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'City of Roses'

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Muslim Fury Grows

Words spoken
by Pope Benedict
incite passions

See page B5



American Dream Doomed

'Ragtime' musical is a
story of struggle, dignity

See Metro section, inside



Week in The Review

U.S. May Boost Forces

The U.S. military will likely maintain or possibly even increase the current force levels of more than 140,000 troops in Iraq through next spring, the top U.S. commander in the Middle East said Tuesday in one of the gloomiest assessments yet of how quickly American forces can be brought home. See story, page B2.

Spinach Contaminated

Federal health officials continued Tuesday to probe the source of E. coli contamination of spinach and warn consumers not to resume eating fresh spinach products. The food-poisoning episode is the 20th since 1995 linked to spinach or lettuce.

Army Coup in Thailand

Thailand's army commander staged a coup Tuesday night and ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra while he was in New York, circling his offices with tanks, declaring martial law and revoking the constitution.

Willie Busted for Pot



Singer Willie Nelson and four others were issued misdemeanor citations for possession of illegal mushrooms and marijuana after a traffic stop Monday morning on a Louisiana highway. A trooper smelled the strong odor of marijuana and found the illegal substances after an inspection of the country music star's tour bus.

Prisons Breed Radicals

U.S. prisons are becoming major breeding grounds for Islamic terrorists, but state and local authorities are too cash-strapped to prevent or track recruiting, a new report by George Washington University and the University of Virginia concludes. It found that Islamist extremists target their vulnerable prison-mates with distorted versions of the Quran and other Muslim readings that urge radicalization and violence.

Data Wanted in Porn Fight

Attorney General Alberto Gonzales said Tuesday that Congress should require Internet service providers to preserve customer records, asserting that prosecutors need them to fight child pornography.

Beach Cleanup Success

Over three thousand Oregonians celebrated the 22nd annual Great Oregon Fall Beach Cleanup on Saturday. They worked side by side to clean up the beach along the entire Oregon coast, from the Washington to the California borders, collecting 42,183 pounds of debris.

Custodians' Uphill Battle

Workers fight for contract

BY SARAH BLOUNT
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

It's been four years since Portland Public Schools laid off 300 custodians in an ill-fated, money-saving maneuver.

Now the district is recalling employees, following the maintenance workers' legal victory in the Oregon Supreme Court. The custodians are eligible for recall and 130 have pledged to return over the

next two weeks, starting Monday, Sept. 25 and continuing through Oct. 2.

School district officials and the returning workers agree that Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) benefits and wage rates will remain the same, plus cost of living over the past four years. However, problems abound with both parties locked in a dispute over back pay and health benefits.

The custodians demand the same benefits as when they left in 2002. The district says no, having renegotiated with another group of district employees, after the custodians were contracted out.

Returning custodians feel cheated by the district intentions to lower its contribution rates for health benefits, which were covered in full in 2002. The new rates were bargained in a contract with Nutrition Services Workers, fellow school employees and members of Service Employees International Union, SEIU Local 503.

Depending on the size of their family, custodians would pay \$25 to \$150 each month for health care.

"Our position is we return under the same conditions we left with in 2002," said Steve Armony, former head custodian at Franklin High School who is now chair of the custodian's steering committee, a group of 10 to 12 custodians leading the return process and bargaining for back pay.

"We've maintained that we had no part of the district's contract with Nutrition Services and no vote in the contract," he said. "The terms are not acceptable to us."

The layoffs never truly disbanded SEIU Local 140, the union group representing custodians in the past. Many maintained

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PHOTO BY SEAN O'CONNOR/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Portland School Custodian Birdie Kirk at Cleveland High School, the school she hopes to return to Monday after being illegally outsourced by contract employees. Kirk said it was a shame to see the school in its present shape.

Hard Fought Win Stopped in Tracks

Women who won discrimination suit must wait

Two African American city employees who won a civil lawsuit claiming discrimination were stopped from collecting a \$50,000 jury award last week when the City Council voted to appeal their case to a higher court.

The successful litigants, Lisa Washington and Roxie Granville were turned back after asking the council to ignore the city attorney's advice to appeal their lawsuit dating back to 1997.

In June, a jury awarded the plaintiffs \$50,000 each in damages plus possible back pay for discrimination the women faced when they worked at the city's Bureau of Development Services. They claimed supervisors singled them out with bogus policies and unfair enforcement of employee rules.

The city claimed there was no discrimination.

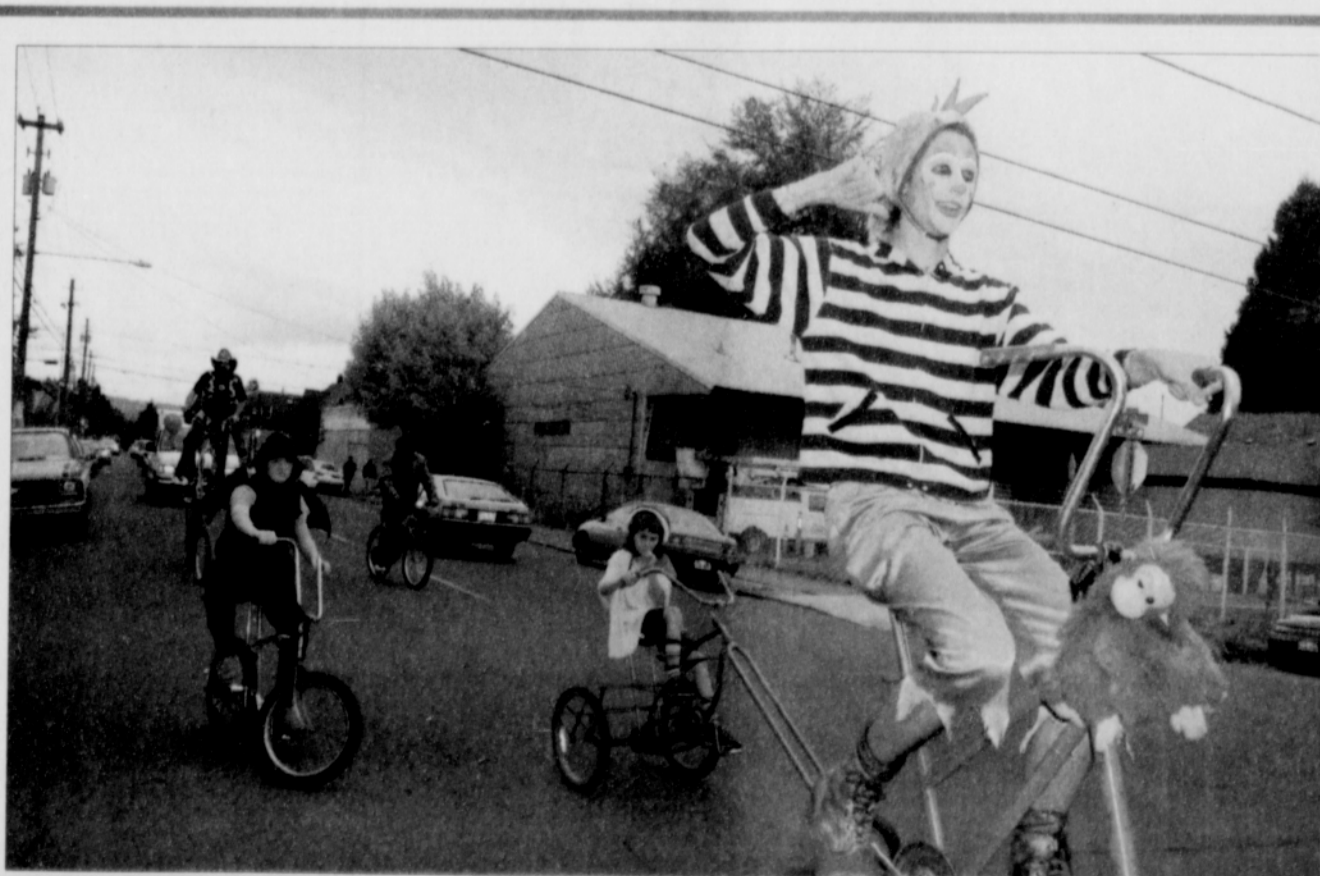
City Attorney Jennifer Johnston objects to the judgment in the civil case because of court errors she said could set bad legal precedent and affect other cases against the city. She objected to the judge allowing evidence from the employees' workers compensation claims that had already been litigated and won by the city. Johnston also said the jury got incorrect jury instructions from the judge.

Mayor Tom Potter acknowledged it was a tough decision to appeal, especially in light of the case coming before an all-white and male City Council. Randy Leonard, who runs the services bureau, said he wanted to let the verdict stand, but city attorneys persuaded

him to support the appeal. Sam Adams and Dan Saltzman joined in the unanimous decision. Commissioner Erik Sten didn't vote, citing a conflict because he's known Washington since childhood.

In their lawsuit, the women claimed supervisors unfairly rated their job performance, accusing them of being seen together, walking down the street when they should have been working. The supervisors said they were concerned they might be going into the field together without a manager's permission and were seen together too often, a violation of a policy.

Washington said she was insulted by the council's appeal decision, whom she felt had been "bamboozled by the city attorney's office".



Send in the Two-Wheeled Clowns

In what has become a trademark of the Alberta Street Fair and the art district's numerous other festivals, clowns on bikes pedal up and down the Northeast Portland thoroughfare Saturday, past shoppers, diners and curious onlookers.

PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

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