

Autzen

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years. Clemmer said he enjoys the work because of the mental and physical challenge. He said the "how you gonna get this done?" dilemma keeps his job fresh and exciting.

But after spending a majority of his career working on heating, ventilation and air conditioning, the 42-year-old decided to make a change. Two years ago, a fire destroyed Clemmer's Albany home. Forced to start over, Clemmer, his wife and his two young children moved to Eugene.

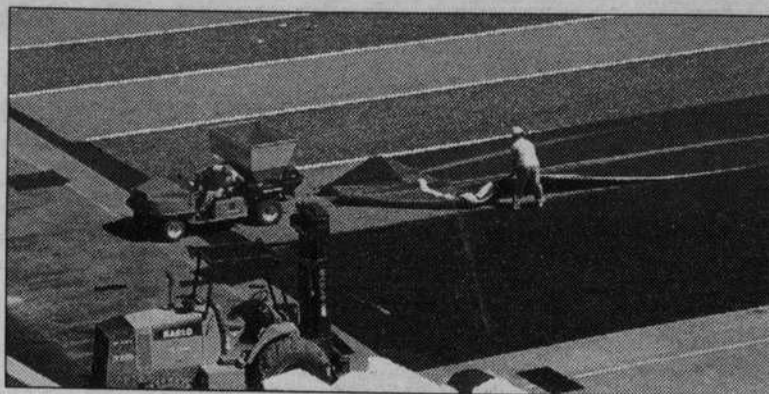
"It's like a new beginning for us," he said.

And after getting a union apprenticeship with JKG Electric, Clemmer now finds himself laying wire inside Autzen, which, in a way, is getting a new beginning of its own.

"They're in a big rush to get done," Clemmer said of the construction process. "They're cramming three years worth of work into a year."

Building a better nest

For the past seven months, construction crews of Hunt-Wildish Joint Venture have been working al-



Adam Jones Emerald

At a cost of \$100,000, Autzen Stadium has been outfitted with custom artificial turf.

most around-the-clock in hopes of renovating the stadium by Aug. 15, two weeks prior to the Aug. 31 season opener against Mississippi State.

The crew of about 350 has been working long shifts over the past month, with some working seven days a week, project administrator John Norton said.

For many months a crane stood in the parking lot, demolishing and reconstructing half of the stadium. Come rain or shine, workers tore down the tattered home of the Ducks with the vision of a grand, luxurious complex.

With the erection of the structure complete, only aesthetic procedures now remain, Norton said. Over the next month, final touches will be made to Autzen's paint, tile, carpets, seats and the stadium's playing field.

The stadium will be football-ready by Aug. 15, but Norton said the project might not be complete until season's end. Autzen's new suites won't be ready for use at the beginning of the season, so construction will continue between home games.

The majority of construction has

focused on the south side of the stadium, which has been greatly expanded, adding some 12,000 seats and pushing Autzen's capacity to between 54,000 and 55,000. Athletic Department Media Services Director David Williford said.

But the project, costing about \$90 million, is more than an expansion. It's a renovation as well, Williford said. Aside from increasing its capacity, the project will also add 32 luxury skyboxes and a club room for suite holders.

Autzen's new south side will tower over the older, virtually untouched north end, one that is typically filled with University students who co-exist as unruly, die-hard Duck fans for a majority of Saturdays in the fall.

Losing a piece of the pie

In prior years, 6,098 tickets were allotted to students for games during the school session. For most regular season games, students were given approximately 14 percent of the total tickets.

This season, the number of student tickets will go up to 6,150. But the capacity at Autzen is expected to be about 54,500, meaning students will receive only slightly more than 11 percent of the ticket share in 2002.

Williford said the only way students could expect to see an increase in tickets is through annual negotiations between ASUO and the Athletic Department. Furthermore, Williford said, ASUO officials would have to prove to the department that there is constant student demand on a game-by-game basis to warrant such changes.

And even if successful, such a change wouldn't be cheap.

Last year, students paid about \$500 per year in incidental fees, meaning ASUO officials had about \$9 million to work with for the entire year. For the 2001-02 season, students' incidental fees paid for about 29,500 football tickets and about 38,300 basketball tickets. The price tag came in at more than \$1 million.

For additional seating, Williford said, ASUO would have to invest more money. Currently, students are already given tickets at a price "below fair market" value, Williford said.

A reserved seat for a basketball game last season cost \$18. During the football season, reserved seats cost \$29, except for the Wisconsin and Oregon State games, which each cost \$42. This past year, had all seats been sold at those prices, football ticket sales would have increased by almost \$970,000 and basketball ticket sales would have jumped by almost \$690,000. The Athletic Department could have, in theory, received about \$570,000 more in revenues had students

been charged full price.

Despite these numbers, ASUO accounting coordinator Jennifer Creighton-Neiwert said she expects to see an increase in student tickets for the 2003-04 school year.

"We're at least going to have another 1,000 (in 2003-04)," Creighton-Neiwert said.

That increase would have happened this year, she added, had the fate of the expansion been known during winter negotiations.

But with enrollment at the University expected to surpass the 20,000 threshold this year, more and more students may be left standing in line, fighting to grab tickets that are available to less than one-third of the student body.

Nevertheless, come football season, "Mighty Oregon" will blare at full volume, filling the Eugene air like pollen on a warm, sunny day. The players, ready to capitalize on the success of last season's No. 2 ranking and eager to prove they can be successful yet again, will storm the field. And the lucky 6,150 students, clad in yellow and green, will rise, screaming until they can speak no longer.

Say what?

Autzen already has a reputation as one of the loudest, most difficult places for opposing teams to play, and the renovation should only improve the atmosphere for the Ducks. Oregon posted 23 consecutive home victories from 1997 through 2001 and hopes to continue its current streak, taking two consecutive home victories into the upcoming season.

The stadium may be losing its appearance as a cavernous field carved in dirt and rock, but it should be just as loud — if not louder — according to University graduate and professional engineer Art Noxon. The concrete bowl should be enough to trap in the screams of fans, Noxon explained, even without dirt surrounding the complex.

"If you have more people screaming, generally speaking, it's going to be louder," said Noxon, owner of Acoustic Sciences Corporation, a business that has consulted with musicians such as Michael Jackson, Sting and Jennifer Lopez. But, he added, "you can only shout so loud."

When comparing Autzen Stadium's previous attendance to its current capacity, Noxon said he expects on-the-field noise levels to rise by one decibel. When fans yell at the top of their lungs, he added, they aren't trying to be intelligible, but are trying to disrupt effective team communication on the field.

So will that one decibel made by screaming fans make any difference when it comes to reaping havoc on opposing teams?

"It could be, yes," Noxon said. "One decibel isn't that much louder, but it is significant. It might be the one that pushes it over the limit."

Contact the sports editor at bradschmidt@dailymerald.com.

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