



Betsy Steffenson leads the Peace Train in the 2007 Eugene Celebration Parade

TED TAYLOR

MARCH. SING. LAUGH. PRAY. CRY.

Meeting the fifth anniversary of Iraq invasion with community resistance

BY SUZI STEFFEN

In the face of an ongoing war (or wars) on several fronts with military actions that are costing the U.S. trillions of dollars and almost 4,000 lives — not to mention costing the world hundreds of thousands of Iraqi and Afghan lives — what’s a peace-loving Eugenean to do?

Why, what she did decades ago during the “police action” in Vietnam: Rally. March. Sing. Laugh. Pray. Cry. And come together with many others in pursuit of justice, in pursuit of building coalitions, in pursuit of peace abroad and at home.

A simple task or two, right? But the many options in Sunday, March 16’s “Sowing the Seeds of Peace” events aren’t limited to those experienced with protesting the Vietnam War, says the Take Back America coalition’s Michael Carrigan. Carrigan, development director for the Community Alliance of Lane County (CALC), feels especially good about a rally at the UO that

kicks off the day. With student organizer Zach Barasaba and speakers ranging from the UO’s MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan) to the director of the Black Student Union and the ASUO president, the UO rally’s set to start making connections.

Why an on-campus rally?

Diego Hernandez, a student senator and MEChA member who’s on the Multicultural Center staff, explains: “The rally will bring in students who don’t have cars, and it sends a big message when the press takes pictures of campus rallies.”

UO student and veteran Noah Mrowczycki, who served with the Oregon National Guard in Iraq from 2004-2005, says that it’s important to keep the wars in the news. “I’m in dismay. I just think it’s unbelievable that this is the fifth anniversary,” he says. “You have to really stop and think — and make a bunch of noise. Hey, people, there’s a war going on!”

Speaking of making noise, the student rally culminates in a march called “Look! The Empire Has No Clothes” that will go from the UO to the old Federal Building at 7th and Pearl. Last year’s march on the fourth anniversary of the invasion seemed a bit dispiriting, Carrigan says, so this year it will be more celebratory of the various

groups working for peace. “It’s going to be a hopping, powerful parade,” Carrigan says. Samba Já, Eugene’s “mobile percussion ensemble,” will meet the parade halfway, and Betsy Steffenson notes that the Peace Train (famous from many a Eugene Celebration parade) will play its role.

“It’s a fun and festive theme to encourage people to come and take part,” Carrigan says. He knows that staying hopeful isn’t easy for activists who have been working for peace, whether that work has been over decades or the past few years, so it’s important for part of the day to include celebration of the connections among various activist groups.

The second rally of the day starts at the Federal Plaza around 2:30 pm, once the parade arrives. That’s when the diversity of coalition interests will fully emerge with a call for peace and justice on many fronts. “Not everyone knows everyone else’s issues,” Hernandez says, so the speakers at the Federal Building rally will both be educational and inspirational. “It shows that we’re willing to stand up for all of the issues we care about.” Speakers include Savannah Martin, a Springfield High School student whose speech draws parallels between Iraq and Vietnam and between the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Beyond Vietnam” speech and the day’s events.

Claire Syrett, a speaker and field organizer for the Oregon ACLU, says that although the ACLU doesn’t take a position on the war and therefore hasn’t spoken at any of the previous rallies, the focus of this rally is slightly different. “There have been a range of issues with how the war has been prosecuted,” she says. The ACLU’s concerns include “the denial of habeas corpus rights to prisoners in Guantanamo, whether our forces and the people in our employ have tortured people and are planning to use evidence gained from torture in court, and the president’s warrantless wiretapping,” she says.

Other speakers include Mayor Kitty Piercy, Lane County Commissioner Pete Sorenson, Josh Schlossberg of the Native Forest Council, Ibrahim Hamide of the Middle East Peace Group (and Café Soriah), Jefferson Smith of the Bus Project and Bob Watada, father of Lt. Ehren Watada, last year’s star speaker who was the first commissioned officer publicly to refuse deployment to Iraq. Local fave Iana Mathews-Harris will perform spoken word, music will come from Beth Rose and Friends, and the MCs are Carmen Urbina and Johnny Lake.

How is the Native Forest Council, for instance, related to the war in Iraq? “The issue isn’t just about stopping the war; it’s

ON THE COVER

EW staff and interns compiled and interwove names of U.S. and Iraqi War dead from the websites Iraq Coalition Casualties (icasualties.org/oif) and Iraq Body Count (www.iraqbodycount.org).