

Fighting for their rights

'Free-speech zones,' areas designated for students to voice their opinions, are popping up on campuses nationwide

Jan Montry
Campus/Federal Politics Reporter

When a group of students camped at Johnson Hall in April 2000 to protest the University's resistance to joining the Worker Rights Consortium, nobody told them they were outside their "free-speech zone." Nobody told them they must move to a remote part of campus. In fact, it seemed they recognized only one free-speech zone: everywhere.

Two years later, free-speech advocates and administration officials around the country are weighing in on what may be an extensive First Amendment battle.

The fight is over "free-speech zones": small, often remote locations on some university campuses that are designated for free speech. The conflict begins when students are restricted to these locations to protest, demonstrate or speak.

The free-speech zones also raise an important question for opponents: Are the rest of these campuses "censorship zones"?

Many universities are either adopting new free-speech zone policies or enforcing old rules; however, it is unclear when the idea for free-speech zones first arose. Some newspapers report that they were created in the 1960s to control student activism, while others say it was in the 1980s.

Most recently, a group of 12 Florida State University students were arrested for protesting at the administration building, which is not a free-speech zone. Afterward, the protesters agreed to move their camp to a small area that the university had designated.

Florida State, however, is not the only place where conflict has broken out.

At the University of Houston, a legal battle ensued when administration officials refused to let Pro-Life Cougars, an anti-abortion group, display pictures of dead fetuses in a high-traffic area. After a judge ruled the university must allow the display, the administration created four free-speech zones in small, low-traffic areas.

Although the number of universities enforcing these policies is unclear, free-speech zones are currently active at many locations, including Florida

State, West Virginia University, the University of Houston and the University of Mississippi.

The U.S. Supreme Court has already ruled twice — once in 1957 and again in 1969 — in favor of free speech on college campuses. In the 1957 ruling, the court wrote: "To impose any straightjacket upon the intellectual leaders in our colleges and universities would imperil the future of our nation."

But free-speech zones haven't imperiled the University — yet.

A University policy statement on Physical Plant, Equipment and Facilities states that "all activities to be held in outdoor campus locations are subject to prior scheduling through the Scheduling Officer of Erb Memorial Union." The policy also establishes the EMU Amphitheater as a "free-speech plaza" which may be used at any time for free-speech purposes.

Vice President for Student Affairs Anne Leavitt said free-speech events are welcomed, as long as they meet time, place and manner requirements, such as not disrupting a class or blocking access to a building.

"It's not as though you only have free speech in one place," she said. "We balance free speech with other

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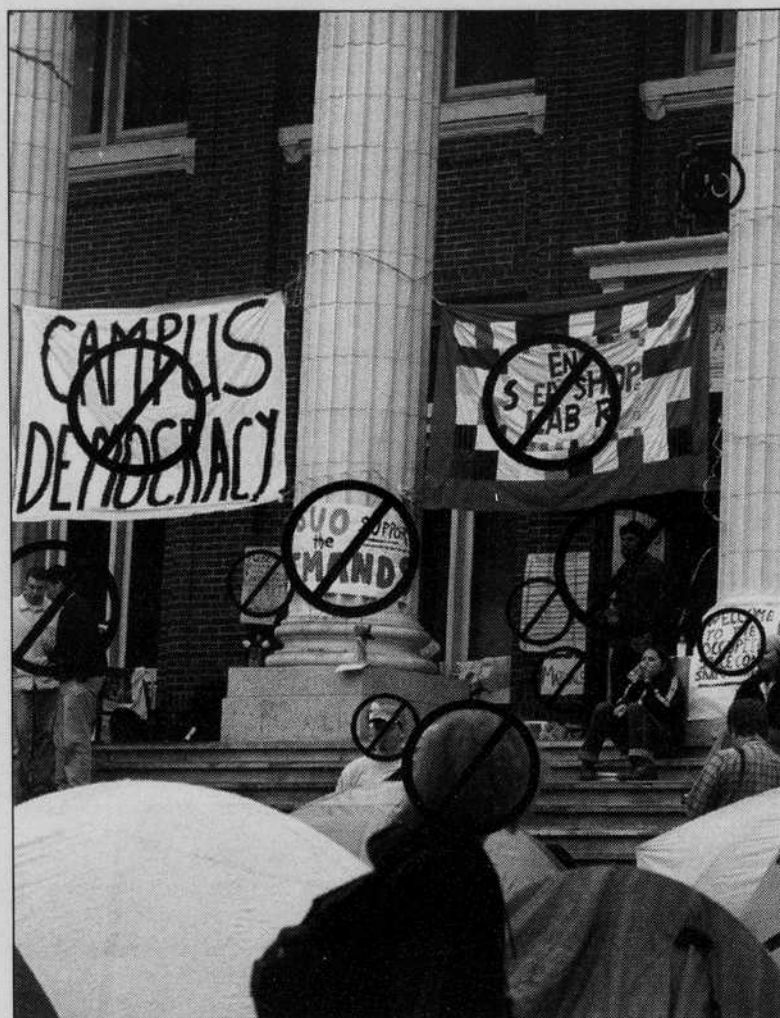


Photo illustration by Adam Jones and Scott Abts Emerald

Remembering a frank friend

A plaque on East 13th Avenue celebrates the life of Cookie Szakacs, a former University hot dog vendor and advice-giver

Nicolette Ong
Freelance Reporter

Everyday people walk past it. Some step over it without realizing it's there, while others notice it and wonder who she is.

Placed in the pavement at the corner of East 13th Avenue and Kincaid Street, a gold-rimmed plaque sits quietly near the newsstands in memory of Cookie Szakacs, the hot dog lady.

The plaque lists the date of her death — May 28, 1994 — and the words "She cared."

Eight years ago, Szakacs was the hot dog vendor on campus. She was a well-known personality who was both a merchant and a friend. After she passed away, Tim Nally took on her role and carried on her tradition.

"I wanted to fill the void that Cookie left — and keep the students fed," Nally said.

Szakacs had been selling hot dogs for about 15 years when she suffered from

an aneurysm at her home at the age of 52. She died instantly.

Still, her legacy continued.

After her death, Cookie's husband, Robert Szakacs, 64, tried to carry on her business. He gave it a try, but things didn't work out because he was also working at the physical plant at the University.

Nally had restaurant experience and knew the couple. He understood what Robert was going through and took over the hot dog business five years ago.

Getting a taste for it

Cookie, who was from Hammond, Ind., first came to Oregon with Robert in 1973. During the first few years, Cookie spent most of her time taking care of their three children. As her children grew older, Cookie decided to work and found a job at Roadway Inn as a waitress.

When Cookie was later laid off by Roadway Inn, she went out looking for a job again. Then, while she and her husband were patronizing a hot dog stall in Salem, Cookie decided to sell hot dogs, and Robert made a cart for his wife.

Cookie chose the campus location because the street was always crowded with people walking by, Robert said. In addition,

the University of Oregon Bookstore was just opposite her stall, which helped bring in more customers.

"It was an ideal location, where business should be good," he said.

At first, Cookie didn't have a taste for selling hot dogs, but once she got connected with the students, she really liked it, Robert said.

Maintaining the connection

Nally, too, said it's easy to get tired of selling hot dogs, but if there is a connection between the customers and the vendor, it can be a lot of fun.

"It's more than selling hot dogs," Nally said. "It's more like a public relations thing."

"If you didn't like people, you wouldn't like the job. People also won't like coming to an unfriendly place to buy food."

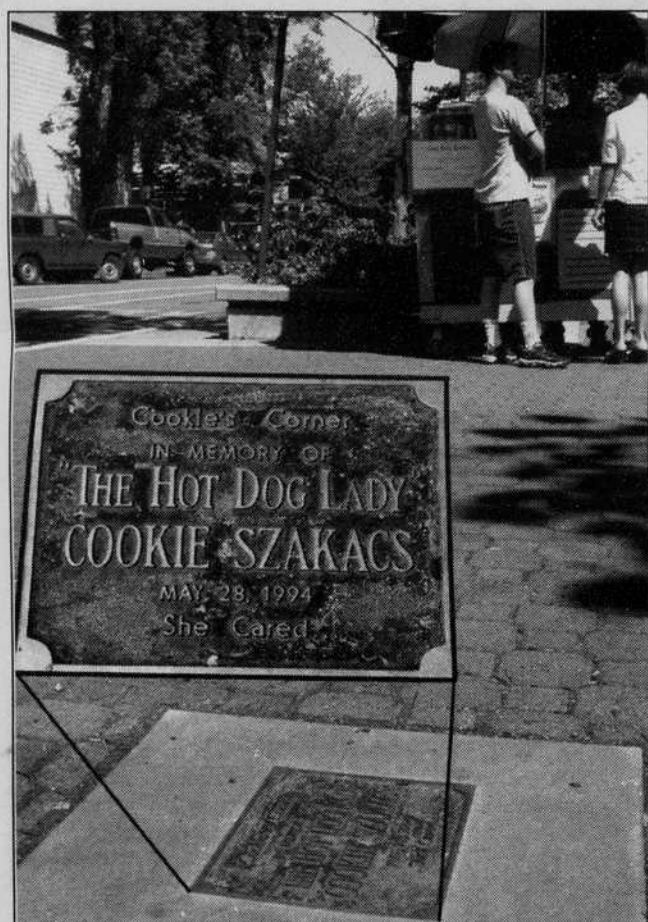
Cookie was very connected to her customers, especially the students, Robert said.

"She sold hot dogs, pop and advice," Robert said. "But that was free, of course."

"The kids would come to her when they had problems and needed a listening ear."

Like Cookie, Nally has a good rapport

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Adam Jones Emerald

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