

news Briefs

WHEN RACE MATTERS

A *Register-Guard* article reporting on changes at Jefferson Middle School prompted local NAACP leaders to organize a community forum on racial bias in local media. About 40 people attended the June 1 event, and County Commissioner Bobby Green facilitated the discussion.

The March 25 article by *R-G* reporter Anne Williams stated that Jefferson's sharply declining enrollment prompted Superintendent George Russell to make big changes at the school, turning it into a K-8 and replacing principal Arbrella Luvert. The article stated that Luvert and her husband, NAACP President Henry Luvert, are "prominent leaders" of the black community, noting that Russell "also is black."

Many at the forum took offense at the references to Luvert and Russell's race, as well as the mention of the NAACP, saying that those details were irrelevant to the article and seemed mean-spirited.

"You are dividing the community," Arbrella Luvert told *R-G* Managing Editor David Baker. "You are perpetuating racism. It is time now for the community to hold editors and reporters accountable for what you put out."

Green advised Baker that race should be mentioned "only if it adds value to the article," but not if it distracts from the context or adds a negative connotation.

Baker said that the article identified Luvert and Russell as black only because Russell had said that "race and gender" issues were at play.

"The article was white supremacy," countered a man in attendance. "Whites are leaving [Jefferson] because of the multicultural curriculum."

"From a black perspective, we can see where the problem is," added another participant. "When we are in positions of power, we are *always* called inadequate."

Pressed to describe the general audience the article catered to, Baker replied: "The audience, I'm sure, would be predominantly white." He added that racial makeup at the *R-G* "does reflect the community because it's mostly white."

Anita Johnson, co-owner of *Eugene Weekly*, asked if it's appropriate to identify a person's race in an article if it's cast in a positive light. "Should we acknowledge that Derrick Bell was the first African-American dean of the law school?" she asked. Participant responses were mixed.

People in attendance, speaking from black, white, Asian, Native American, Latino, Arab, Jewish and mixed-race perspectives, then shared observations about race-related issues in Eugene. The word "fear" came up more than 72 times, according to one participant who kept count. "What are we afraid of?" she asked.

At the end of the night, participants reached consensus on a number of solutions: Educate the media, define diversity in the most inclusive way possible, step out of your comfort zone, address your fears, speak up about with discrimination as soon as it occurs, embrace others' differences, and hold yourself and others accountable for racism.

The NAACP plans to hold more community forums along a similar vein in the near future. — *Kera Abraham*

SDS BACK ON CAMPUS

Four people showed up June 1 for Eugene's first Students for a Democratic



Society (SDS) meeting in nearly 40 years on the UO campus.

On a national level, current college students and members of the original 1960s SDS joined forces this January to resurrect the organization, which disintegrated in 1969 after playing an influential role in anti-Vietnam War protests, according to the SDS website (www.studentsforademocraticociety.org).

UO sociology student Eric Eiden, who organized the meeting, said most of the organization's new chapters — some of which are at high schools — are on the East Coast. He got the idea to start a chapter from reading about the group on the Monthly Review website.

Eiden said he hopes to get Eugene group members to participate in the national "Harass the Brass" campaign SDS is planning for this summer, which will combat military recruitment through counter-recruitment in heavily targeted areas, boycotts of military research companies and sit-ins at

military recruitment centers.

"As far as this campus is concerned, I think we should try to tag Department of Defense funding onto the Harass the Brass project," Eiden said.

Some flyers advertising the meeting said "Stop ONAMI @ U of O." ONAMI refers to the Oregon Nanoscience and Microtechnologies Institute, a research collaboration involving the UO, OSU, Portland State University, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and regional industry representatives.

"It's not anything against the ONAMI project in general; it's just where the funding is coming from," Eiden said.

For the 2006 fiscal year, support for ONAMI initiatives accounted for \$5.7 million of a total \$67.3 million in federal funding allocated by Congress to defense-related projects in Oregon, according to a release from the office of Sen. Ron Wyden.

SLANT

• *EW* was invited to an NAACP-sponsored forum last week to talk about "Racial Bias and Prejudice in the Media" (see story above). A story in the *R-G* instigated the meeting, but it might just as easily have been a story in *EW* (see our letters and viewpoint this week). Journalists tend to be relatively well-educated and sensitive to issues of race, but we don't always get it right. And writing about race has its occupational hazards: We're criticized no matter what we publish. So how can we as a community dispel our ignorance and refine our sensitivities? It helps to sit down together to acknowledge our differences and similarities, examine our fears and prejudices, shed light on the history of political power underlying racial divisions, and move on to embrace inclusivity, tolerance and respect. It's a bumpy road, but a necessary journey. Our thanks go to the NAACP for organizing this forum, skillfully moderated by Commissioner Green, and we hope more will follow.

• Here are a couple of provocative points for political junkies from Howard Dean's speech to the state Democratic convention in Eugene last weekend. He said that after the 2004 election, all the media concern about faith-based voting and perceived lack of

spirituality driving elections led the Democrats to endlessly poll. Dean, national chair of the Democratic Party, reported that faith-based voters surprisingly were most concerned about these three points: 1) Television shows they can't control and keep from their kids. 2) Kids rattling around from 3 to 6 pm while both parents are working. 3) Drugs, especially meth labs in their neighborhoods, getting to their kids. So how will Dean and his team deal with these valid concerns? Door-to-door. He told his Oregon audience that three weeks ago Democrats knocked on a million doors across America, and he plans to



orchestrate this effort four or five more times.

• A blog called "Post an Apology" with input from all over the country has a blurb dated April 18 on the dispute over Eugene Assistant City Manager Jim Carlson's "She's Baaack" comment inadvertently emailed to Councilor Bonny Bettman March 9. Carlson's apology is listed under the category of "Drive-By Apology," referring to apologies that are "insincere, not contrite, merely lip service, etc. It's an I'm Sorry with a F**K U attached," as opposed to "Heartfelt" apologies. Check it out at <http://postanapology.blogspot.com> and search for "Carlson."

• On May 11 in this column, we passed on a reader's observations of what appears to be federal agents in unmarked SUVs prowling Eugene neighborhoods. We've now heard from another reader who spotted an official-looking dark blue Chevy Suburban driving aggressively down Franklin Boulevard May 16. Driver wore a uniform with American flag on the shoulder, had a computer monitor mounted on the dashboard, but normal Oregon plates. Hmmm. Spooks among us?