

# Hooley sings Oregon

By Joe McFeron  
Staff Writer

John Hooley says his voice didn't go bad all-of-a-sudden; it's always been that way.

"It's just that I think these songs are important," he told students in Mike Kepler's Oregon Literature class last week, "and I'd feel silly if I had to stand here chanting and slapping my knee, so I brought my guitar."

Hooley, division chairman, humanities and social sciences at Clackamas Community College, has collected songs about Oregon's heritage for over 15 years.

"I got quite a few of the stories from my mother," Hooley said. "They have been handed down for generations, sort of in the 'Roots' tradition. A lot of my relatives were not certifiably crazy -- but close. When a place had no village idiot or town drunk they invented one. A lot of times my relatives supplied them.

"Uncle Noah was the town drunk in any town he lived in," Hooley said. "He made his living by moving in with widows until their life insurance policies ran out. All the relatives, being strict Menonites, prayed for Uncle Noah and his sinful ways for 50 years.

"Finally, in his 70's, Uncle Noah got married. Then he got cancer and became a Christian. When he died, a lot of the relatives were perturbed that he'd weaseled out at the last minute," Hooley said.

"When I was a kid we couldn't watch the NBA game," he said. "My dad and I would make toys together; or the whole family would sit around and tell stories and sing songs. The folk tradition is as strong as anywhere."

With that, Hooley strummed his guitar and broke into song.

TOWSER JENKINS

Once I had a yeller dog  
His name was Towser Jenkins.

The butcher cut his tail off  
With a cleaver.

Towser had his trademark  
The cats in town,  
And when he spotted 'em  
They never leave her.

He wore his legs all stubby  
Milk-cows round the county,  
Had bunyons on his knees  
Jumpin' ditches.

Had all the hair worn off  
From chasin cats around the county,  
But empty is the doghouse  
Towser's poisoned.

Yes he's gone to look for  
Clear across the Swannee River,  
No more will boys baptize  
The sewer.

No more homeward will he  
With ten cats tied on his tail,

For empty is the doghouse  
Towser's poisoned.

---

**'I'd feel silly if  
I had to stand  
here chanting and  
slapping my  
knee ... so I  
brought my  
guitar.'**

---



Photo by Jenni Wheeler

John Hooley, chairman of the Division of Humanities and Social Science, was guest speaker/singer last week in Mike Kepler's Oregon Literature class. Hooley, who doesn't claim expert vocal talents, strummed, hummed and told folklore stories to the CCC students.

