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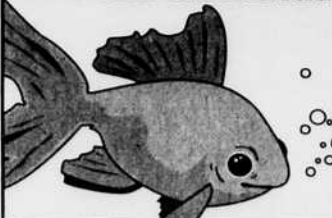
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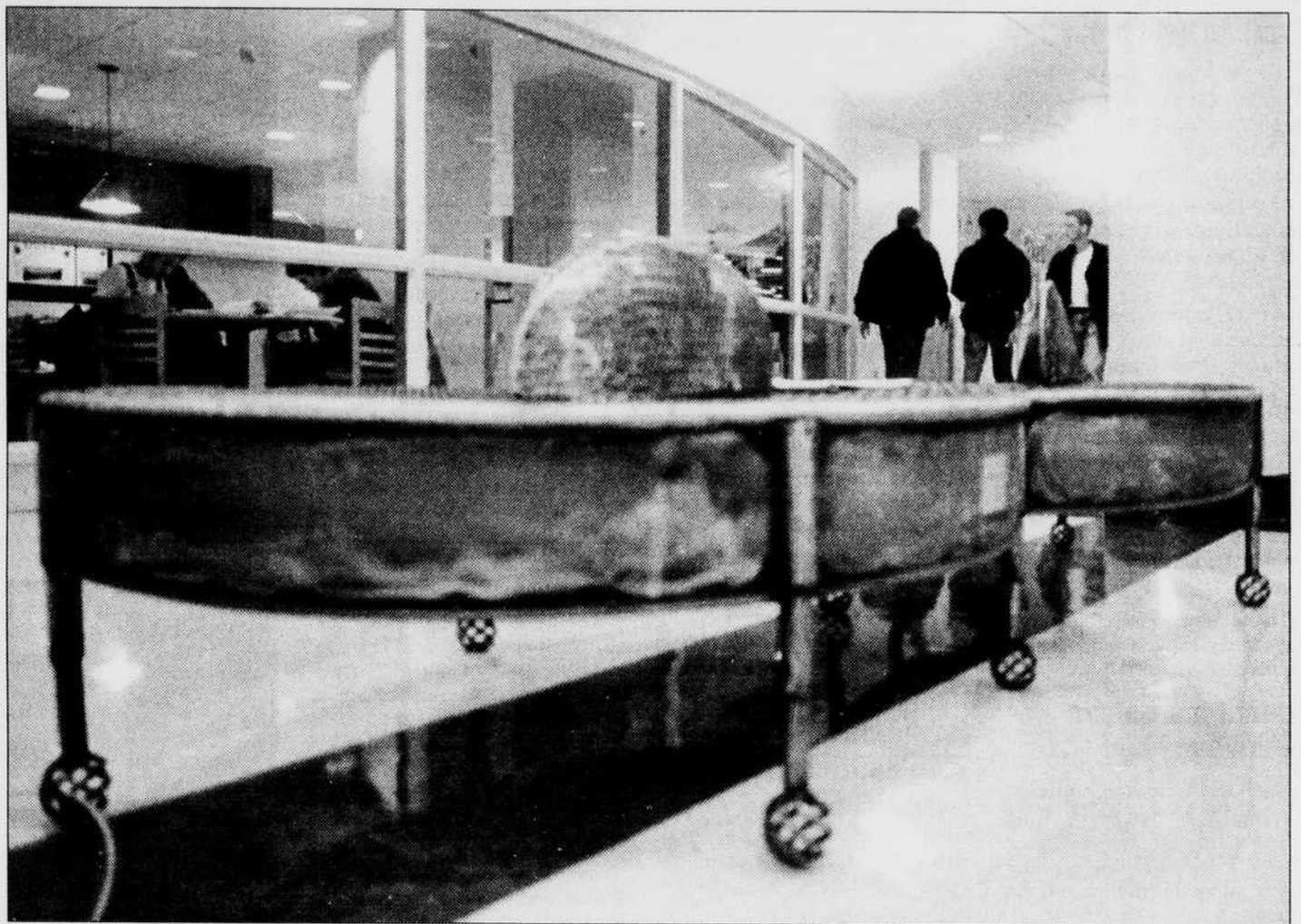
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This "Double Modified Pouf," a bench located in the EMU basement, is part of the 1 percent of the EMU renovation's funds set aside to be spent on art. *Matt Garton/Emerald*

Portland's Beer Bus delivers taste of town

By Hans Greimel
The Associated Press

PORTLAND—Oregonians love their beer so much, they're trying to make it a tourist attraction. And Jim Long's Brew Bus is in the fast lane when it comes to taking craft brew aficionados out for a taste of the town.

"Since Oregon is the microbrew capital of the United States, we thought why not show off our wares," said Long, who leads beer lovers and curious tourists on a four-hour junket to tour Portland's breweries and sample their brews.

Portland leads the nation in the concentration of microbreweries per capita with 44. And 15 of these are scheduled stops for the Brew Bus.

Since the bus first got rolling three years ago, thousands have climbed aboard to taste the gamut of homegrown beers — each taster receiving a "College of Brew

Knowledge" diploma after completing the 20-sample regimen.

"I lived here for 11 years and never knew so much about beer, and I even delivered to the breweries," said truck driver John Cormier as he gestured wildly with a beer glass in each hand at one of the stops.

But the \$29.95 brewery tour is no beer-swigging, frat party on wheels. It's Oregon's answer to the wine-tasting tours that draw thousands every year to California's Napa Valley.

"This is a sipping tour, not a pub crawl," Long said. "I pass out scoring cards so they can develop their taste and find what they like best. We try to expose people to different styles and tastes."

And what a range of tastes there are in Portland...

Wheat beers, pale ales, pilsners and stouts. Beers tinged with honey, apricots and even coffee.

"What do you taste in the porter, folks?" Long asked a group of National Guard officers in town for a convention. Before them sit half empty pints of amber, golden, crimson, and fudge-colored beers.

"Chocolate," one said.

"Espresso," another said.

"How about the Bavarian Weizen? It's the most controversial beer on the tour," Long prodded. The wheat beer sometimes draws a grimace for its spicy aftertaste.

The tasters check their score cards where they've jotted down notes. People take it seriously.

And the beers keep coming. Long diligently points out the bathroom before loading up the bus and moving on to the next brewery, each of which has its own personality.

Widmer Bros. is a stately tavern in a turn-of-the century brick building. Portland Brewing, dubbed the prettiest brewery in

the West, features hand-hammered copper brewing vats. At Bridgeport, British-style ales disappear down the gullets of partygoers frolicking in its cavernous beer hall. Meanwhile, twenty-somethings cradle small-batch brews at the Old Lompoch and shoot a game of pool.

By the time the Brew Bus circles back to the hotel, it doesn't seem so ironic that a town known for its pouring rain has something else on tap: a beer — and a brewery — for everyone.

"I think the microbrewery concept is just wonderful and because the weather is so terrible in Portland, it gives you a good excuse to be inside if you have a brewery to go to," said Irene Anderson, a 52-year-old teacher from Australia on tour with a singles group. "I can see why they invented it."

For more information, call 1-888-BIG-BREW or 1-888-244-2739.

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