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"I can play when I want to. Quit when I want to. Go where I want to."
 — Erik Brashers, the "Banjo Man"

Not your typical street fare

■ Erik Brashers, also known as "Banjo Man," can often be found on East 13th Avenue when he isn't baking bagels

By Brook Reinhard
 Oregon Daily Emerald

Erik Brashers bakes bagels for a living, but around the University, people know him simply as "Banjo Man."

Brashers showed up on campus last August, and on sunny days he can be found picking away across from the University Bookstore on his five-string banjo.

The best part of playing an instrument for a part time job, Brashers said, is the flexible hours.

"I can play when I want to," he said. "Quit when I want to. Go where I want to."

Brashers is a classy dresser on a laid-back campus. His handlebar mustache smacks of an old-time piano player in a Wild West bar. When he plays "bluegrass" style, Brashers wears a set of metal picks that fit around the fingers of his right hand like claws. He often wears a pin-stripe suit, tuxedo dress shirt and tops off the outfit with a hemp necklace, just to fit in with the people.

"I've heard a couple of people comment on the way he dresses," said Heather Donaldson, flower shop worker for Rhythm & Blooms, which is located across the street from where Brashers often plays. "He seems pretty cool."

The 37-year-old has lugged his banjo from state to state for 25 years. He fell in love with the instrument when his parents took him to the San Diego Folk Festival as a 12-year-old. He's found other loves, such as the guitar and mouth harp, but he said he likes the banjo best for its unique sound.

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Adam Jones Emerald

Eric Brashers, left, and Kim Kilmer of the 'Barn Dance Boys' perform at Saturday Market for the morning crowd.

Protesters silently demand end to war

■ Eugene citizens held a silent vigil Wednesday opposing the Bush administration's expanding military action in the Middle East

By Brad Schmidt
 Oregon Daily Emerald

In a town known for noisy protests and sometimes-unruly demonstrations, all that could be heard Wednesday from a group gathered downtown was the sound of silence.

About 30 people held a silent vigil during rush hour outside the offices of Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., and Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Eugene, protesting the expansion of U.S. military operations and calling for local political action to reverse what participants believe is a war focused on foreign policy.

Protesters lined up single-file at the corner of Seventh Avenue and Charnelton Street, amassing a stretch that reached halfway to the next block. Carrying signs reading "No Wider War" and "Prepare for Peace, Not War," participants hoped to raise local awareness. Many passersby honked, and several drivers held up peace signs to support the demonstrators, about three-fourths of whom appeared to be over 45 years old.

Pastor Jan Fairchild, a Faith In Action representative, delivered a letter to both offices at 4:45 p.m., asking for a meeting with each official to discuss the group's concerns. Neither official was in his Eugene office Wednesday.

Organizers said they are concerned that the Bush administration will not keep the world safe, that U.S. forces will invade Iraq, that the United States is issuing one-sided support to Israel and that the government plans to develop and implement a nuclear offensive.

"We think it's high time our congressional representatives start voicing opposition and raising questions against the Bush administration," said Carol VanHouten, a vigil organizer and board member of the Progressive Responses of Community Alliance of Lane County.

VanHouten said U.S. military operations overstep their political boundaries and take the shape of a world police body, putting democratic processes aside. And it's those actions, she said, that will cause more animosity towards the United States and bring more terrorist attacks.

"We do think the perpetrators should be brought to justice," she said. "We just think it should be a multinational approach using an international court of justice."

"I don't think the military approach is going to catch bin Laden."

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News briefs

Woman flees hospital, streaks through neighborhood

A woman was spotted roaming the West University neighborhood wearing nothing but a hospital gown Wednesday morning, according to police.

Police said the woman fled Sacred Heart Medical Center, where she was receiving treatment, at about 10 a.m. and set off walking through the area.

"She decided she didn't want any treatment, left and was running around," said Tom Hicks, associate director of the Department of Public Safety.

Eugene Police Department Spokeswoman

Mandy Fox said the woman "scared the hell out of a lot of people."

Though officers were unable to locate the wandering woman, hospital officials told police that the woman had returned for medical attention, Fox said.

Police did not know what treatment the woman was receiving.

— Darren Freeman

Campus, community groups sponsor Middle East discussion

Atrocities Uncovered: Israel and Palestine, a forum about the Israeli and Palestinian viewpoints on human rights violations, will be held at 6 p.m. today in 177 Lawrence Hall. Admission is free.

The session about ways to reach peace in the Middle East is being sponsored by the Muslim Student Association and co-sponsored by the ASUO Women's Center and the Eugene Middle East Peace Group.

The evening begins with a Middle Eastern refreshment reception at 6 p.m. A slide show follows at 6:30 p.m., and the discussion wraps up with speakers at 6:45 p.m.

Scheduled speakers are: Karen Kennedy of Amnesty International; Thomas Nelson of the International Solidarity Movement; anthropology professor Diane Baxter and geography professor Shaul Cohen.

For more information, contact the Muslim Student Association at 346-3798.

— Robin Weber