

County celebrates 150 with walk down memory Lane

■ Eugene remembers its beginnings, looks to future

By Rebecca Newell
Oregon Daily Emerald

Lane County, the final destination on the Oregon Trail, will celebrate its sesquicentennial Wednesday.

It's been 150 years since approximately 3,000 settlers suffering from "Oregon fever" made the 2,000-mile trek to dwell in an area known for its majestic forests, fertile soil and mild climate.

"We are eight years older than the state, which gave birth in 1859 on Valentine's Day," said Bill Dwyer, a Lane County commissioner.

Lane County commissioners are celebrating the day with a historical reenactment, donning period dress to commemorate the founding of Lane County. The event will take place at 10 a.m. Wednesday at Harris Hall, located at Eighth Avenue and Oak Street downtown. After the reenactment, the audience will be invited to a cake and coffee reception.

History

The 2,000-mile Oregon Trail directed settlers toward the Willamette Valley. The first wagon train of about 70 settlers embarked on the journey in 1841, and within four years, "Oregon fever" had boosted the population of immigrants to 3,000.

Lane County was established January 28, 1851, and named for Joseph Lane, a rugged frontier hero who became the first territorial governor. Pioneers traveled along the Oregon Trail in the late 1840s to Lane County to farm. With the completion of the railroads, the 1880s marked the explosion of the timber market.

"Lane County was a tremendously large territory which stretched from the Rockies to the California border," Dwyer said.

The county was carved out of the

southern section of Linn County and the portion of Benton County east of Umpqua County. Originally, it covered all of Southern Oregon, as far east as the Rocky Mountains and south as the California border, Dwyer said. Lane County was created by the Territorial Legislature, but it wasn't until the 1853 election that a county seat was named. Eugene, which takes its name from an early Oregon pioneer, Eugene Skinner, won the county seat, Dwyer said.

The original Lane County government consisted of a county judge, three commissioners, an assessor, a treasurer and a sheriff. Later years saw the addition of a clerk and school superintendent. In 1953, the judge's position was abolished and a decade later, the county received the right to exercise legislative authority.

Growth

In 1860, the Lane County census revealed a population of 4,780. Since then, the population has grown rapidly. In 1997, Lane County population had reached 308,500, a 9 percent increase since 1990. The county is presently the fourth-most populated in Oregon. During 1999, the county population reached 315,700.

At its inception and for many years to follow, Lane County's economy relied on agriculture and timber. With rich soil and a moderate climate, Willamette Valley became one of the most productive farming areas in the nation, Dwyer said.

In addition to fertile farm land, the lush forests and waterways have been a Lane County treasure that is still enjoyed by residents. One of Lane County's most popular park areas became a "hot spot" as early as the 1870s. Located near the McKenzie River, the hot springs attracted visitors from around the state and even the nation.

"Our parks have more water access than another other county in

Oregon," said Christine Johnson, secretary of the parks department.

In recent years, cutbacks in logging and steady population growth have altered the emphasis of the county's economic development. New prominence was given to industries, including services, technology, trade, manufacturing of transportation equipment, printing, publishing and tourism.

The University

Barely 20 years after Lane County's inception, residents formed the

Union University Association and persuaded the state legislature to give Eugene permission to found the University of Oregon.

"The founding of the U of O was very much supported by the business community, because [the University] would bring people and money to the local economy," said Susan Storch, archivist for the University.

Construction of Deady Hall was complete in 1877, a year after the first students registered for classes. The University opened its doors the same year, and 200 students enrolled. In

1878, the University graduated its first class, comprised of five students.

"For a small town, that increased the population exponentially," Storch said.

The University also brought fame and attention to both Lane County and to the state. International track and field stars including Mary Decker Slaney, Alberto Salazar and Joaquim Cruz trained at the University, and Pre's Trail — a 6.3 kilometer run circling through Alton Baker Park — was named in memory of the 1972 Olympic trials star, Steve Prefontaine.

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Economy

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the market has opened new opportunities for the group of investors.

"We look at it as a really great time to buy," Thomas said. "You need to do the research first; it's a buyers market. Some things may be selling for cheap."

Thomas said when a stock market makes a correction it can mean a several things, including a loss of the public's confidence in the future earnings of a company.

The group will be putting out its first annual report this term compiled from Sept. 1999 to Aug. 31, 2000. Thomas said the figures in the report were high because it was put together before the stock market slid downward.

"Within that period, the market saw some really great returns in the stocks we held," Thomas said, referring to the group's 18.82 percent total

return. Despite the risk involved, their investment beat the returns of the Standard & Poor's 500.

Although the downturn in the stock market does have the power to affect the ability of universities nationwide to provide student loans, it hasn't hurt the University of Oregon so far.

Elizabeth Bickford, University director of student financial aid, said a small increase in parent loans this year, from 8.4 million to 8.8 million loans, indicates parents may be turning to loans more than last year because of the market's dip.

In a visit to campus Jan. 12, U.S. Senator Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said he would be working with budget committees in Washington, D.C., to increase funding for student loans.

"We have to work harder for student loans more than ever, because without that educational opportunity, students don't have the tools that adjust to change in the economy," Wyden said.

The Investment Group Portfolio:			
Company Name:	Shares:	Market Value:	Return:
1. American Eagle Outfitters, Inc.	100	\$4,737.50	66.10%
2. Avaya Communication, Inc.	8	\$128.50	-55.96%
3. Centennial Bank Corp.	577	\$4,727.19	-7.74%
4. Harrah's Entertainment, Inc.	150	\$3,993.75	25.03%
5. In Focus Corp.	150	\$3,075.00	-5.15%
6. Lattice Semiconductor Corp.	160	\$3,850.00	-20.03%
7. Lucent Technologies, Inc.	100	\$1,906.25	-62.17%
8. Monaco Coach Group Corp.	200	\$4,150.00	-8.86%
9. Oregon Steel Mills, Inc.	550	\$1,168.75	76.03%
10. OraSure Technologies, Inc.	550	\$5,053.13	-26%
11. Webtrends Corp.	80	\$2,520.00	22%
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