

## 13th Avenue traffic delays to continue

Traffic delays are expected to continue on West 13th Avenue as a result of the street and fairgrounds construction project.

Lane configurations will be shifted on West 13th between Monroe and Washington streets as grinding work, or rototilling, progresses.

The work being done on these streets is a cooperative project by Lane County, the Lane County Fair Board and the City of Eugene to improve access to the Lane County Fairgrounds and repair deteriorated sections of paving and sidewalk on West 13th Avenue.

## Fire officials issue fireworks warning

The Fourth of July sends people to fireworks stands looking for ways to celebrate the holiday.

However, Eugene Fire and EMS urges residents to attend professional displays, as the professionals must adhere to state-of-the-art fire codes. According to a press release from the Eugene fire department, statistics from a report by the National Fire Protection Association show that fireworks annually cause tens of millions of dollars in property damage and

## TODAY'S NEWS BRIEFLY

thousands of injuries, as well as some deaths. Children are at the highest risk, as in 1995, they sustained 59 percent of the injuries.

Officials from the Springfield fire department remind citizens to watch out for illegal fireworks sales. Dick Evenson, Springfield's deputy fire marshal, tells consumers to look for the retail sales permit, which must be displayed by the stand.

## Pre-paid tuition bill passes Senate

The House Bill which would allow parents to purchase their children's tuitions at current rates passed the Oregon Senate Thursday, June 19. The bill is expected to be signed by Gov. John Kitzhaber in the coming weeks, then passed on to voters for approval in the November, 1998 election.

If the bill is approved by the voters, residents could pay for tuition at today's prices by either a lump sum, or investing smaller amounts over time. By offering smaller amounts to invest, Representatives Peter Courtney (D-

Salem) and Bill Markham (R-Riddle) who sponsored the bill, hope to attract lower-income investors and students by making it easier to open a high-interest bearing account.

The students-to-be would not necessarily have to attend Oregon universities or colleges. The Board of Trustees for the account would set up a flexible plan that would allow payment to any not-for-profit higher education institution, the sponsors said. Students must use the money within ten years of high school graduation.

However, if the student were either unable or unwilling to attend obtain a higher education, that money would be returned, but with substantial penalties to the earnings, a press release stated.

"This bill addresses a truly alarming problem. Since 1990, college tuition in Oregon has risen 80 percent," Courtney said in a press release. "This year the average student who borrowed money for college graduated with \$24,000 in debt. Those statistics are stunning to anyone who wants to go to college or who wants to send someone to college."

## UO's AUDIX voice mail system to get upgrade

The AUDIX voice mail system used by University staff and faculty will be

upgraded July 12 and 13.

The current AUDIX system will be replaced with a Lucent Technologies "Intuity" AUDIX system beginning at 6 a.m. on July 12. The new system will be ready at 8 a.m. July 13. During the interim, voice mail will not be accessible.

The change in systems will require AUDIX users to make several changes. However, access numbers and extensions will stay the same.

The following will be lost from the change: incoming and outgoing messages, password, personal greetings, outcalling programming, messages scheduled for a later delivery and personal directory information. These will all need to be replaced by AUDIX users after the change.

The University recommends that users write down any important message information, write down personal greetings and write down any personal directory information.

Once the system has been changed, users will need to record their name, install a new password, rerecord a personal greeting and re-program outcalling numbers and activate them.

Most students will not be directly affected by this change. Questions are recommended to be directed to department coordinators or Telecom Services at 346-3198.

## Some employers offer benefits to same-sex partners

■ **HEALTH:** A survey shows that 13 percent of all U.S. employers extend benefits to partners of gay workers

By John Hendren  
The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Jeff Jackson and Maurice Monette found what they were looking for when they moved to San Francisco — a community that embraces them and a boss who offers domestic partner benefits.

"I couldn't now work for an employer that doesn't have this," said Jackson, 34, a community relations officer for Kaiser Permanente, the health maintenance organization. "I now have an employer that respects my family."

As recently as five years ago, Jackson's sexual orientation might have choked off career prospects. Today, even as Southern Baptists boycott the Walt Disney entertainment empire for offering just such benefits, 13 percent of all U.S. employers have quietly extended health benefits to the partners of gay workers, according to a survey by accounting firm KPMG Peat Marwick.

For companies with more than 5,000 workers, the figure is one in four.

For the firms that have led the trend, domestic partner benefits are a simple matter of economics. Gays and lesbians are estimated

to comprise anywhere from 2 percent to 10 percent of the workforce. With unemployment near a 24-year low and labor demand high, few employers are willing to ignore a significant share of the pool of skilled, educated employees.

The companies that offer domestic partner benefits include IBM, Apple Computer, Genentech, Microsoft, Borland International, Lotus Development, Bank of America, the San Francisco 49ers, Warner Bros. and Universal Studios-owner MCA Inc.

Disney and others say they cannot afford to lose employees to companies with better benefits plans.

"We aren't changing our policy," Disney spokesman Ken Green said in reference to the church boycott.

Many domestic partner programs cover unmarried heterosexuals as well as gay employees. But Disney and other companies deny coverage to the unmarried partners of heterosexual employees, reasoning that gays and lesbians cannot legally wed.

"Heterosexual couples do have the option of getting married," Disney's Green said.

The KPMG report, a telephone survey of 1,502 companies with more than 200 workers, sought to address one commonly expressed concern of employers — that covering same-sex partners will drive up health care costs.

The survey found they were roughly equal.

Under so-called point-of-service plans, which allow the most flexibility within managed care, the average monthly cost for domestic partners is \$326 a month, compared to \$339 for married couples, the study found.

Indemnity plans for domestic partners are more pricey — \$455 vs. \$398 — while HMO plans are about the same, \$319 for domestic partners and \$307 for a husband and wife.

Gays say there's a reason beyond price to offer benefits to same-sex partners: family values.

"If the whole purpose of giving tax incentives and benefits to married couples is to create communities and families that care for each other and relieve any burden on the government to do that, it makes sense to encourage employer groups and others to do the same for gays," said Jackson, the Kaiser Permanente worker.

While the city of San Francisco encourages equal treatment in the workplace — requiring all firms that do business with the city to extend benefits to same-sex partners — Uncle Sam does not.

Tax exemptions are granted for health care coverage only to the insured employee and married couples. Coverage for anyone else is considered taxable income. That means Jackson and

Monette pay about \$700 a year on a \$2,000 health insurance plan that covers Monette.

"It's expensive, but money's a very small part of it," said Monette, 50, an independent management consultant. "What's happening is we're respected as a household."

And the road to equality in benefits can be rocky. The ordinance that went into effect June 1 in San Francisco — a mecca of gay culture that lured Monette from Lowell, Mass., and Jackson from Ventura, Calif. — has created unprecedented acrimony.

United Airlines, while placing its "United with pride" ads in gay publications, is leading the Air Transport Association's lawsuit against the law, which would force airlines that fly into the city to adopt domestic partner plans.

In response, gay groups have burned United Airlines frequent flyer cards, and every member of the city's Board of Supervisors signed onto a measure barring city workers from using United for work-related trips.

Conservatives consider the San Francisco law an assault on morality.

"The goal of this ordinance is to destroy traditional marriage as the bedrock institution in our society and, in its place, substitute whatever sexual arrangements are currently in vogue," said lawyer Benjamin Bull.

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