

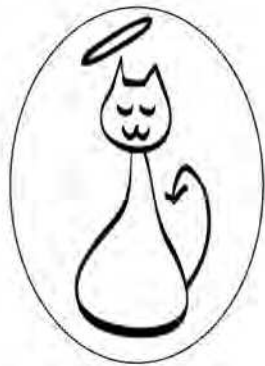
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

called to account. What a great day for our experiment in democracy.

*Gerry Merritt
Eugene*

HAMMER WORK

I'm 50, I grew up to the sound of Peter, Paul and Mary singing, "If I had a hammer." In wartime, the only good a hammer could do is to hobble a soldier. My son is 19. At some point, mothers lose influential control of their sons.

On my son's third birthday, I made us both a promise: If he was ever drafted or seduced into the Fraternal Brotherhood of War, I'd "Narc" him up the yin-yang and smash one of his ankles with a sledge hammer, rendering him "4-F," unfit for service.

It's biblical. Better to lose a foot than to have your whole body cast into hell — the hell of war. My son will never participate in war as long as I'm alive.

"Mothers with Hammers," make it a dot.com. I don't have the money. If I go to jail, big deal.

*Lori Kasprzak
Eugene*

HEE-HAW CAPITAL

I decided long ago that Republicans, the big, gnarly, one-dimensional and stupefyingly dull lot of them, were liars. And liars without recourse to conscience. I decided then, long ago, to change my mind only

when I could encounter one Republican who could pass this litmus test, encountered as an offhand remark by the great English writer Bertrand Russell, but given here as an objective proof. To paraphrase Russell: The only reason people think criminals are stupid is because it is only the stupid criminals who are caught.

Thus I'm reading with great satisfaction since once again, the proof is made that Tom DeLay is indicted for conspiracy, but I await with bated breath for the proof to be made twice, as I see Missouri Rep. Paul Blunt, who is replacing DeLay as House leader even as the smoke roils from his own dank basement, is also about to run into his own dancing shadow as did Hammerin' Tom.

Blunt is from a town in Missouri called Branson. I spent my high school years just miles from that town. If there has ever been an area more full of fulsome self-praise for its confounding ignorance, bigotry, racism, sheer and unadulterated hee-haw! hick-manship, smothered in simmering globs of unleavened stupidity, it is Branson.

Thus it's new incarnation as the home cum museum of The Lawrence Welk Show and the Yakov Smirnoff Theatre, among others. Johnny Cash got out early. Paul Blunt stayed. I hope Johnny is having a big laugh, too. This is American theater at its unvarnished best.

*Tom Erwin
Eugene*

viewpoint BY SYLVIE PEDERSON

World's Greatest?

A little modesty and perspective, please.

Eugene is now officially "The World's Greatest City for the Arts and Outdoors." On Sept. 12, at the request of several arts and outdoors resident supporters, the Eugene City Council unanimously adopted as official motto of our city the slogan initially proposed a year ago by Robb Hankins, Eugene's cultural services director.

Hankins, who starts this October on a new job in Ohio, arrived in Eugene in December 2003. As he set about to assess the city's strengths, he quickly singled out two of its prominent assets: an extraordinary artistic activity and beautiful outdoors. It was his stroke of genius to pair them to provide Eugene with a defining identity.

Because it is simply true that Eugene stands out for its vitality in the performance and visual arts, and because it is indeed blessed with a lovely environment allowing for many varied outdoor activities, Hankins' campaign for Eugene to both view and represent itself as "the world's greatest city for the arts and outdoors" has resonated with many people.

Communities, like people, sometimes require external affirmation to become aware and to come to believe in their own intrinsic value. So it was perhaps best that Hankins, holding such a validating mirror for us to view ourselves in, formulated his slogan in grandiose terms to jolt the city officials into better recognizing Eugene's combination of strengths.

Yet once our collective awareness has been achieved, this superlative formulation may work against us. It may make us sound a little ... well ... unsophisticated.

Because, whether accurate or not, the slogan sounds like an overstatement, those who do not know Eugene may well snort in derision or think it a joke, especially when it is misquoted as "greatest city of the arts and outdoors," as opposed to "for."

We all have seen such self-aggrandizing ads on road sides, proclaiming that theirs is the greatest attraction in the world and we know exactly what to expect. Something mediocre or rather schlocky; these over-the-top superlatives suggest there is little behind the boast.

So let us mature in our estimation of ourselves and grow in our self-confidence. We are truly a great city for the arts and the outdoors. When we feel strong enough about our identity and worth, we can leave the rest of the world out of it and call ourselves, firmly and simply: "Eugene, City for the Arts and Outdoors."

Because we are. And we may feel great pride and pleasure in this. We are lucky indeed, and should continue to work hard to make our community ever more a city for the arts and outdoors.

Sylvie Pedersen is a Eugene free-lance arts writer.

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