

was more distracting than entertaining, constantly advertising something. The new electric green mascot Sluggo seemed to be trying too hard to be funny, slapping people's glasses off, lifting his shirt to expose himself and making humping gestures all the time.

The Ems played with no energy getting shut out, leaving runners on base every inning. The fans tried to pump some energy, but stomping your feet on hard concrete is not the same as stomping on old-growth wooden bleachers. Every thing about the new park seemed forced and artificial. Even the new safety net took away the excitement of a stray foul ball into the fans. Strike three! I doubt that I'll be back, while the bitter sweet taste of glory days of past lingers in my mouth.

Michael Hinojosa
Eugene

MOBILE CANNERY

I am saddened by the loss of the Master Preserver program at the OSU

Extension this September — an invaluable community resource. However, I am excited to share that in their final months, they are going to partner with the Skinner City Farm to help develop food preservation demonstrations in each of the city's six community gardens. Skinner City Farm received funding from the city's Neighborhood Matching Grant to establish this Mobile Cannery Project. Canning equipment and supplies will be hauled to the community gardens this summer via a cargo trike to inform folks of simple, safe and satisfying techniques to preserve food. The start-to-finish demonstrations are geared towards folks with home gardens, community gardens, and CSA shares who have extra produce they want to preserve.

If you're interested in canning or helping out, come see one or all demonstrations this summer. For more information contact Tracy at mobilecannery@gmail.com or call 344-8322. Putting up local food for the winter months is one way we can improve

our food security. I hope this project will help bring together a community of canners who can share experience and resources.

Tracy Gagnon
Mobile Cannery Demonstration
Coordinator
Eugene

POLITICAL VENOM

It's a mystery to me why the *Weekly* would publish a letter as demagogic, bigoted and ignorant as Donovan Worland's attack (letters, 7/22) on all Americans born between 1946 and 1964. That's the Census Bureau's criterion for membership in the baby boom that came after World War II.

One focus of his venom was politics: "Accept it, you voted in the Bush dynasty." In fact, most elections have little to do with voters' age. Other demographic factors, such as residence, race, religion and income, are far more determinative. By Worland's illogic, one would therefore assume that few

baby boomers live in the upper Midwest, or on the coasts except in the Southeast; see <http://wkly.ws/pc> for details.

The 2004 elections were marked by the outpouring of evangelicals in support of Bush; are they mostly baby boomers? The 2008 election had both Jews and blacks favoring Obama by roughly 90 percent margins; did the baby boom skip them?

Worland's letter would be laughable if it did not try to fan flames of prejudice, a dangerous ploy, using words like "spittle," "harridan," "daft" to back his assertions. *EW* should leave this stuff where it belongs: in the recycle bin.

Larry Koenigsberg
Eugene

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VIEWPOINT BY ARNOLD ISMACH

Down the YouTube

New media threaten democracy, community cohesion

All of us are familiar with the many benefits of the digital age. We can stay in contact with friends easily, from home or on the road. Information is at our fingertips easily and quickly with the click of a mouse. Getting lost is a rare problem these days, thanks to GPS devices. Cell phones and computers keep us wired around the clock. And the economy has been helped by a booming new industry.

We also now have easy access to interest groups that didn't exist 20 years ago. And that includes people and groups not only in our own towns, but across the nation and the world. Research shows that we involve ourselves with these people and groups regularly.

That's the upside of our marriage to digital power. But there's also a dark downside — and it holds the potential for severe damage to our society and its core value: democracy.

Most of the negatives we've heard about the digital age center on the decline of traditional news media — newspapers and local television. In-home newspaper subscriptions have sunk below 50 percent, from a high of 85 percent in their glory days 50 years ago. The drop in readership has been particularly severe in the younger age groups, with fewer than 25 percent of the 18- to 35-year-old group who say they regularly read daily newspapers.

Those losses have led many advertisers away from newspapers and toward other media, from the Internet to magazines. The declines have led to a drop in newspaper profit levels from 20 to 35 percent in the 1970s to the current level, barely above zero.

This has led newspapers to drastically reduce their news staffs by the tens of thousands nationwide and also reduce the amount of space devoted to news. Rarely mentioned is another effect — the decline in the scope and quality of news coverage.

We see that clearly in community television, where newscasts contain little more than weather forecasts, fire and police reports, and sports scores. As much as a third of local news programs are filled

with video clips from the national networks. There is little in the way of local substance on local news shows, certainly not government coverage.

One only has to look at *The Register-Guard* for evidence of the decline in newspaper coverage. Thanks to staff and space cuts, it limits local news to a couple of pages daily. Much of that is meeting notices and public record reports. There is little coverage of local government, almost none from cities in the county outside of Eugene. What has expanded is the size of photographs, coverage of entertainment and hobbies, and news-you-can-use (like health tips).

There is also less accuracy today in newspapers. We can see that easily in the typographical errors that now appear regularly. Because of staff cutbacks, there is less verification of spelling — and facts — by reporters and editors.

One of the more notable changes in the *Guard* is the past decade is the virtual disappearance of investigative reporting, where reporters devote considerable time and effort to uncover news that doesn't appear at public meetings. The *Guard* was nationally recognized for the excellence of its investigative reporting in the 1970s and 1980s. No more.

One contradiction to this trend is the continuing success of some weekly newspapers, like *Eugene Weekly*, many of which are increasing their readership. These papers rarely cover much local news in depth, though, and more often concentrate on entertainment rather than government.

The majority of the newspaper and television executives who comment on these vast changes in news coverage are somewhat pessimistic about the future. Some see the end of daily newspapers in the next decade or two. Others see a shift in public focus to on-line news, which they say may save the journalism industry.

But the predictions rarely contain an assessment on the effect of any of these changes on the character and quality of the local community. And that's where



the dire consequences lie. As people spend more time with their digital devices, they spend less time with newspapers and civic organizations. We can see that in declining membership and attendance for groups like City Club, the League of Women Voters and the Lions Club, for example, right here in Eugene. The threat to community cohesion looms large.

The argument that reduced newspaper coverage can be balanced by more on-line readership doesn't fly. Studies show that the younger generation rarely does more than glance at their local newspaper's websites.

What they are spending their time on are social media sites and the millions of blogs that litter the digital landscape. Are they getting real news there? Hardly. So-called "citizen journalists" are out there, but they have little or no training in journalism, and there are no accuracy standards or codes of ethics enforced on-line, as there are in print publications.

More to the point, though, is the fact that people are using the Internet to follow their own special interests, not for local news. They may belong to interest groups with members in Seattle, Chicago, Rome and Tokyo — but few or none in Eugene.

Thus, someone living in a West Eugene neighborhood may know quite a bit about the state of art abroad, but little or nothing about what's happening at Sheldon High School. Their neighbors may be following an Internet interest group focused on cooking, but haven't heard about the renaming of Belt Line. These neighbors are living in separate worlds.

The net effect is that we are gradually building communities of strangers, people with splintered interests who don't know what's happening of importance in their shared city. This wasn't the case when we had Town Criers, who gave everyone within hearing distance the same information, or when almost everyone read the local newspaper and shared the same information.

We can describe this as local democracy going down the tube (or is that YouTube?).

Arnold Ismach of Eugene is the former dean of the School of Journalism & Communication at the UO, now retired. He is also a former daily newspaper editor. This column was submitted to The Register-Guard, but rejected.