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Information guru directs traffic

Bill Smee is keeper the information booth across from Oregon Hall

By Stefanie Knowlton
Oregon Daily Emerald

His office is bordered by two lanes of traffic and a large sign indicating his profession — information. One thing, he said, he does well.

He dispenses maps, parking passes and a little bit of humor from the booth on 13th Avenue near Oregon Hall.

With an accent that he describes as "general mid-American twang," but ends up sounding more sarcastic, Bill Smee explains that for the past four years he has been one of the first faces students see when they arrive at the University.

A sense of humor is mandatory for this position, he said — another thing he does well.

A car slows down near the booth but doesn't stop.

"The op in stop doesn't mean optional," he said as the car moved out of sight. "A lot of people blow past the stop sign."

He admits proudly that he has been called a curmudgeon in the past and defines himself as "opinionated, based on sound principles with a sense of humor."

"I have spent many years honing my craft ... I practice everyday but not in the booth, unless they look like they need one," Smee said smiling.

He imitates visitors who pull up to the booth and say, "I don't know



Catharine Kendall/Emerald

Bill Smee sits in his office, the information booth, from which he guides visitors.

where I am supposed to be, but it is a red brick building." The response, he said, is a smile and an explanation that all the buildings on campus are red brick buildings.

Last month, he heard the strangest question of his information career when a nicely dressed man in his mid-30s approached the booth and said, "You have a beautiful campus here. Is this the University of Southern Califor-

nia?"

Smee smiled and thanked him for the compliment and then informed the gentleman that this is the University of Oregon.

Two 15 minute breaks and a one hour break for lunch is his only solace. The rest of Smee's nine hour shift is in the booth. A typical work day starts at about 7 a.m. and lasts until 4 p.m.

When things are slow Smee passes the time by doing homework, because in addition to his duties at the booth he is also a student at the University. At 47, he is expecting to graduate next year with a degree in anthropology.

This isn't the first time Smee has been a college student. Twenty-five years ago, he was a freshman at the University of Kentucky but dropped out soon after for financial reasons.

Smee took a job at the University as a janitor for University Housing and worked there for 17 years. When he hurt his back four years ago, he began working as the information attendant for the Office of Public Safety.

From his booth, he directs people on how to get to Florence, Creswell, local businesses and has even recommended a few restaurants to inquiring visitors. The farthest place he has given directions to was Los Angeles.

"Just get on I-5 and go south," he said.

His office is full of posters and toys to make the booth a little more livable through the long hours of information giving. One wall of the his tiny space is covered with black and white Three Stooges posters, one of which, he points out proudly, was given to him by a faculty member in honor of his directional know how.

The poster depicts the stooges in the desert, each pointing a different direction with signs in the background pointing every other way. He calls the stooges his "holy trinity" and has loved them before he can remember.

"I don't take myself too seriously and people need to learn from that," he said.

Rand Stamm, manager of parking and transportation with OPS, said that they are happy with Smee's work over the last four years.

His job, however, is a dead-end job, Smee admitted. Even after graduation, Smee sees himself working in the booth until he retires 10 years from now. Then he plans to write ghost stories and science fiction.

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