

SLANT

• One last word from us on the **elected auditor measure** on the May 15 ballot: Opponents of Measure 20-283 complain it was drafted behind closed doors with no public process, but it's actually the product of decades of discussion in public meetings and even at City Club of Eugene. The final language of the measure was crafted by a group of well-informed, civic-minded folks, including two exceptional former city councilors, Bonny Bettman McCornack and George Brown. The measure reflects massive research into auditor best practices around the country and was refined to fit with Eugene's form of government. Guiding the process was auditing expert Gary Blackmer, former auditor for the state of Oregon and the city of Portland.

Eugene is not burdened with Chicago-style corruption, but we do have a city staff that sometimes stumbles along, wasting millions of taxpayer dollars in the process. An adequately funded and *independent* city auditor will work with our city departments to improve efficiency, transparency and accountability. Vote "Yes" on the elected auditor Measure 20-283.

• A transplant from New Jersey was elected **president of the City Club of Eugene** May 4. Joel Korin retired from his practice as a trial lawyer, moved to Eugene to be with his kids and grandkids, and both he and his wife started volunteering in this community. Korin advocates for the "civil and civic discourse" that the City Club represents. He succeeds current City Club President Sandra Bishop and Eric Richardson of the Eugene Springfield NAACP is president-elect.

• **What would Bill Bowerman do?** Everybody from the president of the University of Oregon to the editorial writers of *The Register-Guard* has a take on that question to fortify their positions on the proposed total destruction and rebuild of Hayward Field, including the fabled East Grandstand. We think it is safe to say that Bill Bowerman would not have liked the huge tower that is part of the current plan. Who does like it?

• After listening to Bhairavi Desai speak May 4 as a guest of the Morse Center for Law and Politics on the campus, **we wonder about calling Uber to haul us around any city.** Her topic was "On the Frontlines of the Gig Economy: Organizing Taxi Workers under Ubernomics." Desai, the executive director of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, talked about the obscene gap between income of Uber owners and drivers. She said many drivers don't even receive minimum wage. On the other hand, in New York City, some Uber drivers have joined the taxi workers union. "How does that work?" asked one of Eugene's labor leaders. We wonder.

NEWS

BY TAYLOR PERSE



THE WORLD AT HIS FEET

An on-the-job visit with the operator of Eugene's tallest construction crane

Six days a week, Scott Beeler arrives at a construction site in downtown Eugene and climbs up a series of nine outdoor ladders, rain or shine, to report for work. His job combines unique views and an element of danger, as he maneuvers his crane cab 200 feet in the air.

Beeler gets to the top before sunrise and sometimes doesn't come down again until after the sun sets, as much as 16 hours later.

This job is not for the faint-hearted.

To interview Beeler I climbed up the thin, slick ladders and saw Eugene become smaller as I got closer to the crane cab. The higher I climbed up the crane, the more the wind blew and the tower swayed. As the crane cab and its arm rotated around the construction site, I felt a deep vibration on the metal platform.

Beeler is working on a 12-story student housing building between East Broadway and Franklin Boulevard, the site of the former Chinese restaurant Louie's Village. The housing subdivision will have 230 units, 440 bedrooms and four levels of parking. It is projected for completion by summer of 2019.

A stocky man with minimal brown facial hair, Beeler is wearing a white hardhat, a black sweatshirt and jeans — comfortable clothes for sitting in a crane all day.

Beeler says he began his work with cranes when he was 18 in Lewiston, Idaho. He walked onto Potlatch Paper Mill and got a job working for Chicago Bridge and Iron as a laborer, sweeping floors and doing other small tasks, until they eventually put him in a ground crane — a drivable crane that lifts loads to lesser heights.

"I did virtually anything everyone asked me to do. And they liked that," Beeler says. The crane operator at the site had just quit, and Beeler was asked to try out the ground crane until he felt comfortable on it.

Fifteen years later, Beeler moved from ground cranes to tower cranes. He says he knew tower cranes would be his favorite to operate after his first time.

"I liked it," Beeler says. "It's peaceful up here. And there is really nobody up here to bother you."

At the top of Beeler's current crane tower in Eugene sits a 6.5-by-4-foot cab, Beeler's daily office. It is furnished with a leather chair, a few coat hooks, a communication radio and a decorative wooden hardhat with his name inscribed on it.

Beeler says that he often will keep a microwave in the cab with him on jobs, but there is not a place to put it in this crane, so the oven sits outside the cab on an electrical box.

Before his recent return to Eugene, Beeler spent the past six years operating cranes in Texas and previously worked in Idaho, Montana and North Carolina. He came back to Eugene for his kids.

"I chose this job because my children were here. I quit a job over in Houston to come here," he says.

Beeler has three children who live in town. His son is a junior in high school, his one daughter attends the University of Oregon and his other daughter goes to Arizona State University. Beeler said that two of his kids have been up in the tower with him.

"They liked it. They thought it was pretty cool," Beeler says.

In his work travels, Beeler says he also enjoys the different views that he gets from each crane he operates.

"My favorite view was in Charlotte [North Carolina], right across from the Panther stadium," Beeler says. "And," he says, Eugene "is not a bad view either." He grabs the

black joystick on the arm of his chair and rotates the crane around to show the 360-degree view of the city.

The crane tower, located off of Broadway near downtown, at 200 feet tall is one of the tallest structures in Eugene. The only structure taller is the 212-foot Ya-Poh-Ah Terrace retirement apartments at the base of Skinner Butte. The crane sits next to the Willamette River and offers a view of Eugene from downtown to the UO and Autzen Stadium.

Beeler said the taller the crane, the better it is for crane operators, even if that means a longer, harder climb to the top.

"That's what everybody wants — the highest crane," Beeler says. "It's a better view. You can see over the top of everybody."

One of Beeler's favorite projects was working on the Ruby Dam in Montana because of his closeness to the wild-life there. He saw golden eagles, bighorn sheep and bald eagles in his daily work.

"It was really pretty there," he says.

Although he enjoys the scenery, Beeler has encountered troubles in his work over the years.

"Everyone just thinks we sit up here and pull levers, but there's a lot more to it," Beeler says.

Anytime something goes wrong with the crane loads, Beeler says, it is his fault, even though he is not on the ground to supervise.

Beeler says that once, he had someone on the ground check the hold of the crane choker and clear him to lift the load. Beeler picked up the load and moved it, but the straps broke and it fell off the crane next to a construction office.

"I was blamed for it," he says. "What am I supposed to do? Climb down 200 feet and check it myself?"

Beeler's current crane can lift from 11,680 to 22,040 pounds at a time, depending on whether it is lifting from the tip or closer to the middle of the crane arm.

Communication can also be an issue, Beeler says, because he can only communicate through a radio. A few moments later, an inaudible voice comes over the radio telling him what to pick up next. Beeler grabs the communicator and asks them to repeat themselves.

"If you are on the ground, anyone can come up and ask you for anything, but up here they have to go through the radio," Beeler says.

Beeler's work day consists of continuous alone time. Recently, on a slower day, he took an hour-long nap during his lunchtime.

Other times, Beeler says, he doesn't get an opportunity to leave his cab.

"Sometimes I have a 16-hour day," Beeler says. "That happens a lot. They bid the job with not very much time, so they have to have a lot of overtime."

In addition, Beeler usually works six days a week. He says he's had one-day weekends for the past six years.

"It pays very well, that's the good part about it," Beeler says. He adds that he is often surprised when he gets a half-day on Saturday — off before the sun has gone down. In his small slice of free time, Beeler enjoys fishing and golfing.

"You don't have much of a life other than work," Beeler says.

Regardless of the hours and lack of interaction with other people, Beeler seems at peace with his skyscraping lifestyle. With miles of magnificent cityscapes and landscapes outside his office window, it would be hard for anyone not to find some contentment in the cab of a crane 200 feet in the air.