

news Briefs



LTD employee Sherry Watson at an ATU rally Jan. 14.

LTD MANAGER BLAMED FOR OVERSPENDING

LTD's operating revenues for fiscal year 2004-05 are expected to exceed operating costs by more than \$2 million, and the district has operating reserves of almost \$8 million. So why, ask unionized LTD workers, is the district cutting both services for riders and health care benefits for employees?

The answer, in short, is a huge increase in capital spending. In the 2005 fiscal year, LTD plans to spend \$14.1 million on the Bus Rapid Transit project, \$3.5 million on administrative support equipment and \$5.2 million on relocation of the Springfield Station, among other expenditures.

This represents a huge increase in capital spending for LTD. The district spent about \$5 million on capital projects in 2001-02, \$10 million in 2002-03, and \$15 million in 2003-04. The adopted budget for 2004-05 allocates more than \$27 million for capital projects. While the bulk of the funding for these projects is federal, the district is required to match

federal funds with a local share of 20 percent. Much of this money will come out of the operations budget, which funds employee salaries.

"The money that is flowing through these projects would turn any school supporter green with envy," Metropolitan Policy Committee (MPC) chair Bonny Bettman says.

But LTD Service Planning and Marketing Manager Andy Vobora claims that the district has the right to tap the operations budget for capital expenditures. "The union says 'That's our money,' but it's the community's money," he says.

Members of the local Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) blame the district's general manager, Ken Hamm, for the inflated capital spending. "We need a good manager, not fat-laden Hamm that is unhealthy for us all," ATU member and 15-year LTD employee Sherry Watson says.

Hamm once managed the transportation systems in Wenatchee and Kitsap, Wash. "He had misguided priorities then; he has carried those misguided priorities here," union supporter and LTD rider Sarah Jacobson says.

But LTD Director of Transportation Mark Johnson defends Hamm's record. "He's done a great job everywhere he's gone," Johnson says.

LTD levies an employer payroll tax which funds its services, but its board is appointed by the governor rather than elected. County Commissioner Bill Dwyer says this structure allows the board to be dominated by business interests while being unaccountable to the public. "The LTD board serves the public at large and it should be elected by the public at large," he says.

The *R-G* has presented the strife between the district and the union as a health care issue ("Health care costs fuel LTD labor rift," 1/7/05), but ATU spokesperson Jason Reynolds says that the union's chief complaint is not the scaling back of the employees' medical plan. Rather, union members primarily object to the mismanagement of public monies to fund unnecessary capital projects at the expense of riders and employees, he says.

Negotiations between the district and the

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



union continue, but the ATU may go on strike at any time after giving a 10-day notice.

—Kera Abraham

TOOTHLESS OVERSIGHT

Eugene Police Chief Robert Lehner wrote a rare 2,200 word op-ed in the *R-G* Jan. 16 outlining a vision for the Eugene Police Department that includes only weak citizen review.

EPD scandals have resulted in calls for a strong, independent citizen review board for complaints against police. But Lehner criticized such boards in his op-ed. Lehner wrote that boards that are created under the assumption that they will "eliminate or minimize future acts of misconduct," or reach conclusions "substantially different than those of internal police investigations" will fail. "Under these types of systems, all that results is a very expensive, additional bureaucratic layer with no change in outcome, often mired in legal challenges."

As an alternative, Lehner said "very suc-

cessful police auditor models" in San Jose and Sacramento "hold great promise for a city such as Eugene."

But the controversial auditor models Lehner sites lack independence and teeth. The San Jose auditor lacks the power to independently investigate, subpoena witnesses or impose discipline and was criticized by supporters of a real citizen review board for that city. The Sacramento auditor isn't even independent but is rather hired, fired and supervised by the city manager.

Lehner's opinion piece also goes further than the department has gone before in dismissing a recent racial profiling complaint. Lehner claimed that officer Wayne Dorman was "right" in stopping Cortez Jordan, despite Jordan's complaint of racial profiling. Dorman "did not violate either the nationally accepted or local version of the racial profiling policy," Lehner wrote.

But that claim goes beyond even what Lehner's own Internal Affairs investigator found. IA found that the racial accusation against Dorman by Jordan was "not sustained." By IA definition, that means that due to insufficient and/or conflicting evidence,

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• Hey Joanie, what happened to you? More than a few of us in Eugene had an on-going love affair with Joanie McGowan, that wild and funny, beautiful woman from Ashland who made us laugh and think with her absurd, yet poignant political theater. As Joanie would say, "It's never too late to save the world," but now it's too late to save Joanie. Her body was found along Bear Creek last week, an apparent suicide. Some 600 people showed up for her memorial in Ashland Sunday. We did-



n't know about the demons of depression and addiction that we now hear tormented her. What we witnessed was her infectious, playful energy and her boundless dedication to peace, justice and fun with duct tape. In one of her stand-up comedy routines in Eugene she urged us to "start living like we've been talking about living since the summer of '69." In her intense living, she gave us all that she had to give, and then there was no more. But we are blessed for it.

• John Musumeci's firm Arlie & Co. is getting plenty of head pats in the *R-G* and TV

news following the company's press conference last week. Arlie announced its plans for redeveloping the EWEB site if Triad/McKenzie-Willamette bows out of its hospital plans. Sleepy *R-G* newshounds wrote about Arlie's "offer" and "proposal," but where's the kibble? No dollar amounts were mentioned, no earnest money offered, no plans for traffic across those nasty railroad tracks. What's behind this dog and pony show? We hear rumors that Musumeci, who once mated with PeaceHealth on the RiverBend deal and carried off 18 million bones, is now barking about Triad building its new hospital at Crescent Drive, not more than a five-minute trot from PeaceHealth's RiverBend site. Such a deal might scratch Arlie's back, but it would be a choke collar for the public, unless of course PeaceHealth rolls over and retreats to lick its wounds

in Glenwood. We can't help but wonder if PeaceHealth board members had any idea what kinds of dogs they were about to unleash when they walked along the McKenzie River in 2001, inhaled the aroma of pine trees and thought, "This would be a healing spot for our new hospital." Leaves us scratching our heads.

• Counter-inauguration events abound today (Thursday) on campus (see Calendar) and a Eugene contingency is headed for Washington, D.C., to join the protests there. If we hear from Peter Chabarak and others, we will try to get a short report on our website News Briefs this week (www.eugeneweekly.com). Look for tales from the streets of D.C. next week.

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