

Leading history

Black History Month group of the day

The Tuskegee Airmen, the United States' first black fighter pilot group, was formed as both the 99th Fighter Squadron and the 332nd Fighter Group of the 15th Air Force, United States Army Air Force in 1941. The United States military was still segregated at this time, and black soldiers were still subject to second-class citizen status.

All 992 pilots selected for the program, mostly college graduates, were trained at the famed Tuskegee Institute in Alabama founded by Booker T. Washington. The unit's overall commander was Benjamin O. Davis Jr., who would later become the first black general of the Air Force.

In both training and active service, the members of

the Airmen endured tremendous racism from white soldiers. This included an incident in which 103 officers were court-martialed for insubordination after trying to enter one base's officers' club.

However, the Airmen proved themselves time and again, especially during the 10 months (June 1944 to April 1945) that they flew escort for the heavy bombers of the 15th Air Force. During the course of 200 missions, not one bomber under their care was shot down by German fighters. This stands as a record unequalled by any other air unit in the USAAF during the war.

The Tuskegee Airmen were deactivated in 1945, following the end of the war in Europe.

— Pat Payne

News brief

Asian Celebration comes to fairgrounds

Asian legends will come to life Feb. 15 and 16 at the Lane County Fairgrounds.

The 18th Annual Oregon Asian Celebration, presented by the Eugene/Springfield Asian Council, will

be held at the Lane Events Center from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. both days.

The theme of the event, "The Legends of Asia," will be conveyed with dances, martial arts demonstrations, a marketplace, an art exhibition and traditional Asian foods.

Locations such as Japan, India, Thailand, Nepal, Hawaii, Korea, the Philippines and the Middle East will be represented in the event, which organizers said attracts about 18,000

visitors every year.

The official opening ceremony will begin each day with Waka Daiko taiko drummers and the Chinese lion dance, to scare away evil spirits and usher in good fortune.

Daily admission is \$4 for adults and free for children 12 years and under. A \$1-off-admission coupon is available at all area Bi-Mart stores.

— Roman Gokhman

Marijuana

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"We have people coming from all over the state for our services," said Dalotto, who has been involved with the nutritional and health aspects of marijuana use his entire adult life. "We're creating a model organization that we hope to duplicate in other places."

Dalotto emphasized that one of the center's main goals is to educate the general public about the OMMA, which exempts patients from criminal penalties related to growing and possessing the herb. In order to apply for a medical marijuana card, patients must first be diagnosed with one of nine qualifying ailments, such as HIV/AIDS, Alzheimer's disease and cachexia, a condition of severe malnutrition.

Dalotto also said that he is in support of decriminalizing the drug.

"The American public seems to favor legalization, but it relies on politicians to pass legislation, he said. "There is no reason there should be a law against the plant unless they're using it to hurt someone."

Citing "Question 9," a recent Nevada initiative to legalize the drug, Dalotto said he believes

money plays heavily into the politics of marijuana.

"Any voter initiative for legalization always gets outspent by corporate and government initiatives," he said.

In spite of support from the Nevada

"There is no reason there should be a law against the plant unless they're using it to hurt someone."

Todd Dalotto
Compassion Center
president

da Conference of Police and Sheriffs — the state's largest police organization — the measure failed, with 61 percent of voters rejecting it. National drug czar John Walters made two trips to speak against marijuana use before voters went to the ballot.

But the Compassion Center has yet to raise ire from governing authorities in Oregon.

Dalotto said he's received no interference from state officials and minimal intervention from federal

officials. Last year, medical marijuana patient Leroy Stubblefield's plants were seized by Drug Enforcement Administration agent Michael Spasaro. Doctor Phillip Leveque, a physician at the Compassion Center for two days each month, also works at a variety of other OMMA centers across the state, including Voter Power in Portland. He has signed medical marijuana applications for more than 4,000 patients and said that the law's "strange" criteria cause confusion.

"The biggest problem is that judges don't understand the law, the district attorney doesn't understand the law and the police don't understand the law," Leveque said.

Medical marijuana user John Walsh, a Compassion Center patient and cannabis activist for many local organizations, said the law's gray areas make it "difficult for there to be enough available when they need it."

A benefit for the Compassion Center and Emerald Empire Hempfest 2003 will be held Saturday at 8 p.m. at the Campbell Club Cooperative.

Contact the Pulse reporter at aaronshakra@dailyemerald.com.

Love

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marriage ended five years ago. He said he still wondered and dreamed about his long ago romance with Vinton. He had tried locating her over the years, but had never had any success.

Vinton, on the other hand, was never married.

"I guess in the back of my mind I was always looking for someone who would measure up to him and no one ever did," she said.

In fact, Vinton said she never expected Hesse to come back into her life again at all. She had thrown away all of the letters he'd sent her, and all that remained of their long ago romance was an old picture of them together during his brief visit to California.

But Vinton and Hesse's love story wasn't finished. One month ago, Hesse was finally able to track down Vinton using google.com. Once he sent her a first e-mail to find out if she was the same girl he knew 30 years ago, Hesse and Vinton were able to rediscover their love for one another. Long phone conversations about their lives, dreams and hopes strengthened Vinton's and Hesse's feelings for each other, and convinced her to make the choice she couldn't all those years ago — move

to Connecticut to be with Hesse.

"I've decided that at this stage in my life, no matter what I have here, it's important to live out that dream," Vinton said.

Tina Hammock, a graduation specialist in the Office of the Registrar, has known Vinton for five years and said she's thrilled her friend found her long lost love. She said you usually only find heart-rending romance stories on movies or television, but Vinton and Hesse's story went past anything she had ever seen before.

Hammock said she will be very sad to see Vinton leave for Connecticut in September, but will make sure to keep in contact with her. She added that Vinton has been a good friend to her and even helped her find her husband's biological father.

Vinton and Hesse plan to spend their first Valentine's Day together driving to Seaside, visiting Washington and just spending time with each other. Vinton said she's thankful for the new chance she and Hesse have been given and doesn't have any second thoughts about moving to Connecticut.

"Just being together is the most important thing," she said. "You don't want to go to your death bed with regrets and what-ifs."

Contact the senior news reporter at jenniferbear@dailyemerald.com.

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