

EWEB LISTENS

Being a public utility means listening to your customers. The Eugene Water & Electric Board did that last October when its elected commissioners adopted the first smart meter “opt-in” program in the nation. Customers who want to take advantage of new services (enhanced energy monitoring, new billing options, remote start and stop of service, better outage and leak detection, etc.) can choose to have a new meter installed to enable enhanced services.

Those who do not want the services will not have to do anything. They won’t have to “opt out” as they do in half of the nation, where more than 50 million advanced meters already are in service. EWEB also has no plans to levy a surcharge for reading meters manually, and the utility has taken steps to ensure that all meters will have UL certification — the gold standard for safety of electrical equipment.

These actions were preceded by more than two years of listening to customers, including a small number who remain opposed to allowing other customers a choice. The utility solicited additional expert opinions from the state of Oregon’s chief epidemiologist, the local health authority and other medical experts to help understand what, if any, health risks were posed.

Rather than “not listening,” as a recent viewpoint claimed, EWEB’s actions seem like the hallmark of a public utility that not only is listening to its customers but is acting in their best interest by carefully exploring and adopting sound technology to enhance customer service.

Angie R. Marzano
Eugene

TONE-DEAF MISSION?

I read with great interest [News section, 4/16] of the desire of owner-operator Colin Graham to open “an entirely queer-owned and queer-run business.”

You see, for years now, I myself have cherished the dream of one day opening my own entirely straight-owned and straight-run business.

A friend recently confessed to me his own bosom-wish of opening an entirely white-owned and white-run business. Meanwhile, online, I’ve made contact with a fellow who’d like to own an entirely Christian-owned and Christian-run business here in Eugene — but he was shy of relocating from his native Topeka, Kansas, fearing a left-wing ad-rag such as the *Weekly* would never air an outrageously tone-deaf mission statement.

However, now each one of us has every confidence that the *Weekly* will not only

highlight our planned business ventures, but additionally air our sincere reassurances in some successive paragraph that we (all of us) plan to make our businesses “inclusive, empowering and safe spaces.”

Mahla Shaebanyan-Bady
Eugene

COMPLACENT EUGENE

EW’s “Biz Beat” April 9 noted that the new Whole Foods store “has been relatively uncontroversial” but was challenged when they tried to locate here in 2006.

In 2006, there was enough opposition to stop this big box chain store. Last year, when the City Council rubberstamped Whole Foods’ request, there were three people who spoke in opposition. The other two were the owner and an employee of Sundance Natural Foods. Whole Foods is being brought here by the Giustina timber company’s real estate division — a company that sprays poison from helicopters over their clearcuts.

Eugene is a more complacent community today, with little civic interest in challenging City Hall. A decade of ostensible liberal Democratic control has neutered most activists (even though the real power is held by the Republican city manager).

Another factor is the decline of grassroots environmentalism, a national problem, not just a local issue. Greenwashing has become a substitute for understanding ecological problems. Democratic politicians (Kitty Piercy, Peter DeFazio, John Kitzhaber, President Obama) admit climate change is happening while they promote policies that make climate change worse.

Who remembers that a decade and a half ago, the issue of Nike sweatshops was a controversial concern for many UO students?

Mark Robinowitz
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THE DUKE OF 4J

There’s a first time for everything. The other day during the NCAA championship game was the first time that I’ve taken a political phone call at the same time. As we both watched the game, a candidate for the local school board told me during the commercial breaks about how we starved our school system, dropping from fourth in the national bracket for best education system all the way down to 49th.

Let’s hear it for Kevin Cronin, the duke of the 4J School Board. It was unorthodox, but it was enlightening. Mr. Cronin, it was a pleasure. Good luck in your competition

VIEWPOINT BY STAN TAYLOR

Seeing Red

INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES ON
PEACE AND JUSTICE

This year Lane Community College embarked on a Cultural Competency Professional Development initiative designed as educational programs for faculty and staff about the history, culture and current experiences of diverse peoples and communities. In this context, the Lane Peace Center Committee chose to focus our upcoming 8th annual Peace Symposium on indigenous peoples. Our purpose is to look at the history and culture of the United States from an indigenous perspective, to borrow a phrase from one of our keynote speakers, Suzan Harjo, “Seeing Red.”

For many Americans, our national narrative and mythology casts the colonial settlers as brave individuals coming to a new frontier and overcoming hardship to establish a country built on the principles of freedom and democracy. This viewpoint holds that while indigenous people existed, they were scattered nomadic bands who unfortunately succumbed to diseases inadvertently carried by the European settlers. As a result, it was a virtually empty frontier which providence had provided for the Anglo settlers.

From the point of view of indigenous peoples, the narrative is quite different. Far from being an empty land at the time Columbus “discovered” the Americas, about 40 million indigenous people lived in the countries we now call Mexico, the United States and Canada. At the same time, the population of Western and Eastern Europe was about 50 million. Instead of being scattered tribes, Indians were farmers and builders, engineering canals in Mexico and establishing trade routes that spanned the continent.

According to our second keynote speaker, Dennis Martinez, Indians lived in the Americas for hundreds of generations, far longer than the United States has existed. Survival across these many generations required an intimate relationship with the land. For example, the Salmon People of the Northwest and Buffalo People of the Great Plains base their cultures on their relationship with nature. When the land was taken and the salmon and buffalo driven to near extinction, indigenous peoples experienced cultural genocide.

If we accept these alternative narratives as valid, we must face our histories and ourselves. We must include the reality that the settler colonists were part of a European culture of conquest that dated back to the Crusades. The land was brutally taken from indigenous peoples. Presidents like Andrew Jackson came to prominence by leading military campaigns intended to exterminate whole nations of Native Americans to make room for white settlers. From the time the United States was established under the banner of “continental destiny” until the early 1970s, official policy toward Indians alternated between annihilation and assimilation, virtually erasing their voices and cultures from our national narrative.

Today, American Indians and indigenous peoples everywhere continue to experience an assault on their remaining lands. The same American historical narratives of improvement and gain are still leading to the destruction of indigenous lands, cultures and ways of life.

There is much to gain by facing our histories and opening ourselves to a more complete narrative that recognizes the experiences of all people, that seeks to reconcile the facts and take responsibility.

This year’s Lane Peace Symposium is entitled “Seeing Red: Indigenous Perspectives on Peace & Justice.” Our keynote speakers are Dennis Martinez and Suzan Harjo. President Obama awarded Dr. Harjo the Presidential Medal of Freedom for her work as a writer, curator and activist, improving the lives of Native peoples. She was a key figure in the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act. As the founder of the Morning Star Institute, she helped to found and curate the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian.

Dennis Martinez is the founder of the Indigenous Peoples Restoration Network. He works internationally with community-based Indigenous Peoples on cultural rights, climate change, eco-cultural restoration and bridging Western science with traditional ecological knowledge. He is a recipient of an Ecotrust Indigenous Conservation Leadership award for Pacific North America.

The symposium will be on Thursday, April 30, at Lane Community College, with a morning session in the Longhouse from 10 am to 12:30 pm and evening session in the Center for Meeting and Learning from 7 to 9:30 pm. You are invited to attend. For more information go to lanec.edu/peacecenter. ■

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