

not a priority,” Jones said, noting cyclists may find the bus an attractive option when there is ice.

Like many cities, Eugene has reduced its use of salt to protect the environment and save money. Eugene uses magnesium chloride and calcium magnesium acetate as less damaging salt alternatives, according to Jones. After the melt, Eugene tries to sweep up sand to keep it out of storm drains.

Jones said snow storms are relatively rare in Eugene, so the city doesn’t have a set snow removal budget. As for the cost of the snow and ice this year, Jones said, “We won’t know for several days.”

The city of Toronto estimates that its \$60 million snow removal budget saves twice that much in lost productivity from a single snowed-in day.

Not removing snow also has costs for Eugene. The city reported twice the usual number of accidents on Monday after the snow.

But while Eugene may average six usually quickly melting inches of snow a year, frozen Toronto averages 52 inches.

—Alan Pittman

OLD WALNUT STILL STANDS

The arborists at the Eugene Tree Foundation have found a way to preserve the old black walnut tree that towers over the corner of 6th and Madison (News Briefs, 12/11). The Tree Foundation and other concerned tree lovers met with Eugene’s urban forester, Mark Snyder, last week to discuss the walnut that was scheduled to come down Dec. 15.

Alby Thoumsin, an arborist with Sperry Tree care and former president of the Eugene Tree Foundation, says they looked at the tree and it’s evaluation and decided the tree didn’t merit removal. Thoumsin says that the group went to Snyder and asked, “How can we help?”

Snyder says that he “appreciated that they contacted me” and that the calls from the arborists led him to review the report on the tree. He discovered that two of the main areas of concern — the cankers and the horizontal ridges in the bark caused by stress — did not actually make the tree unsafe. The stem cankers don’t decay the wood beneath them, Snyder says. The ridges, because they are beneath the branches, not above them in the “tension wood,” which gives the tree its strength, are not a sign that the branches are in danger of breaking. With these findings, Snyder says, “the significance of the safety risk is lowered.”

Even with those issues resolved, the problem still remained that the tree needed pruning to prevent future branches from breaking and falling, and such pruning is

not in the city’s budget.

That’s where the Eugene Tree Foundation stepped in. They offered to partner with the city and not only take care of the branches that need pruning but also to pick the walnuts every July to reduce the weight on the branches and reduce walnut-induced car problems. That would leave the walnut tree to stand safely where it’s been for 100 years. Black walnut trees can live to be 200 years old. The LaFollette Black Walnut in Salem, a designated Heritage Tree, was believed to have been planted around 1880.

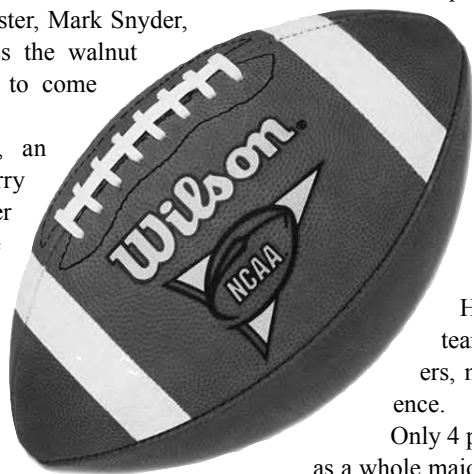
Thoumsin says different arborist companies will help out with the walnut tree and other trees in the future. For this tree, the city will supply a bucket truck and traffic control, and the arborists will provide their labor and expertise. “It’s a win-win situation,” Thoumsin says.

For more information about Eugene’s street trees visit www.eugenetreefoundation.org or link to “urban forestry” at www.eugene-or.gov

— Camilla Mortensen

POLITICAL FOOTBALL MAJORS

The UO has an “extreme” concentration of men’s football and basketball players majoring in political science, which could raise concerns that the university may have clustered athletes in easy classes to protect eligibility.



Forty-one percent of UO seniors and juniors on the football team, 15 of 37 students, major in political science, according to a *USA Today* database published on the internet. Half the UO basketball team, four of eight players, majors in political science.

Only 4 percent of UO students as a whole major in political science.

An investigative report by *USA Today* found that such statistically “extreme” clusters of athlete majors raise questions of whether athletes and the athletic department are using easy classes in the major to avoid NCAA penalties for poor academic performance by athletes.

“When you have extreme clustering,” NCAA President Myles Brand, a former president of the UO told *USA Today*, “you really do have to ask some hard questions: Is there an adviser who’s pushing students into this? Are there some faculty members who are too friendly with student athletes?”

The New York Times reported in 2006 on an academic scandal at Auburn University involving a sociology professor who gave athletes high grades and full course credits for “independent study” classes that required little or no actual study.

According to its website, the UO

• **In calling for yet more prison beds**, Lane County’s 15 Circuit Court judges should be hauled off for contempt of the citizens’ intelligence. Fact: The U.S. incarcerates a higher percentage of its population than any other nation in the world. Fact: Oregon spends a larger portion of its budget on prisons than any other state in the nation (Pew Center). Fact: Lane County’s violent crime rate has fallen 42 percent in the last decade (Oregon Criminal Justice Commission). Fact: Eugene ranks as one of the safest cities in the nation (FBI data).

Even if the judges ignore the evidence and continue to argue that there’s a “deepening crisis” in crime and “the county cannot provide a safe place for our citizens to live and work,” what’s the best way to reduce crime? Studies confirm that prevention using drug, alcohol and mental health treatment, education and social welfare programs provide far more bang for the buck than prisons. Prisons cost \$100,000 a bed to build and \$30,000 a bed per year to operate.

If the judges still want to lock up taxpayer money in expensive jails, what would they cut to do it? Head Start? Senior programs? Mental health and drug treatment? Judge salaries? Whose taxes would they increase? On the realities of the county’s budget, the county’s blind justices are mum, and that makes them moot.

• Suppose **Peter DeFazio** decides to run for governor in 2012. He’d have a good shot at winning, and that would open up all sorts of possibilities. Pete Sorenson could run for DeFazio’s seat in Congress. Bonny Bettman, all rested and refreshed, could run for Sorenson’s seat on the County Commission. She’s too energetic and driven to just sit around.

Meanwhile, we’re looking forward to seeing what George Brown does with Bettman’s City Council seat next year. He’s much quieter and more diplomatic than Bettman, but she says his intelligence, dedication and values make her feel much better about retiring from the council. In fact, if George Brown hadn’t come forward, we’re not sure Bettman would have stepped down.

• Another looming departure has us musing about whether we ought to have a column that tracks the creative folk who leave Eugene for Stumptown. The latest to plan a trek north is just-crowned (in the *EW* Best of Eugene readers’ poll) Best Bartender **Jeffrey Morgenthaler**, who’s riding a wave of national publicity (including mentions in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*) as he leaves Bel Ami for Portland’s Clyde Common. We’re sad to see him go, but at least he’s not going far.

• **Kudos to Mason Williams** and his friends and colleagues for putting on a spectacular Holiday Show last weekend at the Hult. The production showcased the exceptional musical talent that can be found in our community, from middle school kids to white-haired professionals. Loved every minute. Mason Williams has talked about retiring from performing, but he recently completed a road tour, and he’s back in top form. We hope he produces this community Holiday Show again, and again.



• **Sold out?** David Wagner’s hand-drawn *Willamette Valley Nature Calendar* makes an excellent local gift for nature lovers, but it’s been hard to find. Wagner tells us he’s just delivered 40 more to Down to Earth, and more can be found at the UO Museum of Natural and Cultural History. Wagner writes and illustrates a monthly “It’s About Time” feature in *EW* the first week of each month.

• **Tossing shoes at the president?** Why would Iraqi journalist Muntadhar al-Zeidi undertake such a bold and dangerous insult? Look at the numbers; look at the lives. Somewhere between 98,000 and one million Iraqis have suffered violent deaths since the U.S. invasion. Countless others have been maimed. No U.S. soldiers have died this week (19 were seriously injured), but 305 Iraqi civilians have been reported killed in bombings and assassinations this past week, and 335 the week before that. Bush’s invasion unleashed and inflamed a disastrous civil war. This shoe-tossing incident is profoundly symbolic for the people of the Mideast, and Bush, in typical callous fashion, joked about it.

SLANT includes short opinion pieces, observations and rumor-chasing notes compiled by the EW staff. Heard any good rumors lately? Contact Ted Taylor at 484-0519, editor@eugeneweekly.com