

INBOX

Omitted details important in understanding shooting

I read with interest your recent editorial about the Springfield officer that shot the 15-year-old who had stolen a pickup truck. It is an incident that I'm sure all parties involved wished hadn't happened. It is a tragic event and it serves everyone well to have the facts about what happened. That is why the omission of some very important details in your editorial has caused me to write.

The first omitted detail is that the 26-year-old Springfield man you mention as having witnessed the shooting was in the back seat of the police car of the officer involved in the shooting. It is unknown whether the man was in custody, but if he was and it is likely he was, he might not have an unbiased view of what transpired between the youth and the officer that had just arrested him.

Second, the witness was 50 feet away, which is not mentioned in your editorial. Further complicating

the reliability of the account of what was witnessed is that the shooting occurred around midnight, not broad daylight, another piece of information not included in your editorial. There is a big difference in viewing something in daylight compared to midnight, particularly when you are 50 feet away and in the back of a police car.

Finally, you mention that the officer was chasing the stolen truck with lights and sirens and that Porter had tried to evade the police before pulling over. The pickup

didn't turn into a well-lit public place, like an all-night convenience store; Porter turned into a Weyerhaeuser Co. parking lot and circled around before stopping on some elevated railroad tracks that run through the property. Had Porter been in a well-lit area, is it possible that the officer may have had a better view of what Porter did or didn't have in his hands?

That being said, I agree that we have to be on guard of police using less-than-impeccable judgment or using excessive force. I think a

better, more effective way to make this point would have been to write an editorial about the Register-Guard's editorial published June 29, "A premature call: DA should have waited until review was done" and take them to task as being part of the problem rather than the solution of calling for the use of certainty and impeccable judgment. The editorial is archived at www.register-guard.com/news/2005/06/29/ed.e.dit.copshooting.phn.0629.html

The editorial is ridiculous and irresponsible when the RG editorial writers wonder "why the officer fired only one shot if he believed his life was in danger." Had the officer emptied his weapon into Porter, would the Register-Guard have been praising the officer's thoroughness? Assuming that using more force than necessary is the definition of excessive force and that a single shot stopped the immediate threat to the officer, is it irresponsible for the Register-Guard to be condoning or even encouraging the use of excessive force by police officers? How many bullets are enough? As law-abiding citizens of Eugene and Springfield, should we be concerned that the Register-Guard is calling for the police to be firing more bullets than necessary to stop an immediate threat even though it endangers bystanders?

Police officers have a difficult enough job using good split-second judgment without being second-guessed by some middle-aged guy with a bad comb-over criticizing them from a cushy chair and ergonomically designed keyboard. To discharge a weapon at another person requires a split-second decision by a police officer who is trying to not only protect their own life, but also those around them. It is a big and important decision with enormous ramifications and officers know it. Is what the Register-Guard wrote now going to be in the back of the minds of officers when they need to use good judgment in one of those difficult decisions and decide they had better squeeze off another couple of rounds just to satisfy bad comb-over man?

Ken Frazer

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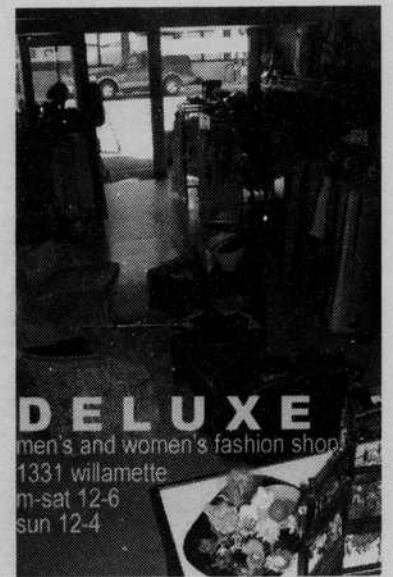
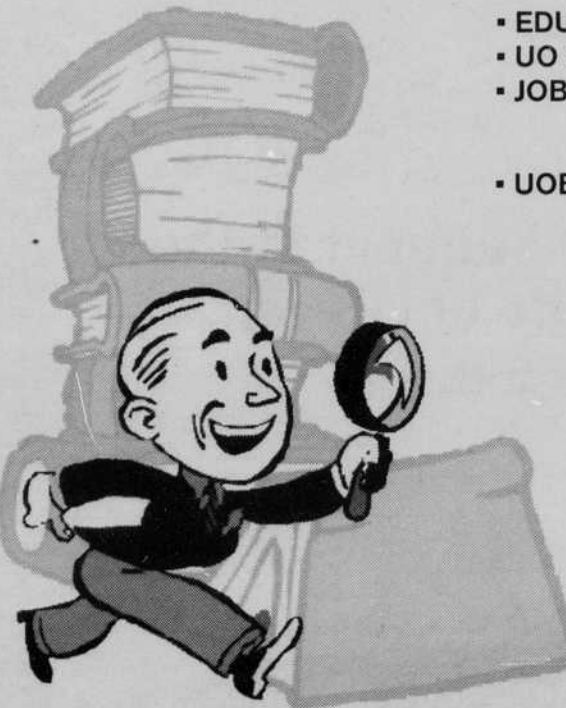
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