recently switched to free advance registration.

The most popular talk in Corvallis in recent years may have been a scientist who brings a Buddhist perspective to studies of the DNA molecule, said Houtman, who retires this month. One speaker on freshwater fish brought dead fish in buckets for the audience to see and touch. A food science team tested different formulations on audience members, separating the taste and smell sensory experiences with a nose plug. Copies of the newly revised edition of the *Roadside Geology of Oregon* were available for sale and autographing after one talk by the author.

Science Options

In Eugene and surrounds, the curious public can find an average of one talk a week. OMSI also hosts a monthly Science Pub Eugene over pizza at Whirled Pies on a Thursday. UO's Quack Chats recently outgrew its campus venue and now takes place a few Wednesdays a month at the Downtown Athletic Club's Ax Billy Grill.

A new group, the 500 Women Scientists' Eugene Pod, hopes to build a following for women scientists with its new monthly Sunday afternoon Science Salon at the First National Taphouse.

Across the river in Springfield, the UO Museum of Natural and Cultural History presents Ideas on Tap at the Sprout! Regional Food Hub every month on a Wednesday. In Cottage Grove, the Coast Fork Willamette Watershed Council often tops out at the 99-person maximum occupancy of the Axe & Fiddle with its monthly Tuesday science pub.

The audience for science pubs includes some regulars and some children, organizers tell *Eugene Weekly*. Most science pub formats feature a single speaker talking with slides for about an hour and then answering questions from the audience. About half the events open with a trivia quiz contributed by the speaker, with bragging rights the biggest prize. Most events are free; some request a $5 donation at the door. The topic and time of year affects crowd size. Several series take a summer break.

The topics are wide-ranging and not as esoteric as one might think at first glance. For example, a talk on rethinking human waste — how it is captured, transported and treated — in Haiti and other densely crowded and desperately poor settings seemed highly relevant to several board members of the Oregon Country Fair, the annual three-day arts, crafts and music festival Veneta in July.

With about 50,000 visitors and 15,000 on-site volunteers, "We generate a lot of poo," said board member Paxton Hoag. The Astoria resident extended his visit by a day for the event, the first and only science pub he has attended so far.

"There are 2.5 billion people in the world without toilets," UO environmental scientist Kory Russel told the audience in a surprisingly tasteful dinnertime presentation for Ideas on Tap in Springfield. "More people have cell phones." Neighborhood pit latrines and even composting toilets have drawbacks, especially in crowded urban settings, he said.

Russel's team is studying the feasibility of container-based sanitation, in which human waste is picked up regularly like recycling. (And yes, it needs to be separated at the start to contain the smell. Urine and feces are collected in different compartments of a simple household private toilet. Without pee, poop quickly loses its smell. Urine odor, on the other hand, can increase, because it outgases ammonia, as anyone who has gone into a stinking subway station can attest.) No water or sewage system infrastructure is necessary, but transportation and a sustainable way to treat and reclaim nutrients is crucial.

The talk paid off for Hoag and his fair colleagues, who are in conversation with Russel about their long-time search for a similar alternative that will pass muster with the state environmental authorities. Their current fleet of blue-water portable toilets is about a $100,000 budget line item and an ongoing insult to their environmental aspirations.

Unexpected benefits cut both ways, said UO geologist Josh Roering, a popular speaker featured recently at both OMSI's Science Pub Eugene and Quack Chats. "Crazy things happen," he said. "An out-of-practice engineer approached me about working in my lab. She will volunteer initially this summer. Her CV is spectacular."

History of Science

Science pubs may be all the rage in Oregon, but they are not new. In 1808, science talks at the Royal Institution gave London its first one-way street, according to Simon Singh, a British theoretical and particle physicist who gives science pub talks around the world. "A night out at the RI was one of the hottest tickets in town," Singh wrote in *New Scientist.* "Charles Dickens, Prince Albert and every other Victorian celebrity fought for front-row tickets to hear Humphry Davy and his fellow pioneers of science. Their carriages so thoroughly clogged Albemarle Street that in 1808 they were instructed to proceed one way only." (Trivia question writers, take note!)

National Geographic photographer Brian Skerry tours the ocean depths with OMSI Science Pub goers at the Baghdad Theatre in Portland

PHOTO BY ANDREA EDGECOMB

Like the Beatles and Rolling Stones before them, modern science pubs came to North America as a British invasion. The first Café Scientifique started in Leeds, England, in 1998 with a posted note: "Where, for the price of a cup of coffee or a glass of wine, anyone can come to discuss the scientific ideas and developments which are changing our lives," according to a 2006 *New York Times* article.

The idea spread worldwide. Launched in November 2003, Colorado Café Scientifique in Denver claims to be the oldest in the United States. The U.S. science café movement was boosted by WGBH NOVA, the public television science show produced in Boston, in a funded project that has since ended.

As of three years ago, a list of mostly U.S. science cafes numbered more than 500 under such names as Science Café, Café Scientifique, Science on Tap, Science Pub, Ask a Scientist, Café Sci, and Secret Science Club.

Taking Off in Oregon

In Oregon, the science pub seems to have caught on first in 2006 with OMSI's first event, Amanda Thomas said. She read an article about the science pub trend in *The New York Times*, attended one in San Francisco and held the first one on nanotechnology at Bridgeport Brewery in Portland.

It was a time when OMSI was trying to reach out to adults who do not normally come to the museum. The next year, the OMSI Science Pub branched out to Eugene and then partnered with OSU in Corvallis. Soon, Thomas was running six science pubs a month in five cities.

Five years ago, Thomas parted ways with OMSI and launched the Science on Tap series in Portland and Vancouver, Washington. It regularly sells out. Thomas relishes the greater freedom in programming speakers and subjects unrelated to OMSI program objectives. Her sold-out shows include a focus on larger societal issues of race, poverty, health and justice, as well as more classic science discovery talks.

"My goal has always been to reach people who might not otherwise come to a science lecture — hence the beer," said Thomas, a former art history major who now teaches construction skills at the nonprofit Oregon Tradeswomen. "Working at the museum fired up something in my brain. I want to give other people the same opportunity to learn."

The wow factor appeal of learning something eye-popping or mind-blowing at science pubs is shared by both organizers and attendees. "We've been known for our athletics, but our faculty do amazing things," said Kyle Henley, UO vice president of university communications. "Not a day goes by where you don't hear about something and say, 'We do that? Cool.'" Quack Chats began two years ago as part of a strategy to showcase UO scientists. Science Pub Corvallis has a similar goal of highlighting research at OSU and more broadly as part of the OMSI network, Houtman said.

Organizers encourage their speakers to tell a story, not give a lecture. The original UK Café Scientifique aimed to push the audience a little more. "Café Scientifique is a forum for debating science issues, not a shop window for science," the web site declares. "We are committed to promoting public engagement with science and to making science accountable."

Audiences at local pub talks seem reluctant to ask tough questions of scientists. For example, Jen Bouton of Corvallis was interested to learn at a June science pub that white eggs from caged birds are as safe and healthy as brown eggs from free-range birds, and both can be refrigerated indefinitely. But she left with her most pressing question unasked: How can she keep her neighbor's chickens from ravishing her newly planted vegetable garden? She likes her neighbors and their chickens and was struggling how to raise the issue diplomatically. "I didn't know how to ask it in a mixed crowd," she said.

Meanwhile, another woman who raised her own chickens stayed quiet about her outrage over the inhumanity of breeding meat chickens to grow larger breasts and thighs without sufficient heart and cardiovascular systems.

Money and Politics

While science pubs are smart entertainment first and foremost, there is a more sobering underlying civic and economic context. In Oregon, such direct-to-the-public talks are one of the few options available to citizens who want to be informed about local research.

No traditional media outlet employs a dedicated science reporter, and there may be only one full-time health science reporter left in the state (at *The* (Bend) *Bulletin*). Yet decades of reader surveys have shown health and science are among the most popular news topics in print and online. In the pre-internet era, *Time* magazine flew off the newsstand much faster on weeks with a science story on its cover, compared to the usual political scandal.

More money than ever is pouring into local research coffers, impacting the economy and lives, resulting in ever more science in Oregon to be discovered by Oregonians.