

Housing Goes Underground

Demand high for swank Olympic Trials digs

Buying tickets to next summer's U.S. Olympic Track & Field Trials in Eugene is easy enough; just enter your credit card data and click "buy." This process was so easy, in fact, that all ticket packages have sold out. But now the big question for the estimated 1,200 athletes, 15,000 daily spectators and 1,200 members of the media (not to mention the huge influx of law enforcement officers and Oregon Bach Festival attendees) is: Where are you going to stay?

According to information from the Convention & Visitors Association of Lane County Oregon (CVALCO) website, 20 of the 51 Eugene-Springfield hotels, motels and bed & breakfasts listed are completely booked for the 10 days of the trials (June 27 to July 4, 2008). Others, such as the Campus

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\$500 per night.

Even at that price there is a caveat: the renter 'will need to care for two indoor cats.'

Inn & Suites, won't be accepting reservations until October or other dates closer to 2008.

The UO Housing and Catering & Conferences departments will soon be opening up portions of their residence halls and campus housing for rental by trials attendees, says Food Services Director Tom Driscoll.

But even with local lodging options at full capacity, there is strong demand for more housing options, particularly in private residences.

The Eugene '08 website (www.eugene08.com) states that athletes and spectators "may choose to stay in private homes, but because of potential liability issues, the Local Organizing Committee will not be providing home-stays as one of the standard options it provides to athletes and their families. Community members who wish to offer this service to athletes and their families might wish to post on Craigslist or similar message boards." In essence, the promoters of the trials are encouraging an underground accommodation market to develop apart from their central website location.

A search on Craigslist reveals that spectators and locals are already in contact. Jonathan Olszyk of Virginia Beach, Va.,

posted a request on July 2 that specified his age, that he would be traveling with his father and that he was "willing to pay good money (cash upon arrival)."

Asked via email, Olszyk said he's willing to pay up to \$1,500 for 10 days accomodation in a private home. Despite making it clear he needed only two bedrooms, he has received offers of four bedrooms, a swimming pool and transportation to the events, all for a cool \$4,000.

On July 1, a family of four requested a three-bed, two-bath accommodation and offered to pay from \$2,000 to \$3,000 for 10 days. But they had one preference: "a private location with hot tub."

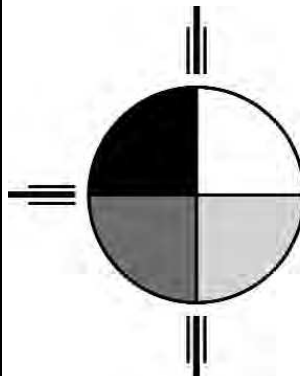
On July 11, a Eugene family offered to rent their 2,900 sq. ft. home near Oakway Center for \$500 per night. Even at that price, there is a caveat: the renter "will need to care for two indoor cats."

Despite Craigslist's power to connect renters and rentees, some are hesitant to use it just yet. Karen Alvarado, who plans to use her house in the Fairmount neighborhood "in some capacity" for either accommodation or to host receptions for the athletes and coaches, is suspicious of Craigslist, she says, because of the frequent "scams and frauds" found there. Just as well, there will be little alternative to posting a classified ad somewhere online, though trials attendees and hosts won't find a "one-stop" solution such as the Eugene '08 website.

Alvarado and Barbara McKeown, another Fairmount resident planning on renting out her home, are fortunate to have a connection through Alvarado's son, who works for a catering and banquet company with access to media markets. The main advantage in partnering with this company, McKeown says, is so she can be "under the umbrella of their liability insurance." Insurance wasn't something she factored in when she first decided to rent out her house, she says. But even with the coverage, McKeown says she would still frequently check on her Colonial house to make sure it wasn't trashed in an after-party run amok.

McKeown says she may use her membership in the Affordable Travel Club, a hospitality exchange group, to find guests for her extra bedrooms. While she is open to giving up her entire house to the right renters, McKeown concedes that just having an athlete or track fan renting out a room would be an exciting prospect. "It will be an adventure to meet up with new people," she says.

It's no surprise that the Fairmount and south university area residents will profit the most from their proximity to Hayward Field, both for viewing (and hearing) the excitement themselves and mingling with world-class athletes. According to John Barofsky of Beppe & Gianni's Italian Restaurant, the Fairmount Neighbors association made a request for all residents to consider opening up their homes to trials attendees in some capacity. As the availability of traditional accommodations dwindles, Eugene residents may realize the financial and social windfalls of an underground network of private housing options. **EW**



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