

news Briefs



LOOTING AT THE PUMP

In New Orleans, people taking advantage of the disaster to steal from stores have been warned that looters could be shot on site. But here in Oregon, gasoline companies taking advantage of the hurricane to loot people at the pumps face no such consequences.

Most states have laws against price gouging, but not Oregon.

"Unfortunately, the Oregon Legislative Assembly has, in each of the past five sessions, failed to approve my proposals for an anti-price gouging law," Oregon Attorney General Hardy Myers lamented in a press release Sept. 2. Myers noted that Oregon's supply of gasoline was adequate and shouldn't be directly effected by the storm.

But gas prices in Oregon shot up about 30 cents a gallon after Katrina, beginning their steep spike just hours after the winds died down 2,500 miles away.

The Oregon AG's office has received dozens of complaints about gas price gouging in Oregon, said department spokesperson Jan Margosian.

Although the state lacks an anti-gouging law, the AG will pursue the most egregious cases using more difficult to use trade practices laws barring "unconscionably" high prices. Cases the AG pursues under the law have "got to be bad" and not just a few cents hike in prices, Margosian said.

Increasing prices with lower supply and higher demand "is the all-American way," Margosian said. But companies aren't allowed to collude in fixing higher prices or raise prices unconscionably, she said.

Margosian said the department has received reports of some stations charging 50 cents a gallon more right after the hurricane. Some gasoline sellers "might find this is an opportunity to make a lot of money," she said.

To complain about price gouging, call the Oregon AG's toll free consumer hotline at (877) 877-9392. E-mail can be sent through the website (www.doj.state.or.us). Documented, written complaints are the most effective.

The California AG plans to subpoena gas company records in a probe into price gouging using a state law that prohibits retailers from raising prices more than 10 percent during government-declared emergencies. AGs in other states have launched similar investigations.

Local Congressman Peter DeFazio called on the U.S. attorney general to also investigate gas price gouging in the wake of Katrina. "It's pure and simple disaster profiteering."

The city of San Diego has also taken action with plans to consider a new city law banning gas price gouging, the *San Jose Mercury News* reported. City Attorney Michael Aguirre said, "You can loot by breaking the window or you can loot by raising the prices." — Alan Pittman

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



UNLEARNING RACIST IDEAS

Lee Mun Wah, an internationally acclaimed diversity trainer, will lead a retreat titled "Unlearning Racism" at the UO this weekend. The workshop is "designed to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of our differences," sponsors say. Mun Wah's film, *The Color of Fear*, won the National Education Media Network's Best Social Documentary Award in 1995, the same year that Oprah Winfrey aired a one-hour special on Mun Wah's life.



Lee Mun Wah

The workshop on racism follows months of heated debate on issues of race and "cultural competency" at the UO. It will be held from 8 am to 5 pm Sept. 10 and 11 in the EMU Ballroom. Mun Wah's newest film, *Last Chance for Eden*, will be shown from 6 to 9:30 pm Sept. 10, also in the ballroom. Log on to www.stirfryseminars.com for more information.

DOUBLE-WIDE TROUBLE

The local real estate boom is blowing out some of Eugene's most affordable housing in manufactured dwelling parks.

The local Emerald Valley park is kicking 20 mostly low-income households out to cash in on rising land values. Another local park is rumored to be planning the same move.

Manufactured dwellings are "often the only homeownership option available to persons with very limited income," city staff wrote the Eugene City Council last month. Closing them "has an enormous impact on the residents."

Moving a double-wide and establishing it at another site can cost up to \$17,000.

Portland has a similar problem with more than 800 homes in parks threatened with closure. Dramatically increasing housing prices in Oregon and nationally have made it attractive for owners to convert manufactured home parks into more upscale subdivisions.

A city ordinance requires that landlords give low-income, disabled, or elderly tenants up to \$3,500 to help move a home, but the ordinance does not apply in residential zoned property outside of flood plains. A state law also requires \$3,500 in moving assistance, but only on the rare occasion that an owner fails to give a year's notice.

— Alan Pittman

Happening people

BY PAUL NEEVEL

LORRAINE KERWOOD

When her massage practice was ended by an injury in 1995, Lorraine Kerwood discovered computers as a student at LCC. And even while she finished a UO degree and began a new career as a social worker, she also got into buying old Macintosh computers from thrift stores. "I found information on the Internet on how to rebuild them," she explains. "I started giving them away." In 1999, Kerwood founded MacRenewal, a non-profit devoted to salvaging old Macs and donating them to kids in foster care, migrant-worker families, and other worthy recipients. "In five years we've given away 3,000 computers," says Kerwood, who quit her social-work job two years ago to dedicate all her energies to the agency, now called the Computer Reuse and Recycling Center (CRRC). CRRC relies on volunteer labor to rebuild computers and dismantle unusable components for recycling. "We find markets for every piece," Kerwood notes. "Recycling pays our rent." Volunteers who put in 30 hours earn themselves a refurbished computer. Flanked by volunteers in the photo, Kerwood cradles Luna, the CRRC mascot. Learn more at lanecrrc.org



DODGING BULLETS

Tree-sitting is a desperate act of peaceful civil disobedience. Forest activists often use the tactic as a last-ditch effort to protect old-growth trees when environmental lawsuits fail, when logging trucks roll in, when it seems to late. They camp in trees marked for logging through wind and rain, pissing in buckets and fighting boredom for weeks (or