

Starry Aspirations

BY URSULA EVANS-HERITAGE

New owners of health food store have high hopes.

Oasis is back, but with a new name and some older and wiser employees. Reincarnated as Capella Market, the store is still located at 2489 Willamette St. and opened on March 17. The store's logo incorporates two stars, a visual reference to the double star Capella, the sixth brightest star in the sky.

Wild Oats, which had been at the location since it bought Oasis in 1997, closed its south Eugene area store in January 2005. The chain natural foods store is still doing well in other places, but the Eugene market didn't respond

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well to its "cookie cutter approach," said Mark Lew, the owner of Capella and a former manager at both Wild Oats and Oasis.

Because Wild Oats is headquartered in Boulder, Colo., decisions about what goods to supply were made at the corporate level. This meant products were streamlined and the company didn't work

closely with local vendors. But Eugene is a leader in natural foods and Eugenians want locally grown and made products. "It was like putting a kindergartner in with a bunch of Ph.D. students," Lew said. Eugenians "aren't stupid."

In a 10/23 *Register-Guard* article, Wild Oats' Spokeswoman Sonja Tuitele said the

Willamette Street location was too small and that Wild Oats would be interested in a larger store in the south Eugene area if an appropriate location were available. But with record net sales of \$1.05 billion in 2004, it seems Wild Oats will be all right without the Eugene market.

Capella should be a better fit for Eugene since its management works closely with local food vendors. Walk into the produce section and you may be overwhelmed by the sweet smell of fresh strawberries. Sample tasty organic tomatoes. Check out the pink rosebuds and eucalyptus leaves available in the spice section. And who knew there were so many kinds of soy milk? Chances are if it's healthy, you can find it at Capella.

And if you need help, you're in good hands. The staff knows natural foods — 44 of the 56 employees used to work for Wild Oats or Oasis.

Lew has high hopes for the store. The south Eugene area is a great customer base for health food and the staff is knowledgeable and enthusiastic. "We're working hard right now, but we're laughing twice as hard as we ever have before."

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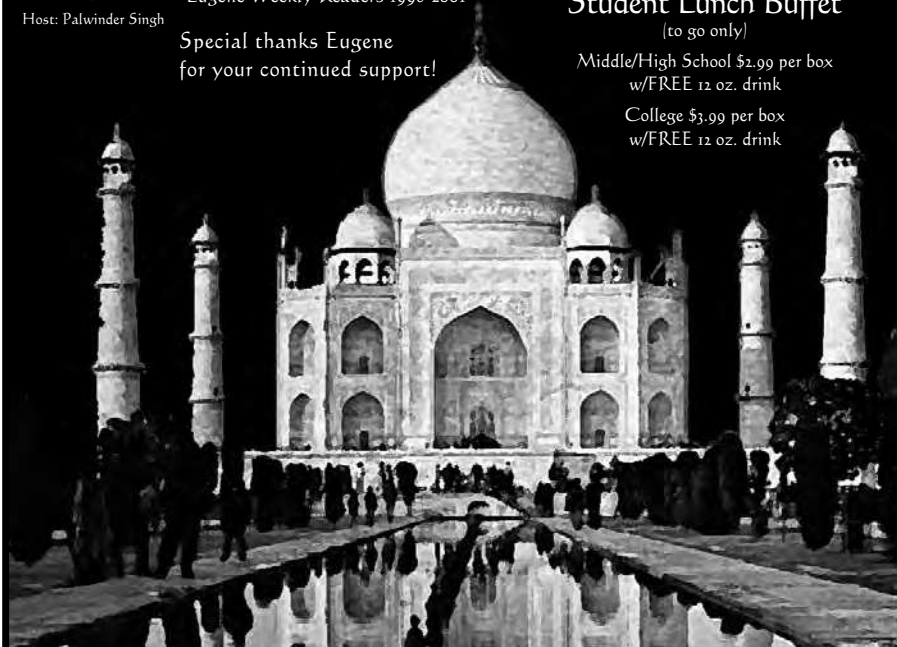
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