and tried to get a job in one of those restaurants.

By the sheer numbers of these trendy transients who litter our curbs and sidewalks (and shrubs and trees), it appears not many have tried filling out job applications.

Most of them are not starving. They choose to spend their (our) hard-earned money on entertainment and luxuries. They can be seen smoking their cigarettes and drinking their beverage-of-choice every day on any sidewalk they've decided to plant their buns or feet on.

Smokes and drinks aren't free, and the stuff isn't handed out at the Mission or Goodwill. In fact, those habits cost quite a bit — a pack of Camels costs \$2.50. Spare change?

On any given day, these youngsters walk around laughing and talking with their lifestyle-challenged buddies, seemingly having the time of their lives. They aren't starving. When you're hungry, the last thing you want to do with your mouth is smile.

One final note: The city's ordinance against aggressive panhandling was designed for your protection. If you feel threatened by a street person, report him or her to the police.



## Powell popularity boosted by Bob and Bill

Last year I wrote my first column about the possibility of a Colin Powell candidacy. One year later, as Powell tours the country promoting his recently released autobiography, *My American Journey*, an announcement of a Powell-for-President campaign seems inevitable.

So why should a man who has never held an elected office be considering a shot at the highest in the nation?

Results from a *Time/CNN* poll of 1,000 adults taken June 21-22 show mathematically why Powell has a good chance of winning the Oval Office.

When asked whom they would vote for in a three-way race, with Powell as an independent and Clinton and Dole representing the two major parties, the general finished a close second with the president. Clinton received 33 percent of the vote and Powell garnered 29.

When asked the same question with Powell as the Republican nominee and Clinton his only opponent, the general came in 3 percentage points ahead of the incumbent.

For any politician, let alone a rookie, these numbers are strong, especially because the general election is more than a year away, and Powell has not officially entered the race. We've never seen anything quite like this. Well, at least not since Eisenhower.

To see why Powell is the hot ticket in the current presidential posturing, we need look no further than his competition.

From the Democrats, we have President Clinton, whose tax-and-spend profligacy is one of the root causes of this nation's economic woes and whose lack of organization has left a revolving door in front of the White House.

Also, the president filled his campaign with promises and then wavered around a great deal of them. Remember gays in the military, the pres-

ident danced around the issue like a marionette? Or the middle-class tax cut, which never materialized? Or health-care reform, when he allowed the GOP to walk all over him? These events, and numerous others like them, have not gone unnoticed by the voting public.

Although the president has

always seemed well-intentioned, his leadership ability has been under constant critique. Powell, in contrast, is seen as the tough general of the Persian Gulf War — a true leader, not a mere political puppet.

On the other side, we have the Republicans: a dour and caustic group who, if divided by ideology, could probably form three, distinct parties.

The combined influence of the National Rifle Association, big businesses and the Christian Coalition has left the party without a consistent philosophy. Businesses get subsidies, but poor people don't; chemical dumping is morally acceptable, but abortion and homosexuality aren't. Such inconsistencies make many moderates, the backbone of any general election, uncomfortable.

Powell has already positioned himself against such nonsense in his book.

"I am troubled by the political passion of those on the extreme right who seem to claim divine wisdom on political as well as spiritual matters," he said.

Such words of common sense, which won't be heard from a president trying to win over Christian voters, will cross party lines and ring true in the ears of the electorate.

Also, the new style of Republican attack-journalism repulses many Americans. As

the general tells his readers: "Democracy has always been noisy, but now, on television and radio talk shows, demagoguery and character dismemberment displace seasoned dialogue."

If he chooses to run in the current GOP field, Powell can distinguish himself as a gentleman above the fray, especially compared with the bar room brawlers the Republicans are fielding.

What distinguishes the general from the Democrats and the Republicans is that he is where most Americans actually lie: the pragmatic center. He describes himself as "a fiscal conservative with a social conscience," a description that more and more people are using for themselves.

Although he has stated that he is pro-choice and supports some gun control, Powell's opinions are the most elusive thing about him.

However, this may not be important for a man held in such high esteem. As Democratic pollster Peter Hart told *Time*: "Voting for a legislator, we say, 'I've got problems with him on this or that issue.' But voting for a president, we say, 'What kind of leader will this person be? Do I trust this person?'"

If these are the questions the American people ask themselves, Colin Powell could be the only answer.

A career as distinguished as his would be impressive for a person from any background, but for Powell it is even more so because he has faced the barriers of being an African-American in this country and of growing up in a family of modest means.

His accomplishments are signs of great fortitude, leadership and gumption — qualities that must have Clinton and Dole biting their nails to the quick.

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