

opinion

'Ageism' prejudice apparent on campus

By Sandy Carter
Of The Print

A distinctly American prejudice exists on this campus, that surpasses feminism, anti-feminism, racism or sexism. The name for this prejudice is "Ageism," and it directly affects the lives of everyone, everywhere across the United States.

After all, who among us does not want to grow old? Ironically, many Americans shun the very group they hope eventually to belong to!

Elderly people suffer from more than the humiliation of ageism. They suffer in many ways. Examine your own feelings as you read Robert Butler, Director of the National Institute on Aging define ageism: He describes it as an attitude that leads people, "to ignore the frequently poor social and economic plight of older people."

Why? To avoid dealing with the reality that our productivity-oriented society has little use for those (who are) regarded—however unfairly—as non-productive, and to attempt to avoid (for a time, at least) reminders of the personal reality of our own aging and death.

How many of you know an elderly person who hasn't suffered this kind of attitude when seeking employment, housing, or education?

Although the old make up only 11 percent of our total population, the September-October 1979 issue of Aging Magazine tells us that, "Forty-four percent of rural American sub-standard housing is occupied by persons over 65. And almost two-thirds of those oldsters live in homes at least six years old!"

How will you feel, when, as well as having to adapt to increasingly restricted physical capabilities and shrinking

financial resources, you face this scenario at age 70 or so: You live on a fixed income, can't drive anymore without strangers making obscene gestures at you, the roof leaks, your family lives out of state, the nearest bus stop is three miles away, and you're tired of always having to ask for help from others.

Even with these kinds of problems, in areas of voter responsibility and community awareness, the elderly set examples that the rest of us are hard pressed to match.

This same 11 percent of the overall population makes up 20 percent of all registered voters, and had an 8 percent higher turnout at the polls in 1974 than the 18-64 group.

Newspaper surveys consistently show the elderly to be the most faithful of all readers, as seniors make the effort to stay informed.

Housing seems to be the greatest of all the problems plaguing older people today, one which all of their other worries come back to in the end.

When a house or the lack of one is the paramount economic concern in an old person's life, all other basic needs must take a back seat to the problem of a roof over the head.

So, what's the housing situation like locally?

Steve Scroggs, a senior citizen housing developer for H.A.S.P. (the Housing And Services Program) talks about waiting lists:

"The sad truth," he says, "is that in the greater metropolitan Portland area, most housing authority and union housing holdings have waiting lists that fluctuate massively, but it's not unusual to be backed up to 1,000. A given facility might have anywhere from 800 to 1,500 people waiting."

It may be pointed out at this juncture that many of these people don't have time to waste waiting

What is their alternative? In Clackamas County, it's nursing homes, according to Susan Hill, of the College's "Rent-A-Grandparent" program.

Hill says, of housing in our county, "It's abominable, with only a one percent vacancy rate. That means that a senior, if he loses his home, for whatever reason, has no alternative but a nursing home."

Unfortunately, to many old people a nursing home is synonymous with a place to die.

What can we do, as individuals, to fight the low-income elderly housing shortage? A lot.

We, the residents and voters of Clackamas County, have an opportunity to get behind a proposal which could:

—Help to alleviate all of these problems of the low income elderly

—Provide valuable new curriculum for students of CCC

—Create a rich and on-campus social and cultural mix which could erode that separation of young and old which is the artificial basis for ageism

If approved, the plan would see a three to five acre parcel of the College property transformed into a low-income elderly housing complex with extensive curriculum ties to our healthcare and social service related programs.

How do the old folks that choose to live in a modern, age-segregated housing unit, adapt?

In an article from *Human Behavior Magazine*, June, 1979, Frances Carp, Ph.D., of the Wright Institute at Berkely, reported on a long-term study she made of the effects of improving the housing of needy senior citizens, on their social, psychological, and physical well-being.

"Provision of appropriate housing and living arrangements," she continued, "may not only improve psychological and social well-being during the later years, but may also extend those years and benefit health status during them."

Long term benefits aside, we know that just the act of moving brings about stress and "ecological shock" at first. But, many older persons are willing to accept the "initial discomfort of a new environment, for the advantages in store," Carp found.

Access to an educational institution would be considered a tremendously exciting opportunity to many elderly people. Hear what *Aging Magazine* has

ASG deals in buffoonery

What is the world coming to? Just when you think you're safe and the perils and insanity of the world can't reach you where you live, something like this ruins your faith.

Just this week our ASG put on a series of charades that is making many people wonder who voted for them. Their wishy-washy attitudes are enough to make someone decide that it might be better to abolish student government for this year and hope to do better next year. In our opinion, we think it's a waste of time to have student government in a community college when they make themselves and us look foolish.

The issue of the 50 flags is a real laughing matter. Don Porter, our president, is not earning many brownie points with his show. First he agrees to take the flags down and the next day vetoes his own decision, while ASG members Phil Boitnott, Richard Weiss, and others are changing statements and generally throwing mud in everyone's faces.

In our opinion, there are more important things going on that the ASG could put their energy towards, than whether or not they are going to take down 50 flags because they don't agree with President Carter. Big deal. We thought the flags were there to show we still supported and remembered the 50 hostages in Iran? It seems to us that a group like our ASG would think of something else, like burning effigies of the president to show their displeasure. Well, guys?

Now we say, if you in ASG don't have anything better to do than sit around and look foolish, then get out and let somebody else give it a try. Remember, you are supposed to represent us. We voted for you, and we sure have other things on our minds than whether or not to raise flags. Why don't you come down from your clouds and find out what the students want, not what you think they need?

to say on the subject of continuing education:

"One area of service potential is that of intellectual stimulation through education. Pre-mature dependency and loss of a sense of worth can be combated effectively through education-oriented programs. Yet it is an approach rarely considered. Whenever educational opportunities are available," the article goes on,

"The response is impressive. How intense and universal the desire for more knowledge is among the aged can be seen by the fact that a university exclusively for the elderly has been established in Toulouse, France, with an enrollment of over 1,000 students—average age 70. And as much as the College would be a resource for the old people, they would in turn be a resource for the College, with unlimited possibilities for skill and experience-sharing exchanges.

According to Pat Lantz, College division chairperson, within the housing complex would be "potential for formal instruction programs in housing management, activity direction, social and recreational management, food service management, housekeeping, home/health care," and many other areas.

Keeping in mind the fact that the project would be financed by the state of Oregon, and not

the College district, it is hard to find a flaw in a plan which could do such good for so many. But "Ageists" among us will find an objection somehow, which brings me to what I see as the last but equally important advantage to pursuing the project.

If we are ever going to conquer ageism, our weapon must be familiarity. No longer do we have three generational families. Aging and dying have been removed from the view of young people.

To many small children today, an old, old face, etched with the smiles and tears of decades, is a freak, a monster, an object of ridicule.

Apparently, the parents of these unfeeling kids have never taught them the old-fashioned respect for age that was once a part of our heritage.

But I can see the pendulum starting to swing back, in Gray Panthers, in Rent-A-Grandparent, in Community College housing projects, in second careers, and movies starring George Burns.

Maybe we will come back to loving our old people.

Rather than the faceless gray we paint them, old people are the rainbow of individuality and stored experience that we all will become if we play our cards right. To ignore their needs is to ignore our own, to hate them is to hate our future.

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