

# NEWS

BY ANDY TSUBASA FIELD

## TURNING RED STATES BLUE

Political activist group supporting out-of-state election candidates



JODI GURTOV AND KAKI BURRUSS FROM SISTER DISTRICT OR-4 AND MARINA SALTMAN FROM DEADWOOD RESIST

PHOTO: COURTESY OF LEONORA KENT

**B**onnie Henderson hasn't forgotten a trip to the Democratic Party of Lane County's headquarters in the months leading up to the 2016 presidential election.

After picking up a Hillary Clinton bumper sticker, the Eugene resident says she was asked if she wanted to volunteer for her desired candidate's campaign.

She declined.

Henderson, 63, says she felt she was past her prime to be contributing to election races. In the '90s, she campaigned against anti-abortion measures, and in 2008 she phone-banked to elect Barack Obama.

She felt she was "too old," she says. "I've done that enough."

But the decision is one Henderson now regrets.

"I have felt bad ever since," she says, lamenting that millions of others made the same choice during the 2016 presidential race where Donald Trump's support in a majority of states narrowly saw him win the electoral college vote.

Today Henderson is a leader in a nationwide progressive movement to turn red states blue, heading the local branch of the Sister District Project. The organization, started by four women lawyers in San Francisco, works to elect more Democrats to state legislatures in swing districts around the country.

In 2017, the project raised around \$700,000 in support of candidates running for state legislatures and gathered 25,000 volunteers, according to its website. Fourteen of 15 candidates the Sister District Project supported in Virginia, Washington and Delaware were elected.

Sister District OR-4 is the organization's branch representing Oregon's 4th congressional district — a solid blue district held by Democratic Rep. Peter DeFazio since 1987. Henderson says that, along with five other district captains, she manages volunteers living in and around Eugene, in the Corvallis-Albany area and Oregon's south coast.

According to Sister District Project co-founder Lala Wu, the organization has 165 volunteers in the district signed up to the project's email lists.

District captain Leann Ford, a business manager at the University of Oregon, signed up to lead the OR-4 branch after being impressed with the project's state-level focus.

"What I like about the Sister District Project is how they do a lot of sophisticated research to try to identify the races they want to get involved with," Ford says.

The Sister District Project uses volunteer researchers to identify races to support based on whether a candidate

is running for a seat in: a Republican-controlled legislative chamber where Democrats are between one and four seats short of a majority, or a chamber held by a bare Democratic majority of one or two seats.

The organization also selects races with Republican-dominated state legislatures where success could sway Republican supermajorities or impact redistricting two years from now.

Wu, who helped start the Sister District Project, says state-level races are critical in responding to gerrymandering as well as forming progressive policies around the country. Six years into Obama's presidency, Democrats lost 910 state legislative seats, according to *politifact.com*.

State legislative races "really are the lynchpin of democracy," Wu says. "And Republicans knew this and implemented a strategy to take over state legislatures during the Obama administration, which is why we are trying to dig ourselves out of a pretty serious hole."

After the Sister District Project assigns a campaign for its OR-4 team to support, the team works any way a candidate sees fit. The team's activities include phone-banking, postcard writing and canvassing from a list of likely Democratic voters provided by the campaign, along with fundraising.

In November 2017, Sister District OR-4 supported Manka Dhingra, a first-time Democratic candidate who ran for a Washington state senate seat. Her victory overturned a Republican majority.

Sister District OR-4 raised \$422 for Dhingra at a screening of the documentary *Dolores* it held at Eugene's Broadway Metro on Oct. 18. The group paid \$3 a ticket, charged \$20.18 (to suit a 2018 theme) and donated the difference to Dhingra's campaign.

In addition, three Sister District OR-4 volunteers from Deadwood held a community potluck, silent auction and square dance in September, raising another \$492.82 for Dhingra. The group, organizers say, also raised \$497.82 for Mike Mullin, who was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates during a time when Republicans controlled 66 out of 100 seats.

Now, having experienced success, the Sister District OR-4 volunteers are preparing to support Florida State House candidate Margaret Good for her Feb. 13 special election. On Jan. 25, they held a kick-off and postcard writing party at Eugene's Claim 52 Brewing. A photo posted on the group's Facebook page shows 26 volunteers writing messages to Florida voters.

Although some of the candidates the team supports are running for office far away, Henderson says she believes that being a part of the Sister District Project can bring change.

"I used to think that my own backyard was Eugene, District 4 and Oregon. But after the 2016 election, I realized that I have an obligation to the rest of the country," she says.

"I think progressives are looking for a way to make a difference," Henderson continues. "For some people, that's showing up to town hall meetings, making phone calls, or going to rallies or marches. My interest is in electing more Democrats. That's ultimately what's going to make a difference."

Learn more about the local branch of the Sister District Project and its upcoming events on its Facebook group, Sister District OR-4. You can also volunteer by signing up at [sisterdistrict.com/volunteer](http://sisterdistrict.com/volunteer). ■



- One of the **largest residential real estate parcels** in the Eugene hills may go on the market this year, according to unconfirmed rumors. Local timber baron Aaron Jones died in 2014, and his widow, Marie Jones, owns the gated 14.7-acre property, an 8,000-square-foot home and large barn at the corner of Chambers Street and McLean Boulevard. The property is known for its elaborate Christmas lighting display each December. The Lane County assessor lists the property's true market value at \$1.6 million, but if this prime view property were to successfully go through a planned unit development (PUD) process, it could be worth much more. Or a new owner could enjoy the spacious landscape as is, open an upscale bed and breakfast, or even create a park or community garden on the lawn where the deer and wild turkeys roam.

One local broker familiar with the property is Ben Fogelson of InEugene Real Estate. He says it's possible that four to six homes per acre could be raised on the lower, more buildable part of the property — theoretically 40 or more townhouses. The nearby Braeman Village PUD has 36 units in approximately six acres. Fogelson says one estimate of the cost of infrastructure is \$45,000 per lot, and the cost to build a higher-end home or townhouse is about \$324,000 (\$175 per square foot). With numbers like those, he says, the 14.7 acres, if fully developed, could be worth many millions.

- Seattle-based **düber Technologies** is planning to open a major cannabis distribution center in Eugene. "This exciting development has the potential to alter the entire business landscape in the area," says Lily Seglin, a company spokesperson. Seglin and others at düber headquarters declined by press time to answer questions about the location and size of the center, whether it will be built or leased, and how many people will be employed. Very little warehouse space is available in Eugene due to marijuana enterprises.

The expansion into Eugene is part of a \$50 million capital investment in düber by California-based Vacone Real Estate, according to the düber website. The company provides a number of services designed to streamline the flow of products from growers and processors to retail outlets.

- **Classic Touch Hair Design** is now located in the Edgewood Shopping Center at the corner of 40th Avenue and Donald Street in Eugene. Robert Cecil says he is no longer cutting hair at his home studio on West 11th Avenue. The new studio is on the east side of the shopping center next to the Highlands Brew Pub and Sports Bar.

- **The Science Factory** near Autzen Stadium has been renamed the Eugene Science Center. Executive Director Tim Scott says the rebranding follows a decision in 2016 to focus more heavily on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). The change involves fundraising, program expansion and renovations to make the center a world-class interactive museum.

- **The Wayward Lamb**, Eugene's "own Queer pub and event space," as it billed itself, announced on Facebook Jan. 29 that after three years it will be closing its doors Saturday, Feb. 3, leaving Eugene again without a dedicated space for the LGBTQ community. See the post and the saddened responses from the community at [facebook.com/thewaywardlamb](http://facebook.com/thewaywardlamb).

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