

COUNTY NURSES MAY STRIKE

Lane County nurses represented by Local 2831 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) have set a tentative strike date for Jan. 23 after months of negotiations with the county over their contract, and in particular health insurance.

There are about 60 nurses working for Lane County in positions such as Lane County Mental Health, the jail, in schools and as home visiting nurses for at-risk moms and babies. According to a statement on the AFSCME website, the nurses also conduct “the epidemiological investigative work that keeps communicable diseases at bay and administers thousands of immunizations a year.” The nurses “generally serve lower-income clients who depend on our services for their medical care,” the statement says.

Union representative Jim Steiner says health insurance is a particular concern for the nurses because they have more exposure to diseases, particularly those nurses working in public health.

The nurses say there are currently eight nursing vacancies at the county and “we fear there will be many more as employees leave Lane County for more lucrative positions, given the actions being taken by the county.”

In a statement issued to the media, Lane County says one of its “primary interests is having the nurses unit move to a new health plan that more than 1,000 county employees have already moved to.” The county says that the plan “is still more favorable than the health plans offered by most public and private sector employers” and says “this is very important to the county because it will save the county hundreds of thousands of dollars.”

In a separate statement issued to county staff in regard to the possible strike and negotiations with the nurses, the county says, “Having the nurses on their own plan would increase our insurance and administrative costs by approximately 2 percent or about \$500,000 for the 60 members, plus the increased annual costs of approximately

\$121,680. So, the total cost for maintaining the nurses on their old plans is approximately \$621,680 per year!”

Steiner says, “That’s a bald-faced lie. The administrator is not being honest about that; there’s no validation for it.”

He says with only 63 nurses on staff, that means the county would be paying \$9,500 per nurse to track them on their plan, which he calls “ridiculous.”

“Our nurses bring a ton of revenue in,” Steiner says. He estimates it at more than \$2 million a year for the county and asks, “Why are they screwing around with our nurses when our nurses bring in money?”

For more information on the possible strike go to www.oregonafscme.com.

— Camilla Mortensen

LTD SEES GAIN IN RIDERSHIP

With college students taking over Eugene and the additional EmX line to the Gateway area, Lane Transit District has seen a 2.4 percent increase in ridership for the first six months of its fiscal year. This could bode well for ridership on the proposed West 11th EmX line.

Since July 1, the district has recorded 5.2 million customer boardings, with October and November each exceeding one million, according to LTD.

This rise is likely due to the increasing number of UO and LCC students who ride the campus area routes, according to Andy Vobora, a spokesman for LTD.

The Oregonian reports that Portland’s transit service, TriMet, whose ridership is also up, speculates its increase may be due to a desire to be distracted while riding — texting and reading on trips. LTD doesn’t have wireless and doesn’t plan on offering it in the future, Vobora says, but a study out of DePaul University on curbside buses showed having wireless on buses could increase ridership even more — passengers were willing to take a longer, slower ride for the convenience of having internet access.

Locally, EmX is one of the reasons ridership has gone up. Jan. 9 marked the one-year anniversary for the Gateway EmX line, and the addition has contributed to the overall rise in riders, according to Vobora.

“It leveraged additional trips,” he said. “People were going on the existing line into the Gateway area and then back.”

Happening people BY PAUL NEEVEL



JANET MCDONALD

Born and raised in Eugene, Janet McDonald is the daughter of a logger, Sam Sears, who lost a leg in an accident when she was in third grade. “He still wears suspenders,” says McDonald, who visits him regularly to help with household chores. “He’ll be 91 in February.” A few years ago, when her mother was suffering with Parkinson’s, McDonald was there to drive her to appointments and to help out around the house. Half a year after the death of her mom in July of 2008, her husband, wood products distributor John McDonald, suddenly developed a brain tumor and died. In need of an income and aware that her father and others his age didn’t look forward to leaving their comfortable homes for assisted living, McDonald joined with her daughter Michelle Daggett and started a new business, Daily Home Services, aimed at providing help with everyday tasks such as housework and errands. “My dad was the first one; that’s how it all started,” says McDonald, who currently has four regular clients plus three on an on-call basis. “There is such a need for it. People need companionship as much as they need me sweeping the floor or cleaning the bathroom. It brings me joy to put a smile on a senior’s face.” Learn more at www.dailyhomeservices.com

SLANT

- We know that **our messy democracy** is all about anybody running for office if she/he wants to. Witness the Republican primary. But it’s too bad when two progressive Eugene environmentalists run against each other, draining money and energy from the real fight against the local extreme right, which is increasingly using its deep pockets, the courts and the press to attack dreaded liberals like Lane County Commissioner Pete Sorenson. We wonder why state Sen. Floyd Prozanski has signed on with his bicycling buddy Andy Stahl against Pete. Some politicians speculate that the backdrop here is the congressional seat held by Democrat Peter DeFazio. When DeFazio tires of that weekly Eugene-D.C. flight, who will go after his seat? Maybe all the above; maybe none.

- Lane County’s **redistricting Ordinance 9-11**, pushed through late last year by the Tea Party majority on the County Commission, is in the hands of the Oregon Court of Appeals, but this tricky case without legal precedents won’t be resolved anytime soon. Looks like the May primary elections will go ahead with the new district boundary lines. Attorney David Force says he will file the next round of paperwork with the court in February and he expects oral arguments to happen in April or May, with a decision coming in summer or fall. “If the Court of Appeals finds in our favor,” he says, “Lane County probably will appeal it to Oregon’s Supreme Court. We also will have that option if the Court of Appeals rules against us.” Kudos to the folks who are pushing this case in an attempt to make our commissioners accountable to the thousands of citizens who are affected by their unabashed gerrymandering.

- **Can you really be terrorized** by an event you slept through or otherwise didn’t even notice? Emails from City Councilor George Poling indicate he didn’t know the topless Occupy Eugene-related “Vagilutionaries” beat their gong outside his house until someone sent him the YouTube video the next day. Poling was soon denouncing protesters as terrorists and blaming Mayor Kitty Piercy for not sympathizing with his plight soon enough. These emails and dozens of others that shed light on what was going on behind the scenes over the holidays were uncovered by an *EW* public records request. Look for “Topless Turvey Terrorism” this week at www.eugeneweekly.com

- **Mining has stopped at Parvin Butte**, according to a letter sent from Lost Creek Rock Products’ attorney to Lane County. We’re still a little unclear about how sheriff’s deputies can go out and stop a party in the woods and arrest people, but can’t stop illegal mining destroying the environment and devastating a community. But kudos go to the folks on staff at the county who have been bird-dogging Greg Demers and Norman and Melvin McDougal and their mine, as well as to the elected officials — Commissioners Faye Stewart and Jay Bozievich and Sen. Floyd Prozanski — who withdrew their support for LCRP’s nearly half million dollar ODOT grant application for a venture that plans to send the illegally mined gravel and rock for use on the Coos Bay Rail Link and at the Port of Coos Bay.

- Concerned about issues like illegal mining at Parvin Butte, folks like the McDougals and Demers, the Supreme Court’s *Citizens United* ruling that removed all restrictions on corporate political contribution and “Who owns Lane County”? **Head over to Occupy the Courts** at 11 am Friday, Jan. 20. Occupy Eugene will rally at the Wayne Morse Free Speech Plaza, 8th and Oak, then march to the new U.S. Courthouse and join up with the Eugene chapter of We the People for a noon rally and afternoon of talks (see Activist Alert). If the weather is bad, the events will move indoors to First Christian Church at 11th and Oak.

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

LIGHTEN UP

Losing a lawsuit but prevailing in several investigations allows County Commissioners Handy and Sorenson to point out that not all the lies our adversaries spread about us are true.

BY RAFAEL ALDAVE