

Keeping Occupied

**WHO
ARE THESE
PEOPLE
AND
WHAT
DO THEY
WANT?**

As Occupy Eugene protester Chris Calef says, “no one is really authorized to speak for the Occupy movement.” Occupy Eugene, like Occupy Portland and countless protests across the country, is ruled by consensus. The diversity of people and opinions of the 99 percent at Occupy Eugene and at Occupations, from the small 400-person town of Mosier in the Columbia Gorge to the mother of all Occupations on Wall Street, are the movement’s strength. According to one of Occupy Eugene’s organizers, Katie Dee, “We are a culture of complete acceptance here, and we make decisions by consensus, which means that 90 percent of us have to agree with a decision before it’s made, which means that there’s no leadership. It means that leaders can’t hijack what it is that we’re doing. We’re not following a leader blindly, which is what this country has been doing all along.”

The mainstream media portrayed Occupy Wall Street (OWS), now going into its second month, as lacking direction at first. But it’s become clear that Occupiers are tired of an economy and elections controlled by a small minority of the nation — the 1 percent.

Occupy Eugene has settled into its camp at Washington-Jefferson Park, and for all intents and purposes, it looks like it’s here for the long haul. *EW* talked to Occupiers, business people and politicians to find out just who OWS is and what they want. And what everyone wants to know is: Where is this energy going to go? Can the 99 percent change the nation? We hope so. For updates, events, marches and protests go to occupyeugene.org, or just drop by the Occupation between 1st and 7th avenues and Washington and Jefferson streets, under the I-105 overpass. For more Occupy Eugene photos and interviews go to eugeneweekly.com

BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN, KENDALL FIELDS, SHANNON FINNELL, ANDREW HITZ AND DANTE ZUÑIGA-WEST • PHOTOGRAPHY BY TRASK BEDORTHA

Peter DeFazio

U.S. CONGRESSMAN, OREGON’S 4TH DISTRICT

What do you think Occupy Eugene and the Occupy movement represent politically and socially?

Clearly tens of millions of people in this county are hurting. They are out of work; they are worried about the security of their jobs; they’re worried about their kids, their kids’ future, keeping their house. There’s so much pain. But the way the mass media works, I think a lot of people are half convinced they are sort of unique; they’re a little ashamed, or it’s their problem. And I think what the OWS group has done with the 99 percent is to let people know the problems they are experiencing are not their fault, that they are very broadly spread through society; in fact they are systemic and have been building for more than a quarter of a century.

They made it OK for all these people to come out and say, “Yeah I’m hurting, too, and we need to do something about this.” So I think they are really empowering a much larger group of people.

Do you think the Occupy movement can effect change the way the Tea Party did?

If you think of mass movements of the past, they didn’t necessarily start out as political movements — populism in the late 1800s, or the civil rights movement or the antiwar movement. They were pretty diffuse to begin with but ultimately turned into a vehicle for dramatic change at national level. I’m hopeful that the OWS folks will provide the same kind of catalyst here. There were a lot of people

who affiliated with the Tea Party movement who were angry, folks who did not necessarily share what’s currently being touted as the far right agenda of the Tea Party. They came because they were angry at what happened on Wall Street and angry at what was happening to them. This was the only group out there saying this is rotten and we ought to do something about it. This (OWS) gives those people somewhere else to go with expressing a different set of values. I don’t see it yet as a focused political movement, but it may well grow into that.

Since I reintroduced the speculator tax we’ve been trying to communicate it out there to folks as one of a number of things that the movement could take up as a cause.

What does the Occupy movement need to do in order to create political and economic change?

I don’t know what came first, whether it was the Occupy movement or Move Your Money on Nov. 5, but I think they are now working together, sort of combined. So we’ve already seen an impact. I mean, they backed down — the Move Your Money folks, the discontent customers, and the Wall Street folks, they backed down Bank of America on price gouging people on their debit cards! That’s a nice little start, but it has to get bigger than that in terms of systemic reform and putting Wall Street in its place in society and turning all our efforts toward rebuilding the real economy to benefit the 99 percent of the people in this country. There’s tremendous potential there. It’s going to be step-by-step, and maybe at some point it becomes a larger more ambitious agenda.

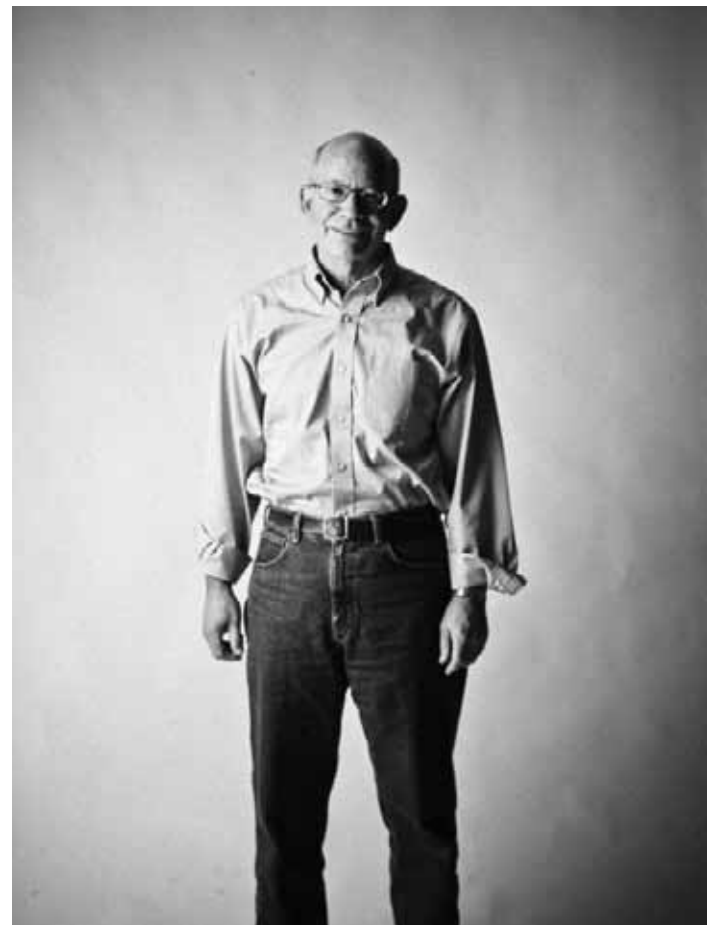


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