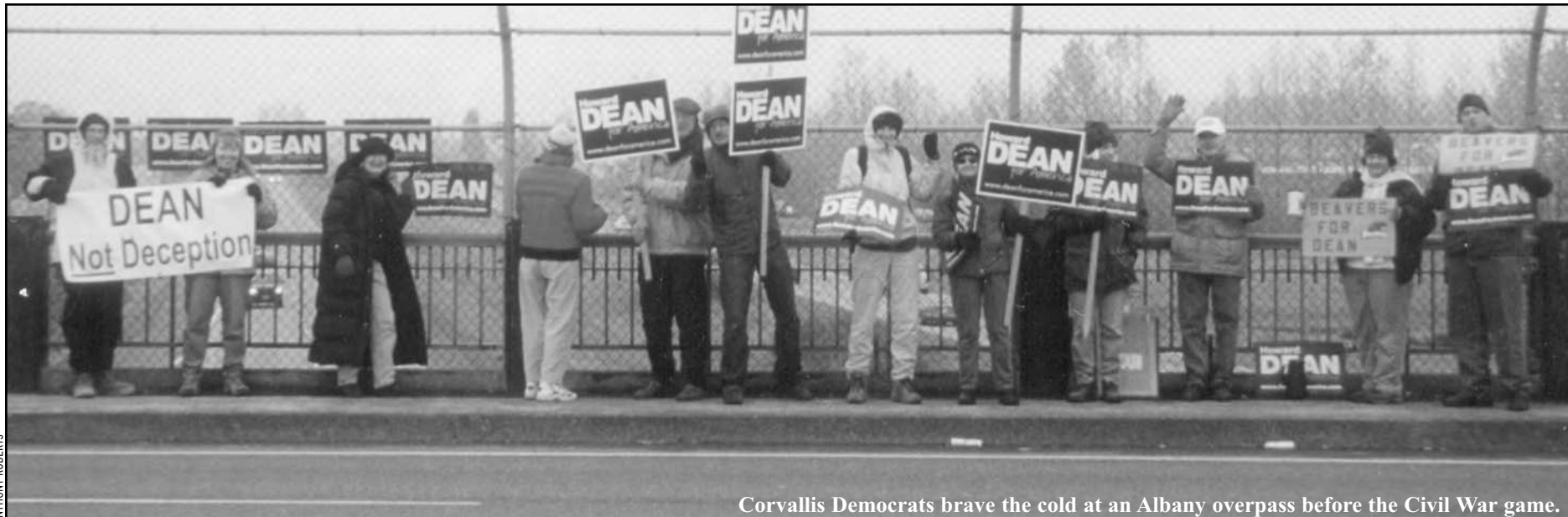




Corvallis Democrats brave the cold at an Albany overpass before the Civil War game.

BEN'S BUNCH

Corvallis political newcomer Ben Swartley inspired by Dean.

BY ANTHONY ROBERTS

Ben Swartley owns the Peacock Bar in Corvallis on Monday nights. A regular for one dollar PBR pints and Monday Night Football, the research assistant and organizer of the local Howard Dean effort sits at the center of the bar, right beneath the television, and the taps.

If you don't see Swartley — his 6'2" sturdy frame is hard to miss — you will hear him. His voice booms as he greets newcomers, most of whom he knows. "Hey, how about 'dem Birds this weekend," he asks another Philadelphia native who walks into the bar.

At first glance, Swartley appears to be the quintessential man's man, slugging a pint of beer and shoveling down cheap tacos. But the 31-year-old research assistant in Oregon State's Department of Forest Science is just as comfortable talking about his beloved Philadelphia Eagles as he is discussing the nuances of regional French dialects in Africa, where he spent four years with the Peace Corps.

This rugged individualism makes Swartley an ideal fit for Oregon's Dean campaign, which is not at all a traditional campaign. There is not a single paid employee in the state, just a web of enthusiasts spun together by a common goal. Dean supporters

always mention they are not employees of the official campaign, yet they are encouraged by Dean headquarters to "speak to anybody and everybody to get out our reasons for why we support Governor Dean," according to Swartley.

They do this principally through Meetup.com, the site used to organize monthly meetings/pep rallies across the country. The Nov. 5 meetup in Corvallis has an unusual air of excitement, with Oregon Secretary of State Bill Bradbury showing up to stump for Dean. Those who attend represent a surprising cross section (in terms of age) of Corvallis Democrats and independent voters. There are 45 people, and perhaps a half dozen are younger than 30. Many more are retired.

Many Dean supporters, including Swartley, still share a common characteristic — they have never worked on a campaign before. The fiery former governor seems to have introduced a new segment of America to politics. Many of them explain their attraction to the candidate in two words: "No bullshit."

Like John McCain in 2000, Dean has at least created the perception that his campaign is all about issues, not slick talk. He is brutally direct, and that chord resonates with the hundreds of thousands of people across America who spend one night each month gathered in rooms like the Tunnison Community Center in Corvallis to plot a strategy to take Dean from the governor's mansion to the White House.

STODGY OLD CORVALLIS?

Sitting in a room full of like-minded people, it's easy to believe the entire country is ready to serve the current White House residents with an eviction notice. In reality, America is split down the middle, and there is a perception that Corvallis tends to fall on the right side of that divide. The community of 53,000 is set among farms, fields and fruit stands and is small compared to Eugene's population of 138,000. Oregon State University is roughly the same size as its southern academic partner, but is widely seen as a Mecca of agricultural studies, not a hotbed of activism. "It's different in cow town," jokes Sam Sappington, a Dean supporter who has been involved with the Corvallis effort for about six months.

Swartley laughs at the perception of Corvallis as a stodgy old farming community. He suggests a visit to the Benton County Courthouse for a taste of the town's liberal sensibility. A group has held an hour-long

peace vigil there every day since Oct. 7, 2001, when the U.S. began to bomb Afghanistan.

About two dozen people stand outside the building on Fourth Street, holding signs reading "No War," "Truth is Replaced by Silence," and "We Support People, Not Policy." Across the street, a lone protestor stands in favor of the Bush administration. The group is an average size for the daily vigil, according to Michael Creighton, one of the founders of the event. The size fluctuates based on what's happening in Washington, D.C. "When people get angry or frustrated about what's going on," Creighton said, "they'll come down."

Most of the supporters are from Corvallis and Albany, though members of the international community have stopped by to share their support. That includes members of the Middle Eastern community, though only in passing. Susan Burke, who attends the vigils regularly, says most of them are reluctant to join in protests for fear they will suffer repercussions from the government. "They say, 'I can't stand here, but thank you,'" Burke says.

The response to the vigil on this particular evening is overwhelmingly positive. Drivers wave, honk and offer encouragement. Corvallis resident Bill Glassmire admits that it's not always like this. "One of the reasons we just spent some time in England," he says in reference to a recent 10-month stint abroad, "is that my wife couldn't stand hearing children shout 'kill them all.' It was eating at her soul."

Members of the vigil see their share of middle fingers from angry hawks, but it is



Ben Swartley



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