



Jefferson Smith, founder of the Bus Project



Kitty Piercy, candidate for Eugene mayor, ushers volunteers onto the bus.



Erin Gray, a junior at Springfield H.S., at the door of Charles Wright, Jr.

It began when Smith, a graduate from the UO and Harvard Law School, was schmoozing with cronies in the Rogue Pub, a short distance from the campus of Portland State University. They all shared a lament that there was a critical need to engage disaffected youth in the political process. The stats were grim. Those between 18 and 34 comprise 30 percent of the voter population, and only 20 percent of that group register to vote.

After a few schooners of microbrew, Smith came up with the idea of acquiring a bus, loading it with youthful activists, and touring Oregon to get out the vote and encourage progressive thought. He kept his day job as a corporate lawyer for Stoel Rives, but decided, in that saloon, to dedicate himself to changing the legislative landscape.

More than one participant in the project has assured me that their boyish, charismatic founder is definitely headed for high office. Smith says he doesn't have political aspirations but rather suffers political trepidations. It's an uplifting attitude I find neither jaded nor naïve but rather well-timed.

"I believe we can create a constituency for the common good," he told *Oregonian* columnist S. Renee Mitchell. "We're trying to raise the level of debate. Government is either evil or good depending on what we do."

Smith has assembled a core group of volunteers for the Bus Project who call what they do "a new kind of campaign: no television, no radio, no big money, no single candidate or special interest. Just people, issues they care about, a square coastal state and a bus."

The project's godfather is former Governor John Kitzhaber who was taken with the bus concept and lent his full support. He says that he was apolitical for his first two decades and easily understands why the political system is no longer relevant to many young people. As a way to reconnect youthful voters, he says we should create small, activist governments to replace paternalistic administrations.

Kitzhaber was at the EcoTrust building in Portland in Spring 2002 to officially christen the bus with a bottle of champagne he smashed across its blunt bow. After the ceremony the 10-wheeler hit the road and an estimated 70,000 doors were knocked on during that year's electoral cycle. Most of the door-rappers were under 30.

Others who took a seat included Secretary of State Bill Bradbury, Congressman Earl Blumenauer, and former Gov. Barbara Roberts, who said it was "The most exciting thing in Oregon politics in 20 years."

Now, in this fiercely political year, the Oregon Bus Project is all over the map with an office located in southeast Portland and free beer and pizza rallies held on Third Thursdays at Disjecta, a trendy watering hole in Northeast Portland.

At a Disjecta blowout, held Feb. 19, the bus brigade was joined by PCUN (Northwest Treeplanters and farmworkers United), OABA (Oregon Assembly for Black Affairs), BRO (Basic Rights for Oregon), NARAL Pro-Choice, and Planned Parenthood Advocates to collaborate and boogie all night long. A poster for the shindig asked, "Who says the political process can't be sexy?"

Now it was Eugene's turn. Smith bounded onstage to deliver a pep talk. He started with an historical note that the Greeks had a word for citizens who refused to vote. They called them idiots.

He added that this traditional apathy has led to the current

crisis of volunteerism and closed by challenging the canvassers to "recapture the spirit of community" that led their city to political prominence three decades ago.

The last speaker was the star of the show, Kitty Piercy, a Planned Parenthood executive and former state representative, who said she was excited about the busloads of supporters



Bus on the Move

Here's an itinerary of spring trips planned by the Lane Branch of the Oregon Bus Project:

On Friday, April 16, founder Jefferson Smith will talk at the Eugene City Club at noon and the bus will hit the road for Don Hampton on Saturday, April 17.

On Saturday, May 1, campaign volunteers for Betty Taylor will meet at Tsunami Books at 10 am for a rally before embarking in the bus. Contact volunteer coordinator Kate O'Donnell at kato@efn.org or 344-1946.

A bus trek is planned for Andrea Ortiz on Saturday, May 15. For more information, call her campaign manager, Michael Carrigan at 342-1953. If your weekends are jammed, ask the organizers about weekday bus outings.

For general information about the local activities of the Bus Project, contact coordinator James Mattiace at 541-914-0293 or jamesmattiace@yahoo.com. And for statewide bus action, contact Jennifer Yokum at Jennifer@busproject.org, try bus@busproject.org or investigate the project's websites: www.secretplan.org and www.busproject.org.

The Oregon Bus Project is also affiliated with an informative, sleek, punk-friendly 'zine called *The Zephyr*, (www.zephyrmagazine.com). This 'zine will provide details on clumps of grassroots sprouting throughout the Oregon Territory.

Donations may be mailed to:

Oregon Bus Project-Lane

P.O. Box 242

Eugene, OR 97440

who were about to head for the neighborhoods. She explained that she has had a long history with the young people of Oregon.

Continuing the theme that began with my wistful reverie and Smith's toss of the sociopolitical gauntlet, Piercy insisted that we had to get beneath the glossy veneer of progressive politics and make things happen.

Wow! I liked her for Eugene mayor. She is a no-nonsense straight-shooter, gracious when talking about the guy she may replace, yet firm in her vision of changes needed in the oft-stodgy Emerald Empire.

After an interview rehearsal held by coordinators Ethan Firpo and Slade Leeson and Smith's hilarious demonstration on how to model Kitty Piercy's lawn signs as sandwich boards, the canvassers headed for their cars or boarded the bus parked in the alley next to the warehouse turned staging area.

Recalling Ken Kesey's notorious assertion that, "You are either on the bus or off the bus," I clambered onto the 1980 GMC 14-seater adorned with a Kitty for Mayor banner.

It was a little squirt compared to the 1978 charter bus I rode in last month on a Bus Project cruise to canvas Lincoln City for Measure 30.

We had meandered up and down hilly 'hoods, chatting with Lincoln City coasties. Some were friendly, others were tight-lipped or non-responsive and a few of our inquiries were met with no response other than a moving shadow or a ripple of a curtain.

I was curious to see how Eugeneans would respond but first, I snapped my seatbelt and quizzed pilot Cary Thompson about the bus. He said it was once used to transport seniors at the Kaufman Center on Jefferson Street. Thompson said he had participated in early discussions to start a Eugene political action committee (PAC) with a progressive tilt. After the success of the Portland bus, he decided to buy the rig he calls the "busette." It's too small for a cadre of politicians beating bushes throughout the state, but it's suitable for local campaigns.

He laughed as he shared the news that insurance coverage for the bus was nailed down at 8 pm last night. We might be rag-tag radicals but we were street-legal!

On the way to assigned streets, Thompson staged a drive-by of the Saturday Market. The bus gang hollered and waved at the crowd of vendors and browsers, exhorting them to remember to vote.

As the bus entered the westside, Adrienne Stuart, a glib, comedic cheerleader for the cause, fired one-liners at pedestrians and folks gardening in their front yards. Her comment about the bus was, well, it does lean a little to the left.

At 18th Avenue and Pierce, a trio of students from Springfield High School disembarked to start their canvas. Juniors Erin Gray and Tia Léon and sophomore Matt McCune agreed to let me tag along.

As we hoofed south toward the foothills, working one side of the street, we outdistanced a postal carrier who reflected that he actually earned wages to go door-to-door. The novice canvassers' first few encounters left them a bit edgy but they loosened up as responses to their inquiries blended into a mixed bag of rude dudes slamming doors, a few friendly "you betchas," a "come back later, give me some time to think,"