Azdell enjoys work

By Steve Lee

Curtis Azdell, 79, a lifelong hard worker, is the man responsible for irrigating the garden plots at the College. An intelligent man, he spends his time trying to stay employed and keep busy.

Curtis is a silver-haired old gentleman, bespectacled, wise, interesting, and a man who knows what he is about.

After two days of hunting, Photo Editor Duffy Coffman and I found Curtis irrigating the garden spot behind the maintenance barn on campus. We slogged out to talk with him, dodging sprinkler spray the whole time.

After introducing ourselves, we followed him around, asking questions as he worked at moving the water pipes. He was dressed in bibbed raingear and rubber boots, and wore a hat that made a perfect ring around his head (Duffy noticed it when Curtis took his hat off for a picture).

For the last three years, Curtis has been working in the gardens. He got the job when, at age 76, he was referred to the College by the unemployment office. The college put him to work, but CETA paid his salary. All Curtis does is irrigate. His job helps to supplement his social security. Soon he'll stop working for the school until Spring, when the gardens are planted again.

Most county, state, and other government jobs have a mandatory retirement age of 70 years of age. Because of that, Curtis doesn't know is he'll be able to return to his job in the gardens next year.

Born in February of 1901, Curtis will be 80 soon. Raised in the little town of Monmouth, Illinois, about 250 miles from Chicago, he came west to Oregon in 1945 to raise turkeys. He worked for a "turkey hatcher" until he was 65. "We raised a million turkeys a year." In thirty years, he never got tired of the gobbling.

After that, Curtis was a taxi cab driver for the old Oregon City Taxi Cab Co. until 1977. "I got out of it before it got too rough. At 12 in the morning you never knew who you were going to pick up. We tried to get people to ride in the front seat so they couldn't get behind you and hit you in the head. We had some guys get bumped off."

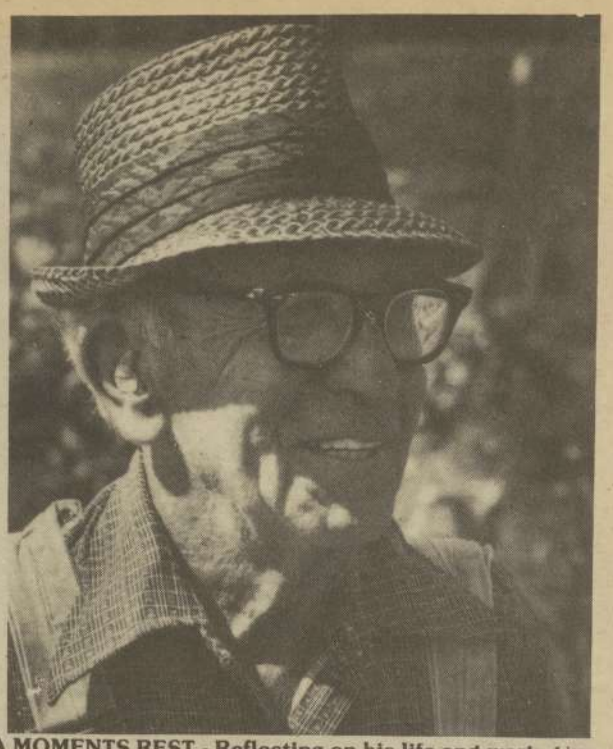
Since age 65, Curtis has been fighting to stay employed. "They say they don't discriminate, but they always make some sort of excuse." I checked with CETA and found this incorrect. CETA is willing to help anyone of any age to find a job. The crux of the matter is that, again, most county, state and other government jobs have a mandatory retirement age of 70. With this in mind, Curtis is fortunate to be working at all on campus, since it is a county employer.

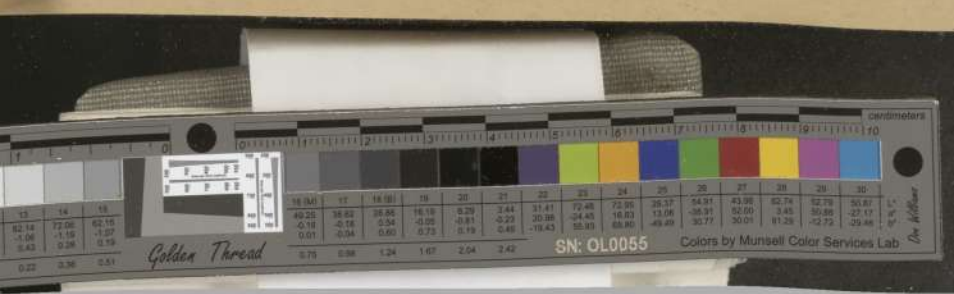
Since Curtis is 79 years old, we asked why he still wanted to work. "Why, it keeps you busy, you meet people."

Duffy asked one final question of Curtis. What was his wisest saying? What piece of knowledge would he like to impart to younger people that they could pattern their lives after. He answered, "Try to get a job that you like." He went on to explain that people that weren't satisfied with their work were the ones that have drinking, drug, and smoking problems. "It's not good to do a job you don't like because it'll make a wreck out of you, even if you get paid for it. It's better to be happy."

When asked how he liked working out in the gardens, Curtis responded, "It's worked out real good. I just try to keep from stumbling over the weeds out here."

Just then the sprinkler turned on the three of us. Duffy and I dodged the spray, but Curtis just bent over and turned the water off.



A MOMENTS REST - Reflecting on his life and work, Curtis says he likes his job . . . "I want to keep working, even if I had a lot of money I'd still work . . . I like this job I'd like to work here next year if they'll hire me."

Photos by Duffy Coffman