

West-end weaponless cops continue cleanup

■ OUR OPINION: The community obsession with campus vagabonds has gotten out of hand

Increased police patrols in the West University neighborhood, a police trailer in the 7-Eleven parking lot, and hundreds of jaywalking tickets distributed to the dreadlocked and dirty have not been enough for area business owners. This week, red-jacketed community officers joined forces with Eugene police to keep "undesirable elements" out of sight.

The community guides intend to deter rather than arrest criminal activity. Armed with cellular phones and keen senses, they stroll the cigarette-speckled streets in search of tire-slashing and public urination. This is good, of course, but is it really necessary?

Loitering and panhandling were the area's biggest problem, and a general annoyance for the bathed and book-carrying who wanted to

stop for burritos or bagels.

But since police activity increased, the human gauntlet has disappeared from East 13th. Once again, students can walk between Kincaid and Alder without being spare-changed to death.

As such, this new addition of officers without weapons will only add to an atmosphere of intolerance and do little to deter crime.

It's difficult to intimidate a crack-high, switch-blade wielder with the threat: "Don't push me, punk! I've got a cellular phone, and I know how to use it!"

West University business owners and their patrons have a right to feel safe. But in our effort to ensure security, we may be removing the harmless human debris that gives the west end its charm.

Police can remove the criminals. But let's keep the earthy, the geeky and the delirious. Without them, we're no different than OSU.

Group projects: Why must we endure them?

■ OUR OPINION: Working together should not be forced upon us

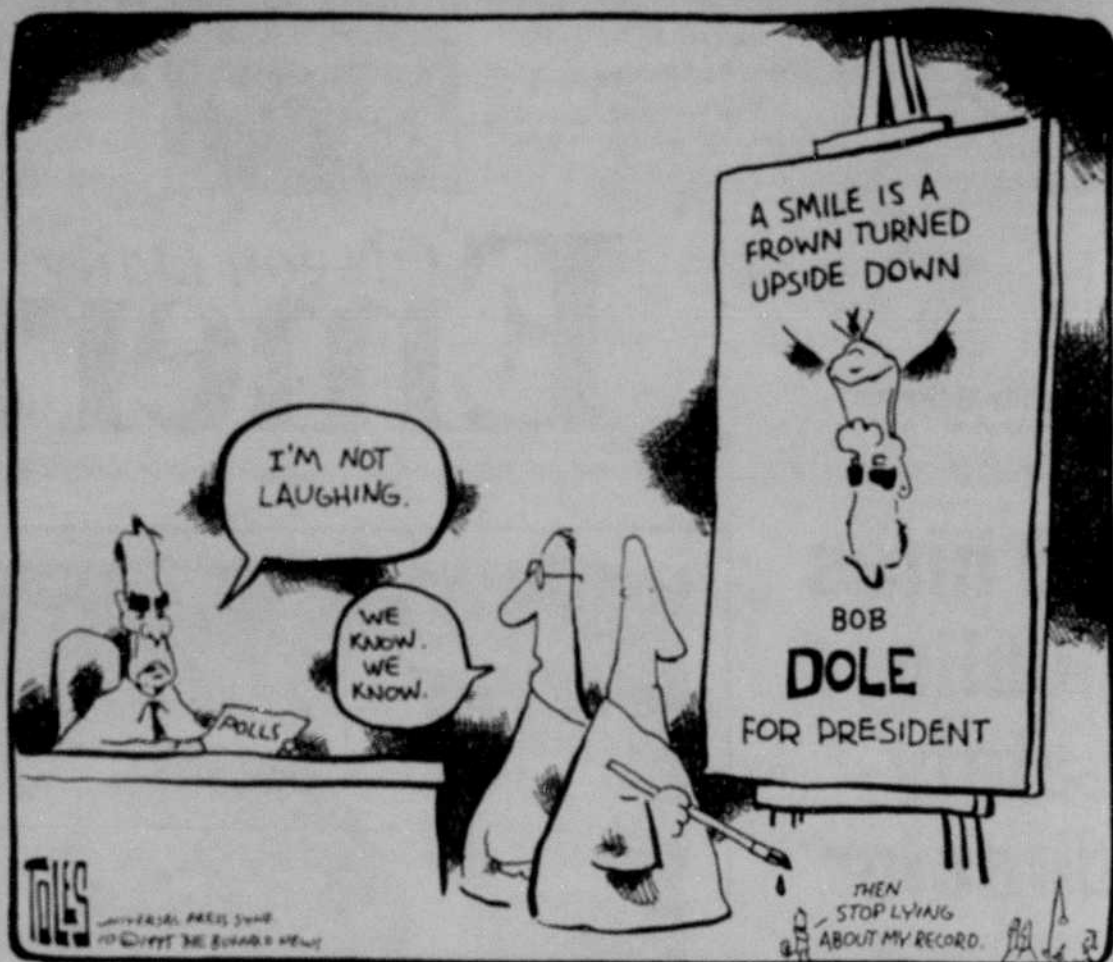
Group projects suck. Professors love them because it means fewer papers to grade and fewer days of lectures and lesson plans. Of course, they tell us that group projects teach us to work cooperatively with others. Group projects, they say, prepare us for the real world.

Lies. All lies. Group projects force hard-working students to carry the weight for the unmoti-

vated, and they allow students who would normally fail to bask in the glow of other students' work.

As for their likeness to the "real world," nothing could be further from the truth. In the real world, flakes who don't show up for group projects and don't complete their work are fired. In school, these losers get five other people fired with them.

Group projects are academic welfare, and they must be stopped. In the sea of life, the life jackets have to come off sometime. Let the weak drown.



Statistics beat up, rob West University

If you believe what you've read in the news lately, you might think the University campus is squatting on the biggest den of iniquity this side of the ninth circle.

The campus district is so bad, *The Register-Guard* tells us ("Where Goes the Neighborhood," Jan. 28), that it may be even more vile than the Whiteaker neighborhood - known colloquially as Felony Flats. That must be pretty bad. The Whiteaker area in west central Eugene has long been the city's clearinghouse for heroin, hookers, and "second-hand" stereotypes. In the past year Whiteaker has been the object of park cleanup efforts, prostitution stings and undercover drug busts.

How can West University compete with such depravity? What evils does this little neighborhood on the University's west side (known colloquially as Campus) have that Whiteaker denizens don't - besides gourmet coffee? Answer: the wonder of numbers known as demographics.

West University's reputation is on the rocks because of *The Register-Guard's* comparison of the two neighborhoods by population, median age and income. According to the city's census data, the average West University resident is younger, poorer, and more transient than Whiteaker residents. In addition, crime statistics for the two neighborhoods show that West University averaged more felonies and misdemeanors between January and October 1995 than did Whiteaker.

Statistics can be accurate and still be misleading.

If you believe the algebra, West University is a nasty place to live, filled with migratory gangs of young felons strapped for cash who prey upon - upon who? On migratory gangs of young students strapped for cash. Who can tell the difference these days? Certainly not demographics.

A stroll down 13th will yield at least one offer for drugs per day, but these offers don't come from dangerous thugs. A stroll through the cemetery on 18th will put any female at risk for rape, but common sense steers everyone but the risk-takers down safer streets. Johns don't come here except in the guise of clever professors, and junkies have gigs to go to. The crimes that happen here happen everywhere, the difference is that campus criminals are absurdly easy to spot.

If you live here and go to school here and have always relied on these streets to steer you past Sacred Heart and into Smith's, or over to Safeway and back to Autzen, day and night or dawn - then you don't think about demographics or drug deals or the danger you may or may

not be in. Chances are, you recognize the stray from the stranger, and the drug dealer from the harmless delinquent.

And chances are better here than anywhere else that you won't feel alone or incapable of finding company when you need it.

West University, whatever its ills, is that intangible thing: a community. Wayward or upward, renter or vagrant, this neighborhood consists of some of the youngest and poorest - but also grooviest - people in town. It is known by the county elections office as Ward 3, one of the most liberal voting districts in Eugene. These are the statistics that give one a sense of the people behind the window sashes. These are the demographics that count.

A resident cited in *The Register-Guard* article admitted West University had "pockets of slumminess." The slum pocket Shannon McCarthy speaks of is no more than the state of decrepitude to be expected from an area overrun with students. In a state where property laws make it unprofitable to maintain rentals - in a neighborhood where nearly everyone is a tenant - buildings run down at top speed. This does not a ghetto make.

One of the city's solutions is to offer tax incentives to encourage the construction of co-ops on the assumption that co-ops promote pride of ownership. While it's true that massive rebuilding might speed up gentrification, one has to wonder if anyone from The City has seen the Campbell Club or Janet Smith co-ops lately. How about after they've thrown one of their notoriously Bacchanalian parties? This is a portion of the city that stands a better chance of being adored to death than successfully restored.

The city's Zero Tolerance strategy to clean up West University now has the Orwellian assistance of the West University guides program, but at bottom the city's efforts remain commercial rather than communitarian. West University shop-owners seek to emulate the downtown mall, where businesses have created a safe shopping environment in what was once a public square.

Businesses may lead the charge to remake West University into an image of their own liking, but they can't prevent 5,500 migratory young students strapped for cash from calling it their home. The University's demographics and West University's demographics are one in the same. Accept its shortcomings, enjoy its vagaries, but don't fear it.

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