

# SLANT

• The combination of **Jane VanBoskirk, Eleanor Roosevelt and Planned Parenthood** of Southwestern Oregon filled every seat in the Wildish Theater on April 20. In a performance sponsored by *Eugene Weekly*, VanBoskirk did her amazing one-woman hour as Eleanor Roosevelt, and Planned Parenthood received about \$4,800 to put toward their important work. A former resident of Eugene now living in Portland, VanBoskirk is playing Eleanor all over the country. She and the Wildish are planning a June 4 reprise for all those fans who were turned away.

• **This week in kudos:** Local writer Eliot Treichel won the Oregon Book Awards readers' choice award for his *A Series of Small Maneuvers* (Ooligan Press). And Tracy Daugherty of Corvallis won the Frances Fuller victor award for general nonfiction for *The Last Love Song: A Biography of Joan Didion* (St. Martin's Press). You can read our reviews of both in our Winter Reading issue online. Meanwhile, here at *EW*, owner and publisher Anita Johnson will receive one of the City Club of Eugene's 2017 Turtle Awards to Outstanding Citizens on April 28 for "sticking one's neck out for the good of the community." We're honored, but believe we can always do more. Readers, what else should we stick our necks out for in our solutions journalism? Contact editor@eugeneweekly.com.

• **Where do you want your taxes to go?** A coalition of activists From Taxes for Peace Not War, CALC, WAND, ESSN, Indivisible Eugene and Take Action Eugene gathered April 18 at the federal building to "challenge militarism and oppose Donald Trump's egregious policies," Michael Carrigan of CALC tells *EW*. Participants in a penny poll were handed 10 pennies, which they deposited in jars representing a six-category breakdown of the federal budget. The categories and how people voted were: human services 43.3 percent; environmental services 33 percent; general government 7.8 percent; military (present and past wars) 3 percent; Veteran's Services 8.6 percent; and paying down the national debt 4.3 percent.

• **Resistance is not futile.** Remember the pink pussyhats and the huge Women's Marches across America the day after Trump's inauguration? The smaller gatherings and action that stopped his Obamacare repeal, fought his Muslim ban and turned out Democrats in red districts in Kansas and Georgia? Last week the March for Science, including 2,000 protesters in Eugene, caught the world's attention. Next is the Climate March, Saturday, April 29. See our What's Happening Calendar for details.

• **"Our Representative Democracy — Can It Survive?"** was Congressman Peter DeFazio's topic April 21 when he spoke on the University of Oregon campus sponsored by the City Club of Eugene and the Morse Center. His answer: "I haven't given up and neither should you." That was powerful advice from a congressman first elected in 1986, now the ranking member of the transportation committee. DeFazio laid out a long list of profound problems from Citizens United to dark money to gerrymandered districts, superpacs, the electoral college and on and on. But the good news is that the "American people are awakened from their slumber," and newcomers are taking political action, DeFazio said. We're with Pete. We haven't given up either.

## CORRECTIONS/ CLARIFICATIONS

Due to older, incorrect info on their website that was later fixed, *EW* ran the wrong dates for the upcoming **Friends of Buford Park and Mount Pisgah Native Plant Sale** in last week's gardening column. The event is 9 am to 1 pm, Saturday, May 6, not April 29, at Howard Buford Recreation Area (aka Mount Pisgah). If you don't see this in time and accidentally head there this Saturday, we regret the error and hope you have a nice time at the park.

## TROUBLE ON WATER LANE

*Will Alpine residents run out of water with new development?*

**F**or Southern Benton County resident Garrick Balsly, concern about his water supply and the health of his land started nearly five years ago when his widowed neighbor received a postcard in the mail.

The postcard offered timber-cutting services from the Veneta-based Oregon Land Company and bore the seal of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative — a seal that Oregon Land Company did not have permission to use, as *EW* reported in 2013.

Helen Davidson responded to the postcard because she was worried about the trees on her 40-acre property becoming a fire hazard. After a timber cruise of the property, the buyers convinced her to sell them the land.

According to Davidson's daughter, Carmen Keyser, "they weren't as above-board as they could have been, but they didn't break any rules."

Within months of the sale, the large timber that blanketed the property was nearly all razed. A freshly paved road, handful of spindly oaks, large brush pile and an oil drum are pretty much all that remains on the once forested property.

The land is set to be developed as five residential lots after plans to create seven lots on the property were withdrawn following backlash from neighboring property owners.

New developments like these are raising concern among rural communities about how their land may look in the future and how new development will affect their access to water. In order to address these issues, rural residents in southern Benton County are organizing to have a bigger voice in county land-use decisions.

Even with the abundant rainfall on the Coast Range foothill community, Alpine residents are seeing their wells go dry in summer. Alpine is just a few minutes west of Monroe and about 20 miles south of Corvallis. People in the area depend on wells, and having a well go dry can mean spending thousands of dollars to drill a new well that may or may not provide for the future needs of their land and property.

Todd Jarvis, director of the federally designated Institute for Water and Watersheds at Oregon State University, says groundwater problems in the Alpine area are not a new concern. Because of the geology of the area, "it has been known to have low availability for years," he says. "Water levels will decline when you start to pump."

The spotty reputation of the buyers and developers — the McDougal Brothers Co., who are long associated with the Oregon Land Company — adds to the concerns of community members.

Collectively the McDougal brothers, Norman and Melvin, along with their frequent business partner Greg Demers, have a well-documented history of questionable business tactics and contested developments, including the clearcut and mining of Parvin Butte; fires at the Pilot Rock lumber dump (which earned Demers a nearly \$800,000 fine from a state environmental agency); and an attempted water speculation scheme on the McKenzie River.

The brothers' history of buying property from senior citizens through proxies and then doing clearcuts on their land was documented in an *InvestigateWest* article published by *EW* last April.

Since the purchase of the land by the McDougal Brothers and subsequent clearcut, Balsly has challenged a series of proposed developments on the property, with the support of LandWatch Lane County and the Goal One Coalition of Eugene. The state Land Use Board of Appeals has twice sided with Balsly and remanded the

case back to the Benton County Supervisors for further consideration.

While the clearcut and the process of fighting development proposals have caused a great deal of frustration for Balsly and other neighbors, there has been a silver lining to the situation.

"It was the Davidson Hill case that sparked us to organize," says George Wisner, an Alpine resident.

Pushed forward by Wisner and Balsly, Alpine activated the previously defunct Southern Benton County Citizen Advisory Committee. According to a county press release, the committee gives rural residents the ability "... to improve communications between county officials and those living in that part of the county, as well as create greater opportunities for input into Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners actions that impact them."

Of the six Citizen Advisory Committees for rural areas of Benton County, only three are currently active.

Wisner says the committee gives Alpine residents "a forum to bring issues to."

"We get notifications for everything," Wisner says. "Issues come up that we would never have known about without this system. A lot of county matters don't require public participation."

Because the CAC can raise awareness about planned developments and other county projects, it gives Alpine the ability to settle disputes as a community without having to go to court, according to Wisner.

"Because the platform is legally recognized by the county, when we make recommendations the county commissioners take them seriously," Wisner says.

While the details of land use planning and zoning applications vary from dull to downright boring, they are important to people relying on wells for water in an area with well-known water issues.

One of the original complaints Balsly brought to the planning commission regarded the failure of the county to require the developers to do a dry-season well test. The commissioners found that the county planning office had indeed failed to follow county rules requiring wells to be tested in dry months.

Benton County code requires dry-season well tests for new developments to show they have sufficient water access during summer and early fall.

While a hydrologist hired by the McDougal brothers dismissed groundwater concerns in front of the commission, citing the annual rainfall in the area, residents in the area have noticed a trend of wells running dry during the summer.

During public testimony before the Benton County commissioners in September 2015, multiple residents voiced their concerns.

Richard Saylor, who lives less than half a mile from the proposed development and recently had to drill a second well, says, "people in the area are scared about their water supply." Saylor told commissioners that he has been studying well logs in the area for 20 years and that wells on slopes like the Davidson property are "seasonally challenged."

Jarvis, of the Institute for Water and Watersheds, says the geology of the area makes it such that the aquifer does not store much water despite heavy rainfall. Because of the fractured rock formations, which he compared to broken glass, two wells within 20 feet of each other could have totally different water availability.

This creates a tough situation for well owners who are out to prove that their neighbors have negatively affected their groundwater, according to Jarvis. "When it comes to well level monitoring," he says, "the burden is