

"HEY, EUGENE!"

BY ERIC D. OLSON

"Why is everyone running?" I asked myself, rhetorically, when entering the city limits of Eugene.

As everyone knows, "Track Town, USA" has a long history of running and the infamous making of a shoe. Major running events, like last year's Olympic trials, are held here.

Eugene is the perfect weekend getaway for the queer traveler from Portland. An easy 90-mile drive south on Interstate 5, the second largest city (currently) in the state offers a plethora of activities. Marketed as an outdoor recreation town influenced by a countertype mentality, Eugene sits at the southern end of the Willamette Valley.

The midsize city rests in a perfect location to take advantage of its nearby wineries, all-season Cascades, and mid-state coastal regions. That said, I didn't even make it outside the city limits on a recent long weekend in July.

The town itself is part hippie, part athlete, part outdoor adventurer, and part cultural highbrow. Eugene seems to provide greater selections of food co-ops, arts events and gay, lesbian, bi and trans resources compared to any other city its size.

I stayed at the lovely Augusta House, a bed and breakfast overlooking the city. Part lesbian-owned, the amenity-studded house (free use of GPS systems and laptops) evokes a decorative style of Williams Sonoma Home. However, I was most intrigued by the "spiritual menu" that offers books, CDs and other motivation media.

The most comfortable bed I slept in all summer was here, and a made-to-order breakfast was brought in on a cart. My meal included scrumptious eggs Benedict with a side of seasonal fruit. Introductory rates begin at \$119, and most rooms are larger than a Pearl condo (www.augustahouse.net).

Because splurging at the Augusta House can constrain one's wallet, I was cautious about my spending for the duration of my visit. The good news is that I succeeded in my goal, thanks to numerous low-cost, high-



Just a few of the hip, cultural and GLBT-friendly EUGENE TREASURES: (clockwise from top left) The master suite at Augusta House, the Smith Family Bookstore on Willamette Street, and the outdoor courtyard at Fifth Street Market.



impact options in Eugene.

I continued my day at lesbian-owned Eugene Coffee Company on 18th and Chambers (www.eugenecoffee.com). The baristas here are extremely knowledgeable about the city and helped me plan the remainder of my weekend.

After charging up on caffeine, I spent some time at the free Owen Rose Garden. Boasting over 400 varieties of roses along the Willamette River, the garden rivals any plot in Portland (www.eugene-or.gov/portal). This is an ideal place for an intimate picnic, or well, a jog. Nearby Skinner Butte Park provides panoramic views of the city.

Another fantastic and frugal place I visit-



PHOTOS BY ERIC OLSON

on Seventh Street, and numerous arts organizations call the Hult home.

In contrast, the Oregon County Fair "creates events... that nourish the spirit...and transform culture in magical, joyous, and healthy ways." Every July, the three-day event features musicians and artisans in a counter-culture village. Tickets start at \$18 (www.oregoncountryfair.org).

If you can't wait for next year's summer festivals, then head down to Eugene this Saturday, August 8 to experience the Eugene/Springfield Pride Festival in Alton Baker Park (www.eugenepride.org).

I also spent time at the Fifth Street Public Market, a city block "destination area" of restaurants, courtyards, coffee shops and various retail boutiques. I grabbed a Greek salad for \$6 at Café Glendi and headed to one of the outside sitting areas (www.5stmarket.com).

Fueled by a collegiate crowd, nightlife in Eugene is ample. I began one of my evenings at gay-friendly Diablos (959 Pearl Street). Red-upholstered booths make a welcoming place to grab a Ninkasi's Triceraphops Double IPA (\$3.50).

Without a doubt, the libations from Ninkasi Brewing are the beer connoisseur's choice in Eugene. You can find many of Ninkasi's beers on tap along the bars and cafes at the intersection of Broadway and Olive Street.

For the non-bar scene, check out Eugene's Q Center on 1309 Lincoln Street (www.queereugene.com). The center hosts a variety of activities—a recent online calendar showed movie nights and barbecues happening in July at the active center.

Eugene appears to be a four-season destination, and I look forward to visiting the city from different points of view...fall football games, winter skiing and spring running events. If the summer is any indication of Eugene's identity, I will most definitely be back.

Combined with an affordable culture menu, progressive attitude and countless outdoor options, Eugene is a worthwhile weekend getaway for the gay, lesbian, bi and trans traveler. 

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