

The Drawing Board



Media made topless carnival out of fair

OUR OPINION: Local coverage of the Country Fair focused too much on the goodness of beefed up security practices

The people who come [to the Country Fair] to profit from and engage in criminal activity are the ones who are squawking, and to that I say, 'Hal-lelujah.' They're the ones who should be squawking." Police Capt. Tom Brett, quoted in the *Sunday Register Guard*.

Sometimes, if you look hard enough, you can actually find news in a newspaper. The real story behind the *Guard's* extensive coverage of the fair, now in its 28th year, is not that a bunch of people got together to play in the sun. It's not even that police exerted serious pressure against the counterculture forces involved in the fair by threatening to revoke their use of 285 acres near Veneta. No, the real story is the way in which the *Guard* and other media outlets swallowed the ideas of people like Brett, something which showed in their coverage.

Brett's fundamental premise is that situations like the Country Fair controversy represent a clash between two groups: good, law-abiding citizens who would never complain about police action, and some sort of subversive criminal element who complain about the slightest police interference.

With their coverage, the media played right along. This may seem an unfair statement, considering the rosy light the fair was portrayed in. But it is important to remember that a story's slant lies in more than its conclusion.

Remember, first, what it took for the media to

put a positive spin on the fair. Not until fair organizers buckled to government pressure and expressed strong and repeated concerns about drugs, alcohol and community safety was the Country Fair designated a fun time for all.

Now, if reports that fairgoers had a less adverse impact upon the environment in Veneta are true, efforts to that end are admirable. However, the media's concern was not with trampled grass or heavy traffic. It was with drugs, bare feet and exposed breasts.

Not only did the media accept the standards of police about what would constitute a successful fair, but they also bought into Brett's notion of who would complain about police authority. In its coverage Saturday, the *Guard* assembled an interesting cast of anti-police spokespeople.

One man was described as "secretly cupping a marijuana cigarette in his hand." Another girl, who felt the cops "just need to chill out," was "strolling the grounds topless." What she was or wasn't wearing may seem irrelevant, until you consider the ideological intent of the article.

Undoubtedly it was not intentional, but in their coverage of the fair the media have succeeded at marginalizing the "alternative" culture heavily represented at the fair. In addition, they have managed to cast the debate over drugs, alcohol and fairgoer behavior in terms presented by the police.

Either fairgoers were presented as a significant community problem, breaking the law and contributing to unfortunate tensions between the fair and the surrounding area, or they were trivialized as children having fun.

Admittedly, events like the Country Fair are largely about people having fun. However, despite the positive coverage the *Guard* and others gave to the event, they didn't present it as an opportunity for people to escape the constraints of dominant culture. Instead, the fair was reduced to a freak show.

For reasons that escape us, the *Guard* reporters seemed particularly interested in the way women at the fair dress. I suppose describing the fair as featuring "beviies of semi-clad women" could be seen as free advertising. It could also be seen as demeaning to those women, most of whom shunned shirts and other garments for personal reasons having little to do with making the fair fun for other attendees.

Apparently, the reporter who wrote "there must be something in the air that turns people giddy before they even get inside [the fair]" was affected by that something. So long as fairgoers were fun-loving hippies content to sway about in bright clothing and face paint, the media felt content to laugh quietly at them.

Once people associated with the fair began to seriously threaten the legal and social norms of society, the media felt the need to echo police presentations of such people as socially deviant, threatening and devoid of serious political thought.

Perhaps next time, the *Guard* will save itself the trouble of paying a reporter to gawk at topless women and simply reprint the police press report.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

Numbers

No book is more packed with information than the phone book. Most people use the book for finding the phone numbers of friends and businesses, but a more thorough search can reveal interesting facts.

■ Among the useful entries in the Eugene city government section are numbers for: the compost hotline, flooded streets-ditches, grass and weed control, meter repairs, rodent control, streetlight problems, dead animal removal and RV waste disposal.

■ The first entry in the White Pages is for A Accent Escort Service. This would make A Accent the first of the 12 escort services listed in the Yellow Pages, but the company is not listed there.

■ The last business listed in the White Pages is Zygar and Associates Insurance Agency, Inc. It's conceivable people looking for insurance companies don't feel quite the same "urgency" to call the first number listed that escort service customers feel.

■ The White Pages lists 215 entries under the last name White but only 79 households with the name Black. Notably, the book lists no families named Purple.

■ Not only does the Yellow Pages mention 12 escort services, but listings also include one lubricant company. The section begins by listing six abortion providers and ends with the inclusion of one "zippers and repair" company.

■ If you're in a hurry to call one of these important services and discover noise on your line, the book also includes this advice: "It may be caused by the weather ... or other conditions that are only temporary. Wait until the weather conditions change."

LETTERS

University wrong

I am writing because I want to leave no stone unturned in my quest to right a wrong that has been done to my son and probably many others by the University of Oregon.

My son, David, is a resident of Oregon. He served four years in the Marine Corps. Upon his discharge in 1994, he moved to Oregon where his sister lives. He began working, and several months later, enrolled at Portland Community College. After two years there, he applied and was accepted at the University of Oregon.

Only upon registering was he told he was not eligible for resident tuition. He has appealed twice. What he had never been told was that in order to be a resident AND be eligible for resident tuition, he needed to stay out of school for a full year. He had no reason to know this since he was getting resident tuition at PCC.

I do not understand why the state can collect tax-

es from my son, as it has now for four years, and say he is a resident, except for he isn't a resident at the University of Oregon. He is not a resident of any other state and in fact is not eligible for resident tuition in any one state. This is a travesty.

My son has heard from someone considering a class action law suit. I am pleased that we are not alone in this, and I think that this preposterous treatment of your residents needs to be challenged.

I am writing in hopes that this issue might be of some interest to your readers and that your involvement might cause someone who can help to sit up and take notice.

Carol Lewis
Anchorage, Ak.

Money speaks

I have worked at the University since April 1965. I used to feel I was a valuable resource at the University of Oregon. I felt I was considered a part of this proud community. I find it so sad when an

article is run in the paper regarding hundreds of University personnel retiring, many with over 15 years service each and some with 40 years and have the vice chancellor of academic affairs say "this will not negatively affect the University. Rather, this is an opportunity for departments to reorganize, and it could save the University money because new employees can be hired at a lower pay."

It used to be people mattered more than money here at the University of Oregon. Today we can have over 1,000 years knowledge and experience and loyalty leave the University and "it will not negatively affect the University!"

Only because now the University can get some cheaper employees? Well, I would like to say to each of those retirees, it matters to me, and I will miss your wisdom, your dedication and your experience. I hope you all have a great retirement and good luck.

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