



PHOTO BY KELLY KENOYER

RELIGIOUS BANNER DOWNTOWN RAISES IRE

Christmas-Jesus: A religious message on a banner downtown has stirred controversy this holiday season, with more than 140 comments and replies blowing up a post on outgoing Mayor Kitty Piercy's official Facebook page.

The sign in question reads, "CHRISTMAS Attend a Church of Your Choice" and "JESUS Celebrate His Birth." Since the banner is stretched across the public street of 8th Avenue, some citizens argue that it's in violation of the constitutional separation of church and state.

Sally Nunn, a Eugene resident for 53 years, says "it is seen as a message to people that this is being endorsed by the city, whether that perception is correct or not."

"I think they have an obligation to be neutral on politics and religion," Nunn adds.

Sam Mitchell, a local musician, says the sign is alienating and shows that only certain people are welcome in our town. "I don't think the city should be allowing or even making money from religious organizations to display their messages on the streets," he says. "I especially don't think it's appropriate since those religious organizations aren't paying taxes in the first place."

Brian Richardson, the public affairs manager of city of

Eugene public works, says, "We generally don't look at the messages of those events because of constitutional provisions." Instead, he says that the banner program only looks to see when the reservation is, if the applicant completed the forms and if there was a full payment of fees.

"We don't want to review these messages because we don't want to infringe on freedom of speech," Richardson adds.

The controversial sign itself is the remnant of the long legacy of local resident Al Jagger, who ran a program called Messengers Of Truth, which aimed to spread the gospel with lawn signs at Christmas time. He died in October at the age of 98, but according to his obituary, "more than 70,000 signs have been sold in the 12 years since Jagger began campaigning for Christ."

While Jagger's previous billboards and lawn signs, including an Easter banner downtown last year, didn't stir much controversy in those 12 years, many in the community do not accept the banner across 8th Avenue.

"There absolutely should not be religious banners in public spaces," Mitchell says. "It's inappropriate, it's divisive and it's a non-inclusive message to other members of our community." ■

ACTIVIST ALERT

- **350 Eugene is off and running in the New Year.** On Monday, Jan. 9, from 4-5 pm, activists will meet at the Federal Courthouse, 405 E. 8th Avenue, to protest Trump's climate denier cabinet nominees, 350 organizer Betzi Hitz says. And on Wednesday, Jan. 11 from 6-9 pm at the First United Methodist Church, 1376 Olive, the Winter 350 Eugene Meetup will combine a potluck, campaign reports and strategies discussion. "This is the place and time to plug in," Hitz says. On Friday, Jan. 13 from 6-9 pm also at 1376 Olive non-violent direct action training is offered. "Join the growing numbers of citizens motivated to take earth-saving action in these most uncertain times." Get more info at world.350.org/eugene.

- **Friends of Jim Cross**, a 41-year-old Eugene resident and University of Oregon student, who has been missing since Dec. 12, 2016 want Eugene-Springfield residents to keep an eye out for him, saying "It is possible that Jim could be in a confused or depressed state," friend Jill Brazier says. Cross is 6 feet tall, with brown hair and a brown beard. A missing persons report has been filed with the Eugene Police Department, Case No. 16-20891. See EW's blog for a picture of Cross, and call EPD with any tips at 541-682-5111.

- Community Rights Lane County is hosting Mari Margil, associate director of the **Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF)** on 7 pm Thursday, Jan. 12, at the Eugene Garden Club, 1645 High Street. Margil leads CELDF's global rights of nature work, which advocates for legal standing for nature. In 2008, she assisted Ecuador's Constituent Assembly to draft "rights of nature" constitutional provisions, and works today in Nepal, India, Colombia, Cameroon and other countries to advance the rights of nature. She has been a contributing author for several books including *The Bottom Line* or *Public Health* and *Exploring Wild Law*.

IT'S ABOUT TIME BY DAVID WAGNER

The natural world has its regular rhythms disrupted by natural disasters like ice storms, much the way human environments change.

Incense cedar trees have proven much more susceptible to damage from an ice load than Douglas fir. The recent ice storm brought down incense cedar branches in much greater numbers than Douglas fir. The incense cedar's ecological adaptation to the warmer end of the forest zone allowed them to evolve into a species with weak branches. They are not resistant to snow or ice. Key elements to surviving a disaster seem to be adaptability and resilience.

Heron nests were lost in a big cottonwood stand close to the Willamette River. Only two are left in a tree that hosted a rookery of seven or eight nests in the past ten years or so. Three of the big branches that supported nests are gone. There are still good nest sites in this stand of cottonwoods — it will be interesting to watch how the rookery responds to the damage.

The harshest part of winter in the southern Willamette Valley normally comes after the New Year. Those of us who feed birds in the summer need to pay attention to our feathered friends now, when the living can be tough. Feed in the wild is scarce; many

birds now rely on the kindness of bird feeders. Keep seed feeders full and hummingbird feeders available by bringing them inside on freezing nights. They need energy to maintain life functions in temperatures below 0° C.

David Wagner is a botanist in Eugene teaching moss classes and leading nature walks. His 2017 Oregon Nature Calendar is now available at Down to Earth stores in Eugene or online from his web site: fernenmosses.com.



RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD
SELASPHORUS RUFUS