

news Briefs

SLOSHY SANTAS SING & SHWILL

'Twas the week before Christmas, and all through Eugene, the Santas were crawling across the pub scene.

And if you were at one of the 10 venues that the Santas crashed on the night of Friday, Dec. 17, rest assured, you did *not* hallucinate. There really were up to 65 jolly old elves tossing back tequila and singing naughty Christmas carols right next to you.

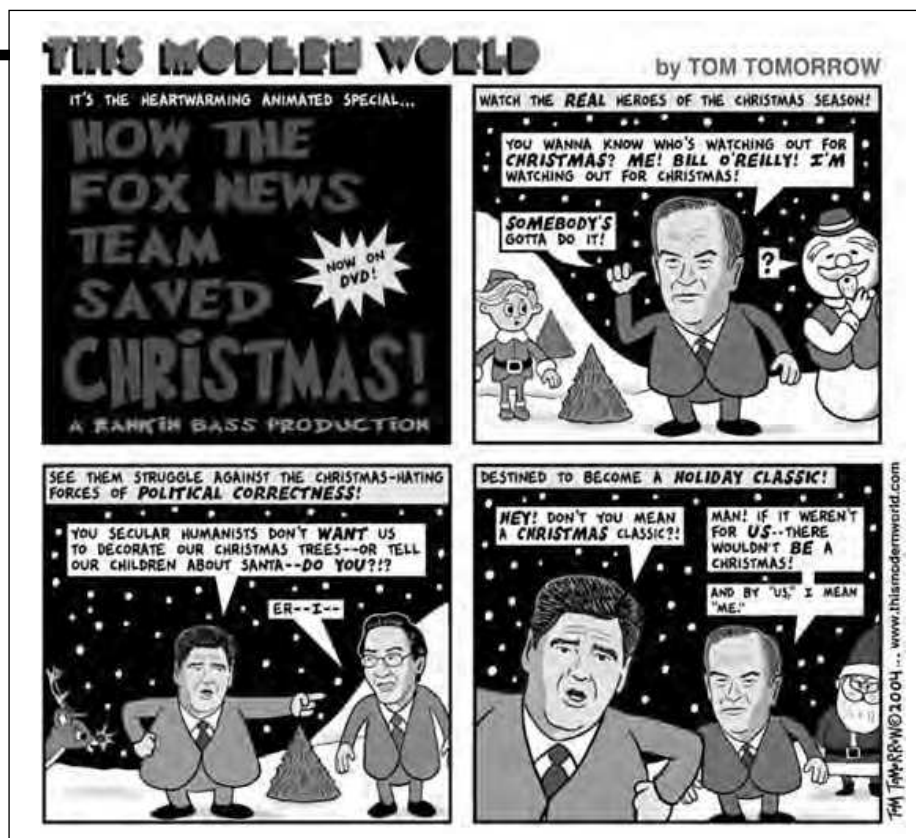
The 8th Annual Santa Claus Pub Crawl started at the McDonald Theatre and wound its way through Eugene pubs

including Rogue Brewery, Jogger's, Diablo's and the Silver Dollar. And yes, the sloshy Santas had designated drivers (the reindeer were in short supply).

The leader, Santa Juke, was saintly in his velvet suit and luxurious white beard. Drinking only soda all night, he made the rules clear to his co-Santas: Pace yourself. Obey all local laws. And don't scare any kids.

Santa Juke was inspired to organize the pub crawl after attending the 1995 SantaCon in Portland, a three-day event sponsored by the Portland Cacophony Society. As the Santas sang Christmas carols, the Portland Police donned riot gear and braced themselves for elven anarchy. But the Santas weren't then, and still aren't, interested in making trouble. "We're not Santarchy," Santa Juke says. "It's a civil pub crawl. We're just some jolly elves spreading holiday cheer."

This year's crawl brought the biggest Santa turnout yet, and fellow pub-goers received them well. One man bought all the Santas a round of drinks for their caroling. "It's just one of those things that just



happens when you're Santa," Santa Juke says. "You haven't lived until you've seen 65 Santas do a Santa conga at your establishment."

Santa Juke organizes the pub crawl through word-of-mouth and his website, www.santajuke.com. "Everybody loves Santa," he says. "You walk down the street and cars honk, people wave, and a good time is had by all." — Kera Abraham

BIG BOOST FOR PRISONS

Gov. Kulongoski's proposed 2005/07 budget includes a "largely unnoticed" 32.2 percent increase in funding for state

Department of Corrections (DOC) programs, according to Ron Chase, director of Sponsors, Inc., a non-profit organization that provides transition services for ex-offenders.

The budget hike raises spending on the DOC to \$1.072 billion, just \$6.7 million short of the governor's proposed budget for higher education and community colleges.

Chase, in his December Sponsors newsletter, says the corrections budget is growing due to the need to "backfill" the loss of federal funds from the last biennium, to fund an expected boost in inmate population, and to help pay for new and expanded prisons around the state. But he says the budget actually reduces existing

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• This issue of *EW* has our first bilingual news story in many years, and we hope to do more of them, depending on space and reader response. It seems appropriate in this case, since our story is about a local Spanish language radio station that's taking hold in the valley. La "X" is now broadcasting 24/7 with a strong signal at 660 AM, and includes a morning call-in show. Its sister station, Air America, is now broadcasting at 1450 AM with a weaker signal, but it can still be picked up most places in Eugene. Air America offers some great discussions and rants mixed in with irritating national ads regarding weight loss, hair loss and erection loss. KOPT 1450 joins public radio at 89.7 FM and 1280 AM to provide welcome relief from right-wing talk shows. Both the new Spanish-language and Air America stations are owned by developers Suzanne Arlie and John Musumeci, targets of our editorial barbs over the years. But this time they have our support.

• Something's wrong with this picture. At the same time Oregon is putting money into an innovative gambling treatment program for prisoners whose crimes are gambling-related, Gov. Kulongoski is pro-

posing expanding legal gambling options. The November American Correctional Association newsletter mentions a creative program at Oregon's women's prison, Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville, to help inmates deal with problem gambling. It's estimated that 20 to 30 percent of the inmates have histories of problem gambling, and that 86 percent of those who reported problem gambling admitted to committing crimes such as identity theft, theft, and shoplifting which are related to gambling. "Aside from a casino at 2 am, there's a higher proportion of problem gamblers in prison than almost anywhere else," says Jeffrey Marotta, manager of gambling treatment programs for the Oregon Department of Human Services. The governor proposes expansion of state-sponsored gambling to include on-line slots, which are far more addictive than video poker because they require less "skill." Is this the way to run a state?

• We hear of some last-minute politicking by Mayor Torrey as the calendar runs out on his tenure. He's pushing a Dec. 30 emergency meeting of the Metropolitan Policy Committee, the secretive "shadow

government" we wrote about last week. It appears Torrey has in mind pushing some of his pet projects, such as improvements to Chad Drive, through the Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program. The MTIP has an adoption deadline six months out, so it seems the only emergency is Torrey's time running out. The lame duck mayor's request contradicts an earlier MPC decision not to hold a special meeting before the end of the year, and it has a lot of people scrambling to organize a meeting and hearing during a time when many people are out of town or are otherwise occupied. Meanwhile, the MPC's vote Dec. 9 to include the West Eugene Parkway in the Regional Transportation Plan has thrown a wrench in local transportation planning. The Eugene City Council needs time to rehash priorities and give direction to its two members on the MPC. Sound complicated? You bet. Is this an open and public process? Not very. The "emergency" hearing, if it happens, will be at 11:30 am Dec. 30 at the Springfield Library.

• Apparently the U.S. can pre-empt war, but not the release of toxic chemicals into our environment and bodies (see this

week's news story on the bio-accumulation of toxic flame retardants in the Pacific Northwest). The hypocrisy stinks like toxic sewage sludge. We need to write precaution into the law books, forcing companies and government agencies to prove the biological and environmental safety of new products *before* they are unleashed. If you're concerned about our government's too-little-too-late approach to toxins, call on your representatives to uphold the precautionary principle. For more information, visit www.takingprecaution.org

• Lorri Goodman tells us that the non-profit Madison Meadow group has exercised its option and given earnest money Dec. 22 to buy the two-acre meadow and remnant orchard at 22nd and Madison. She says the group raised the required \$220,000 and now has three years to raise the remaining \$250,000. Nice job. We recognize the need to stop sprawl by increasing density, but some special places like Madison Meadow deserve to be saved.

SLANT includes short opinion pieces, observations and rumor-chasing notes compiled by the EW staff. Heard any good rumors lately? Contact Ted Taylor at 484-0519, editor@eugeneweekly.com