

New voting ballots replace punch cards in Lane County

Lane County voters will use the new ballots in all future elections, including Feb. 3's election on Measure 30

By Nika Carlson
News Reporter

Hanging chads are a thing of the past in Lane County.

Optical scan ballots and voting with dark, black pen marks have replaced the punch card ballots and the poked-out chads that were vilified in the contested 2000 presidential election.

The new voting system — also called marksense — arrived at Lane County Elections in time to be used for the Feb. 3 special election, and voters have already received the new ballots.

"The advantage in the optical system is for the voter," Lane County elections official Annette Newingham said. "It's easier for them to vote."

On the new ballots, voters indicate their decision by filling in the shaft of the arrow that points to their choice using a black pen or No. 2 pencil. Circling the arrow, crossing it out, or making a light mark will cause a machine to reject the ballot.

In comparison, voters using the punch card ballots vote by poking out a small, numbered square of paper that corresponds to their choice, numbered on a separate sheet of paper.

Incorrectly punched-out squares, called "hanging" or "pregnant" chads, caused the results of Florida's votes in the 2000 election to be disputed.

The paper squares, however, were never a problem in Oregon, Newing-

ham said.

"Here, we looked for hanging chads and removed them," she said.

Oregon is a voter-intent state, meaning Lane County election officials inspect ballots before they are counted so all votes are still included even if voters make mistakes that would cause the machines to reject the ballot.

"If voter intent is clear, we make sure it counts," Newingham said.

Political science Professor Priscilla Southwell said the new ballots are a great improvement over the punch card ballots.

"You still have a ballot in the old sense, but it's just a much more efficient and accurate method," she said.

The county has four machines that count the ballots, Newingham said. The machines tabulate the results which are recorded onto a disk. The disks are then hand-carried to a computer where the results are combined. The computer is not networked to any others, so hackers can't get into the system, she said.

Optical scan ballots also leave a paper trail — an Oregon requirement — so that votes can be recounted by hand.

There is little fear of manipulation of the system, a criticism that has frequently been leveled against electronic, touch-screen voting, which does not produce a paper record.

A study by The Miami Herald after the 2000 presidential election found 2,119 votes tabulated by the optical scan system went uncounted because of voter error in marking a choice.

Voter error, however, doesn't cause a problem in Oregon because of the

state's policy of inspecting each ballot.

"There always were a few hanging chads that were missed, (but) we never had an outcome of an election change because of recounts," Newingham said.

Southwell said the push against punch card voting came about directly in response to problems not only in Florida but in states throughout the country in the 2000 elections.

In 2002, federal legislators passed the Help America Vote Act — which gives money to states to pay for new, non-punch card voting systems — in addition to a number of election reforms. The Federal Election Commission reports that about 25 percent of the country used optical scan ballots in 1996, but that number has grown rapidly since the 2002 election reforms.

Lane County's \$540,000 system was paid for mostly in grants from the Help America Vote Act, Newingham said.

Lane County is the last of the 36 Oregon counties to get an optical scan ballot system in place. Oregon is one of the few states where all the counties will use optical scan ballots for all the 2004 elections, according to the office of Oregon's Secretary of State.

Southwell said she doesn't think the national push toward optical scan ballots will change any outcomes in upcoming elections.

"I just think it will cause fewer problems," she said. "If there is any sort of close race, it will prevent the sort of long delays we had in 2000."

Contact the city/state politics reporter at nikacarlson@dailyemerald.com.

Neon-rabbit creator speaks at UO

Eduardo Kac discusses his usage of technology and genetics to make art

By Chris Potter
Freelance Reporter

Many artists use a palette of colors to create a picture on canvas, but artist Eduardo Kac uses genetic code and cutting-edge technology to push art to new horizons. His most widely recognized work is a rabbit named Alba that he created about four years ago, which glows fluorescent green under special light.

Kac delivered a lecture about his work in genetics and communication

to students and community members at the Lillis Business Complex on Thursday.

Alba was created in a lab by inserting green fluorescent protein into a rabbit zygote. He described the rabbit as "a materialization of fantasy." Kac, the chairman of the University of Chicago Art and Technology program, intended on adopting the rabbit into his own home after it spent a short time at the lab. His effort was blocked, and the rabbit is still living at the lab. He responded by creating a "Free Alba" campaign complete with a flag picturing his exiled glowing-green pet on a white background.

Kac's transgenic art has created

controversy with people who question the ethics of manipulating genetic material. Concerns about human intervention in genetics were also raised at the lecture by audience members.

University student Amjad Faur asked Kac whether he would turn his child green. Kac responded by saying that he is not having a child.

"That decision determined that animal's fate," Faur said, referring to Alba. "If he feels like he has done something to better the world, God bless him."

Kac responded to concerns about the ethics of genetic manipulation by saying that it is not done only by

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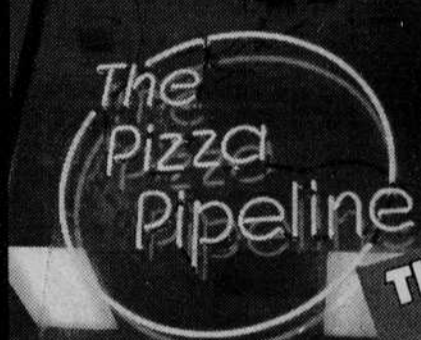
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