

EMERALD CITY: THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE EUGENE

By Jack Clifford
Oregon Daily Emerald

There is no easy way to define the word "community." One approach is with a dictionary entry: n. any group living in the same area or having interests, work, etc. in common.

That description, of course, leaves out way too much. Which is why the Emerald has left it up to those who should know best how to portray the deeper sense of what the word inspires in the Eugene populace.

Eight people offered a few insights on the town that most students will be calling home for the next nine months and some resi-

dents have called home forever, give or take a day. They defined community in their own words, each person spoke about why he or she has chosen Eugene as their place to live and everyone suggested one change they would make for the city.

Michael Lamont owns the Bijou Art Cinema, just off campus, and he came to Eugene in 1978. Lamont made it to senior-level status in computer science at the University before, in his words, "tanking out." He's stayed because, first of all, he was coaxed into becoming the Bijou's owner. Beyond his cinematic obligations, however, Lamont said he also appreciates Eugene's other cultural offerings.

More than that, though, he says it's "the surrounding areas, the ease with which you can go to the coast in an hour, or skiing in an hour, or hit the high desert in a few hours — the hiking trails up Spencer Butte."

He gave a textbook definition of "community," but added that the people should strive to "hopefully make themselves better, and as a result, the community will improve over time."

Should he stay here for another 22 years, Lamont wants to either add more screens at the Bijou or open a second theater.

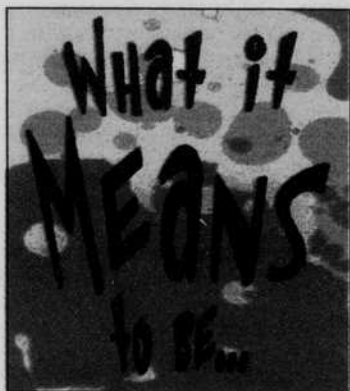
"It would give [the community] access to more films that don't have the kind of profitability that a small business like mine requires, so I just have to pass on some films," he said. A wider range of films would add more culture to Eugene, he added.

Mary Daniels, who works in advertising and marketing for Serenity Lane, an alcohol and drug treatment center, is originally from London, England, but has lived in Eugene since 1973. Similar to Lamont, she gave a more common definition of community. Daniels, however, also named several areas where she has lived and can compare to Eugene: San Francisco; Pickwood, Ohio; Pontiac, Mich.; and Greely, Colo.

She left England because her hometown was "very formal" and she wanted to experience a country that was less so.

"I've been [in Eugene] so long because I have a sense of roots here that I never had anywhere else," she said. "The longer I live here, the more people I see that I know going down the street and it really is a sense of roots for me that I've never had before."

Those roots may run deep for Daniels, but her dislike for high ticket prices at the Hult Center were on the tip of her tongue in response to the community change she would make.



"There was a big deal about the Hult Center when it opened, but I don't think that it's for the community, it's for the rich people in the community," she said. "I think it's failed to be a community theatrical experience [and] I think it's become only for those who have \$75,000 a year or more."

Bagonda, Old S.L.U.G. Queen, 1997-98 reign, put it simply: "To me, community is family, really," said Bagonda, who goes by Kevin Henry when not promoting slugginess.

Bagonda came here in 1992 and said it's important to tout the S.L.U.G. Queen title because it's the truest spirit of diversity. In fact, moving to Eugene freed Bagonda to become "the glamorous person that I am."

At the 1997 Eugene Celebration, Bagonda went around to each entertainment stage to talk with the partygoers.

"I told a little story about an unglamorous slug who arrived in Eugene, and how she became glamorous and became herself and let her true spirit out," Bagonda said. "So many people come to Eugene to become themselves, they leave behind their life in the old country and they come here yearning to be freed, and they can."

The biggest change Bagonda wants to see is in how money controls everything.

"I don't think we're going to see

real change until money is removed from politics. ... Unfortunately, because of so many budget cuts and unfair tax policies, the Celebration now has to be sponsored by many corporations and I see that as a kind of advertising for them," Bagonda said. "I think tax money should be spent on public art, it should be spent on public events. [Events such as] the Celebration build community."

Kimber Williams came to Eugene from Kansas 12 years ago and is a feature writer for The Register-Guard. She acquired a master's degree in journalism at the University, and pointed out in her answers that she is "married and keeps busy chasing after a 20-month-old daughter, two aging cats and two hyperactive dogs."

Not surprisingly, she doesn't think of community as a static system. From her job as a newspaper reporter, she sees the act of building community as ongoing, a

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Bagonda former Eugene S.L.U.G. Queen

process that arises from the ordinary — shared experiences, common struggles, the mundane, incredibly necessary functions of daily living — and said Eugene is "constantly refining its own sense of community."

This town is Williams' choice to call her community, because of, among other attributes, "sunsets over the coastal range. ... Witness-

ing the cultural collision of yuppies and hippies. ... A wonderful community of writers. ... A love of recycling. ... And oddly, the gentle winter rain."

As the parent of a young child, however, Williams worries about raising her in such a homogenized area.

"As a community, even our recent history has not been one of inclusion," she said. "I would love to see our community become more inviting to minorities, to truly achieve the diversity and tolerance that we so often find flaunted on bumper stickers."

John Huang has lived in Eugene for nine years with his wife and they have one child. He and his family moved here from China so that Huang could attend the University; he received a sports management degree in 1994.

To Huang, it's important for people in a community to go beyond their common interests and be more supportive. With that in mind, he says he has stayed in Eugene "because people here are very friendly and people help each other."

Huang has settled in town and he staked out a claim in the area's substantial massage therapy field, while teaching tai chi, as well. Another reason Huang has stayed in the Willamette Valley is the cleanliness factor — the city streets are clean, the water is good and the environment is close to perfect, he said.

Yet, if there were one thing Huang would change, it would be the growing traffic problems.

"I don't want [Eugene] to become like San Francisco or Los Angeles," he said.

Barbie Griggs talked about the Eugene community and compared it to Santa Cruz, Calif., near Monterey, where she lived before coming to this area nine years ago. She said the sense of community in both areas was an "interconnectedness of people living and thriving together, assisting each other. They

[both] have an established community of earth-conscious, friendly minded people."

Griggs runs her own craft business, which brings her to the downtown Saturday Market every weekend, and she also has her wares available on-line.

If there's one thing I might change, it would be that people have a truer respect for real diversity, and an ability to dialogue when we disagree.

Steve Clovis Priest, St. Paul Catholic Church

She appreciates the fact that she can walk down the street without being harassed. But she does see a few infrastructure problems with the city's growth.

"There's so much development happening when there are buildings that are vacant and readily available," she said. She said that new buildings in one residential area will draw people away from an already established residential area, which changes the system of both areas.

"There is no interconnectedness when it comes to the business establishments," she said. She added that taxes shouldn't be used to build new schools, when there are so many available buildings that could be used for that purpose.

Father Steve Clovis is a priest at St. Paul Catholic Church, which is nestled in between Coburg and Harlow roads in northeast Eugene. He was transferred to the city 14 months ago, but "fell in the love" with the area during his first stay in Eugene, for a summer in 1987.

Clovis said that a community should strive for a sense of unity and search for common ground.

Eugene, he said, has a wide range of activities that appeal to a broad scope of individuals, and that there's a diversity here that makes it a comfortable place to live.

The differences that people have, however, sometimes create discord, which Clovis would like to see resolved with more consideration.

"If there's one thing I might change, it would be that people have a truer respect for the real diversity [Eugene residents] have and an ability to dialogue when we disagree," he said.

Clovis said that "attention-grabbing activity" gets too much play in the media and he wishes that "authentic and respectful dialogue would be just as attention-grabbing."

Ernie Bok works at the University Bookstore, which is a microcosm for her community definition: "It's a place where you live and you interact with other people, hopefully in a positive way."

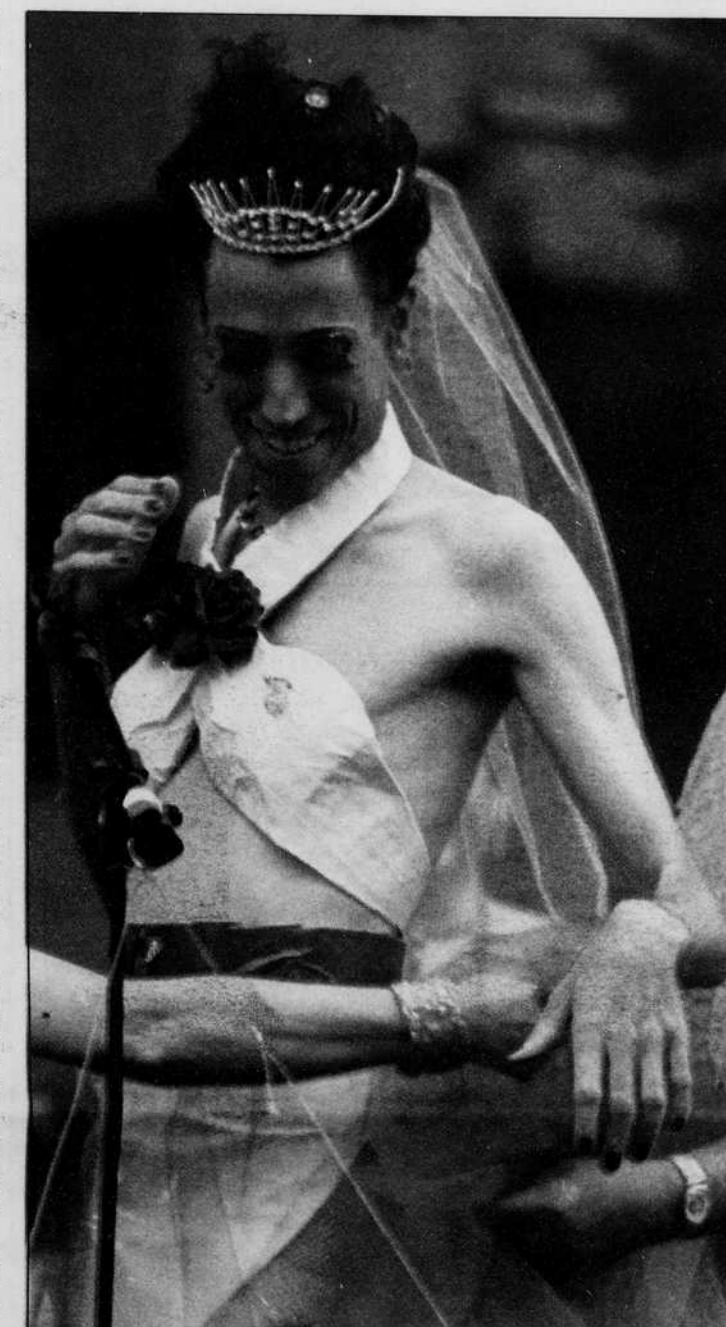
Bok, who is married with two children, was born in Arizona and moved here from California. Her family background — Bok's ancestry is Native American, German and Spanish Basque — sounds more diverse than Eugene as a whole, but she likes the town because of its small size, "there's a lot of cohesiveness; it's a nice environment, with friendly people."

The quietness of the town and the neighborhoods appealed to her on a visit 20 years ago, so she made a move. Of course, moving from California to central Oregon does have its drawbacks.

"It would be nice if it were sunny, warm and wonderful — nine months, 10 months out of the year [with no rain] would be nice," she said.

Other than a change in the weather, who knows how many local residents Bok speaks for when she gives a final comment on necessary changes for Eugene?

"I'd change nothing."



Old S.L.U.G. Queen Bagonda, whose reign occurred during 1997-98, gets a little help with fashion. Bagonda was on hand in August to watch the 2000-01 Queen be chosen.



Tom Patterson Emerald

Ernie Bok works at the University Bookstore and said she would change nothing at all about Eugene. Bok likes the quietness of certain neighborhoods in the city.

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