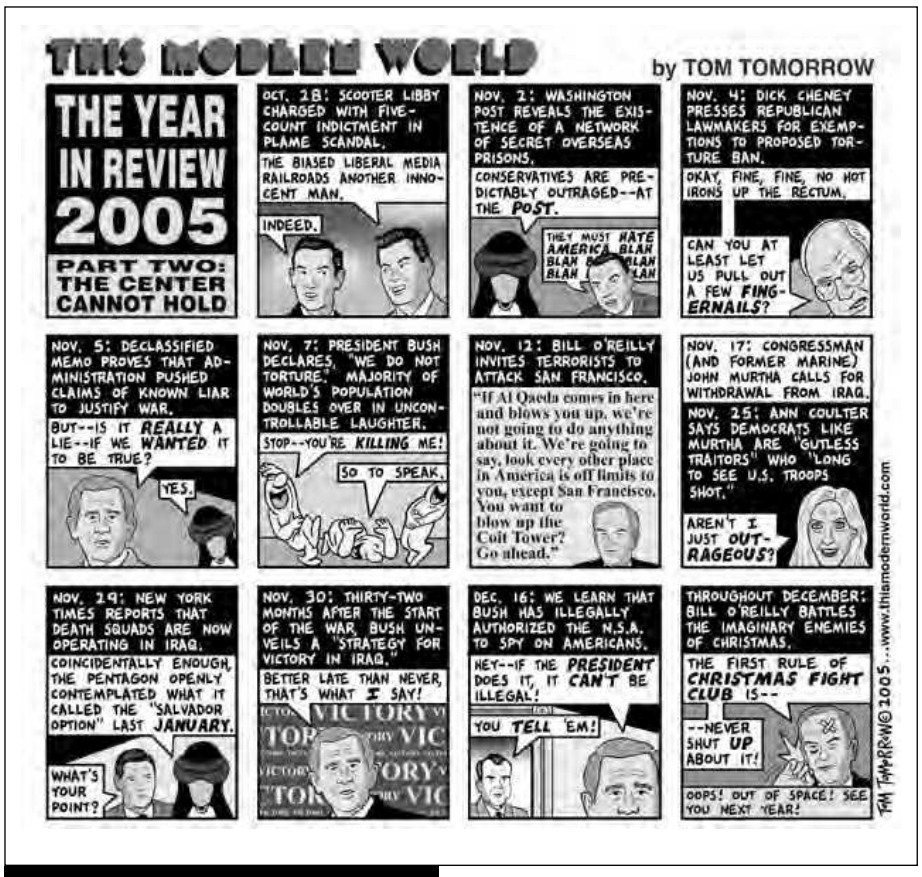
Ahh, marijuana growing on the canal. Could this be Eugene's future?

• 'Twas the Friday before Christmas and Eugene City Club still managed a good turnout for the second part in its annual presentations on "If you could give the community any gift, what would it be?" Former Mayor Brian Obie wasn't there to hear responses to his previous week's gifts of lumps of coal to local politicians (see Slant last week). Councilor Betty Taylor had her big chunk of coal with her at the luncheon Friday and with the help of a spray can of tree flocking, it was turned into a snowball "suitable for throwing." The list of gifts offered to Eugene was a long one, including more access to higher education, a comprehensive hospital and birthing center downtown, a canal system so people can swim to work, pink Cadillacs to replace EPD squad cars, a better Amtrak system serving Eugene, more silence and friendliness, community education about the value of wetlands, support for the mayor on resolving the west Eugene Parkway impasse, a center and services for the homeless, and legalized prostitution and marijuana to "make Eugene more like Amsterdam." We love these ideas, but one that really caught our attention was a proposal for a drop-in arts center for at-risk kids downtown. The kids loitering downtown are blamed for all sorts of things, including business failures, but every city has them, and they are part of the culture downtown. We might as well embrace them. They only stand out because there is no crowd of people walking around downtown.

• Speaking of downtown culture, one gift not mentioned at City Club (unless we missed it) was some movement on downtown commercial development. We hear some progress is being made in acquiring property so that developers Connor & Woolley can do their long-awaited magic. Parts of Broadway and Willamette will likely be razed for new construction of retail shops, restaurants, apartments, condos and maybe a multiplex theater. We hear that some structures owned by C&W, such as the solid old Bon/Symantec building, will probably remain standing. We urge city officials, in their negotiations with developers, to insist that pedestrian-friendly amenities, such as open space and "pocket parks," be included in the plans for Eugene's center core. And we urge the developers to recognize the importance of arts downtown, and to provide affordable space for them. Galleries, music venues, performing arts and art schools add immensely to the vitality, livability — and profitability — of urban centers.

• Sometimes we grow damned weary of Bush bashing. We cringe at the thought of another year of reacting to outrageous White House initiatives and policies that divide our country and distract us from the critical issues we face as a nation. But bash away we will until enough people wake up to elect national leaders dedicated to peace, justice and prosperity for everyone. Meanwhile, we can practice some dualistic thinking: Politics, the environment and human rights are deadly serious, but we can maintain our sanity by having some fun and games with our activism. This week's cover story on *EW* predictions for 2006 is one such attempt. Our collective wit might be a bit lame, but we hope you find some chuckles in it. Happy next year!



news Briefs

PIERCY GIVES AN UPDATE

Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy, in a holiday message to her mailing list, thanked her supporters and also expressed gratitude for all the people in Eugene who work for the city, volunteer, and "the most profound of all, raising your kids and caring for your neighbors, friends and world."

"There is much to be thankful for this year," she said. "We live in a great place that we can all be proud of."

Piercy's next public appearance will be at the City Club luncheon Friday, Dec. 30, for a presentation on "The Mayor's Sustainble Business Initiative" by initiative co-chairs Rusty Rexius and Dave Funk. Piercy said more than 300 people "have been engaged in making recommendations as to how we can encourage the development of sustainable products and practices in Eugene. When I ran for office, I said I thought we could strengthen our economy and preserve our natural resources. This is part of that effort. I hope you will come to learn and be supportive of this important undertaking."

The mayor's annual State of the City address will be at 5:30 pm Jan. 5 at the Hult Center lobby. "This is my opportunity to talk to you about how we are doing in meeting the goals set last January," she said. Piercy will get a short recap of the address at the 11:50 am City Club meeting Jan. 6 at the Downtown Athletic Club. A time for questions and comments will be provided.

The annual alternative Citizens' State of the City address will be given at noon Monday, Jan. 9 at the Eugene Public Library.

Next on her public meeting schedule, Piercy will introduce Richard Heinberg, an internationally known expert on peak oil, when he speaks at 7 pm Tuesday, Jan. 7 at the Hilton. "Heinberg will discuss what the public can do to encourage the city to include peak oil in its agenda," said Piercy.