

Eugene City Beat: Artists collaborate in search of community's secret stories

By Joe Mosley

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Remember Zeus? How about Uncle Ray?

Did you ever wonder about those concrete steps across Williamette Street from Civic Stadium? Ever duck classes, back in the psychedelic era, and hang out at the New World coffee house?

Some do, and others have.

They're among those who have shared stories on a Web site being compiled by a pair of artists who hope to turn the collection into an exhibit - titled "A Secret History of Eugene" - scheduled to open next month at the Jawbreaker Art Gallery, at Fourth Avenue and Monroe Street.

"A Secret History of Eugene is an online guest book of the small, the large and the forgotten stories of our community," collaborating artists Mary-L Bryant and Marc Moscato say in a written statement introducing their project.

"The Web site will allow participants to share and view stories about the people and places that are missed in the community."

More than a dozen respondents already have shared stories on the Web site, ranging from recollections of colorful characters - street icons Zeus and Uncle Ray among them - to famous open air drug markets" on East 13th Avenue.

Some wax wistful about the demise of Icky's Teahouse, and others wonder whatever happened to Sandino's or the Animal Farm or the Corral.

Punkers and anarchists seem to have discovered the Web site early on.

But there also are historical tidbits from Eugene long-timers, such as the following:

"I remember when the mall was first started in the '60s, the bowling alley above the 88 Cent Store on the corner of 10th and Williamette, and going to five cent Williams Bread cartoon shows on Saturday morning at the McDonald Theatre. My mom and dad remember when the Fairgrounds on 13th was considered out in the country and you could go ride horses for the day for a quarter. Do you know the strange set of stairs on Williamette across from Civic Stadium? Those used to go to the hospital that sat up on the hill."

Then there's the entry from an LTD bus driver, who remembers the Soviet communist nicknamed "Stupid" - he wasn't at all - who used to give away fruit gleaned from people's yards, write "sometimes amusing political statements and poems" and tape them to the backs of bus seats, and treat bad bouts of arthritis with liquid-only fasts.

"Stupid," according to the bus driver telling the story, apparently died of mushroom poisoning.

Those are just the kinds of stories that fit the bill of a mysterious-sounding entry page to the Web site at www.secrethistory.org:

"Beneath the sidewalks, behind the doors and in our memories lies a Secret History of Eugene...."