

Jeff Luers



UPCOMING ECO-ARSON SENTENCINGS

Eco-arsonists are returning to Eugene courtrooms with the sentencing of Jacob Ferguson by federal Judge Anne Aiken on Oct. 26, and the re-sentencing of activist Jeff "Free" Luers at a yet unspecified date in Lane County Circuit Court.

On Oct. 26 at 1 pm Ferguson will face charges of one count of arson and one count of attempted arson. Ferguson participated in at least 14 of the ecologically motivated arsons dubbed "Operation Backfire" by the FBI, according to court documents.

Ferguson's charges were unsealed by Aiken last month after three years of secrecy per the request of federal prosecutors. According to court documents, Ferguson faces only probation for his arsons. Other eco-saboteurs received up to 13 years in prison for their participation in some of the arsons.

Ferguson wore a wire and recorded conversations with other defendants in the Backfire cases, leading to the label of "snitch" on Portland.Indymedia.org and other activist websites. He is expected to get a greatly reduced sentence in exchange for his cooperation with the government.

Luers was sentenced in June 2001 to 23 years in prison for a then unrelated action – the burning of three SUVs at Romania Chevrolet in Eugene. The goal of Luers' and his accomplice, Craig "Crittter" Marshall was to call attention to global warming. Luers was voted "Best Activist" in the EW's 2005 readers' poll.

Several of the Operation Backfire defendants set fire to almost 40 SUVs in the same car dealership shortly before Luers' trial. Many felt this action was a factor in Luers' heavy sentence. The dealership location is currently owned by the UO.

In February 2007, the Court of Appeals unanimously decided that Luer's case would be reversed and remanded for resentencing. Luers could get up to 15 years off his original sentence. Luers has been moved to Lane County Jail in preparation for the hearing, but a date has not yet been announced.

– Camilla Mortensen

QUAKERS ARRESTED

A small group of local Quakers acting in an unofficial capacity were arrested Friday, Oct. 12 following a peaceful protest at congressional offices in Eugene. The group gathered at the U.S. Courthouse to urge Rep. Peter DeFazio and Sens. Gordon Smith and Ron Wyden to vote against the 2008 appropriations bill for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The group of five included physician Paul Qualtere-Burcher, pediatric nurse practitioner Laurie Knackstadt and retired rural outreach counselor Peg Morton. An unnamed high school student and special education teacher were also arrested.

The group read statements at the offices and sang peace songs before they were arrested in Smith's office for refusing to leave. Wyden's office was closed. "None of the three have definitely made up their minds how to vote on this bill, which will come to the floor of Congress in January or February," reads a statement from the group.

The action was part of the national Occupation Project, developed by the organization Voices for Creative Nonviolence (www.vcnv.org). More than 320 people, including 11 in Eugene, have been arrested for nonviolently occupying offices of members of Congress who were unwilling to make a commitment to vote against the war funding.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



news Briefs

BLUNDERING TOWARD WAR WITH IRAN

Can President Bush be thwarted in his reported obsession with attacking Iran? Dr. Catherine Thomasson of Portland, national president of Physicians for Social Responsibility, visited Iran in early March as part of a peace delegation sponsored by the Fellowship of Reconciliation. She attended meetings with Iranian religious, education and political leaders. She will speak about her trip at 7



pm Wednesday, Oct. 24, at the First United Methodist Church, 1376 Olive St. in Eugene.

Thomasson's presentation discusses common misconceptions people in the U.S. hold about Iran and what missteps the U.S. has taken in our relationship with Iran. She'll also discuss Iranian history and political structure. She will also review what peaceful solutions lie ahead for our two countries.

Her visit coincides with efforts by Congressman Peter DeFazio calling for congressional hearings regarding Iran and increased congressional oversight of White House plans for war. In a recent letter sent to House Democrats, DeFazio said, "In the run-up to the war with Iraq, Congress as an institution, through its committees, failed the American people by failing to ask tough questions, challenge the administration's assumptions, and force a public debate. Yet, we're now witnessing a similar rush to judgment regarding Iran. This Congress must not make the same grave mistake."

MORE DEBATES ON 20-134

Citizens for Public Accountability (CPA) is hosting a debate on the city ballot measure that would expand the limit on urban renewal spending on downtown redevelopment. The debate between Greg McLauchlan and Bonny Bettman will be at 7 pm Thursday, Oct. 18 at the EWEB boardroom.

Ballots are going in the mail this week and the deadline for voting in the special election is Tuesday, Nov. 6.

Debate questions will include: Will this new ordinance affect the taxes of Eugene residents? If so, how? What is the alternative? Can we revitalize downtown with currently available resources?

A later debate on Measure 20-134 is being organized by the Lane County Bus Project and Eugene Weekly and is set for 6 pm Tuesday, Oct. 30 at Davis' restaurant on West Broadway. The debate is the first in a series called "Brewhaha," and is inspired by the successful "Debate Club" events held in Portland bars and organized by the Portland Bus Project and the Portland Mercury.