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OSU professor develops software for blind

The blind scholar will speak during Disability Awareness Day at UO

By Amy Jennaro
Oregon Daily Emerald

Oregon State University physics professor John Gardner wanted to do the simple task of typing numerical data into his computer. But it wasn't so simple.

Gardner lost his sight after a 1988 eye operation and found it difficult to use the complicated mathematical braille system to enter numerical data. Since 1990, Gardner has developed a simpler braille font system, DotsPlus, for numbers and the TIGER printer system, designed specially for the blind.

On Tuesday, Gardner will share his experiences with students and faculty in the Knight Library Browsing Room at 4 p.m. Gardner is the keynote speaker for Disability Awareness Day, which is being put on by the Disability Services.

"He is an interesting individual because he has a disability, and he's made great contributions to the science community," said Hilary Gerdes, the head counselor for students with disabilities.

Since January, the department has been planning for the day. The event is put on annually to increase public understanding about the disabled, Gerdes said.

"We want people to become

more sensitive to disability issues, and if we can get people to talk about this subject, we are making some headway," she said.

Molly Sirois, assistant counselor for students with disabilities, has been organizing the event. She first became interested in Gardner's story after he received national exposure in connection with a paper he submitted to a scientific committee that was rejected for being single-spaced.

"I wanted to bring in somebody with first-hand personal experience to talk to people about his disability in relation to his personal and professional experience," she said.

Gardner said he is excited to have the opportunity to present his story. He added that he hopes students will realize the importance of accessible technology.

"What I want people to realize is that by creating good computer programs, you are going to make programs that are better for everyone," he said.

Gardner said his technology has sparked a strong response in the technological community. At the annual International Conference for People with Disabilities in March, Gardner said there was strong interest in his technology. In the past two weeks, since the TIGER system was put on the market, he has received 50 orders for the printer at the headquarters

of his startup company, ViewPlus Technologies, which specializes in creating accessible technology for the disabled.

"The TIGER is a sensation," he said.

But Gardner's speech isn't the only part of Disability Awareness Day. Rachel Indigo Cerise, a junior women's studies major, has organized an art show that showcases the artwork that is either related to disabilities or created by disabled artists. The show will be displayed in the EMU lobby from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Tuesday.

Cerise said her interest in the project comes both from the fact that she has a disability and because she wanted to provide a forum for people to talk about disabilities.

"I wanted to promote exposure for artists who have a disability because it is something that I haven't seen done before," she said.

Cerise said the art is by both students and artists in the Eugene community and features work that draws attention to all disabilities, not just blindness.

But Sirois said she hopes Disability Awareness Day will do more than just focus attention on disabilities.

"Through discussion, we hope to educate people, raise awareness and dispel misconceptions and miscommunication regarding disabilities," she said.

PRIDE

Continued from Page 1A

Something similar to the cluster exists already on campus.

Nina Thompson, co-coordinator of the PRIDE Hall committee, said there was an unofficial PRIDE Hall in existence this year on the fourth floor of Carson Hall.

Hutto wanted to publicize the location of where the LGBT clusters would be so incoming LGBT students could know where they are.

He was also worried that the programs of the cluster hall might not address the needs of the LGBT students there because they might not make up the majority of the hall.

Eyster said that although he had worked out the cluster idea with

the PRIDE Hall committee, it was developed as merely one way to compromise.

"I'm not particularly stuck on this cluster idea," he said.

Williams said the cluster idea seemed to address the concerns of safety brought up by the PRIDE Hall but without segregating students from each other.

Several audience members expressed concern over the cluster compromise.

"The clusters seem to be following an in-the-closet mentality," said Rich Patitucci, a senior majoring in philosophy at the University. "I think a PRIDE Hall is an official recognition of the issues rather

than subverting it with clusters."

Glenn Matchett-Morris, a counselor at the counseling center, said the cluster idea struck him as second class citizenship for homosexual students.

"I think that the whole issue of sexual minorities is uncomfortable to talk about in our society," he said. "So the cluster is a way of making [homosexual] issues unofficial."

Others worried about the changing composition of housing employees. David Bayless, residence director of the Walton Complex, said five employees will not be returning next year, two of who identify themselves as queer and one identifies himself as gay.

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