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FREE EVERY FRIDAY

Railroad Avenue merchants beleaguered by vagrants

Daily menace frightening customers, employees

by MARILYN OLSEN
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BELLINGHAM - The corner of Champion and Railroad Avenue is not that nice a place anymore. In the middle of the morning on a nice sunny day, scruffy looking guys will yell obscenities at you, make obscene gestures and, if you take a photo of a group of them gathered around the planter in the area, follow you to your vehicle, yell at you some more, make some more obscene gestures and pound on your car, just moments after the police car goes by. At least that's what happened to this reporter this past Tuesday.

For most of us such rude and threatening behavior is an occasional thing, something that may get your adrenalin flowing, but not something you have to deal with on a regular basis. Not so for the merchants and their customers who try to do business in this decidedly no longer pleasant neighborhood. Just ask Tracey Westbury or Jennifer Richter who manage Otions located on Railroad Avenue, a shop selling soap making ingredients, or Jeanie Pritchard and Brian Haney at Direct Copier Service around the corner on Champion. They have to put up with this sort of thing all day every day.

"We feel like we're being held hostage on Railroad," said

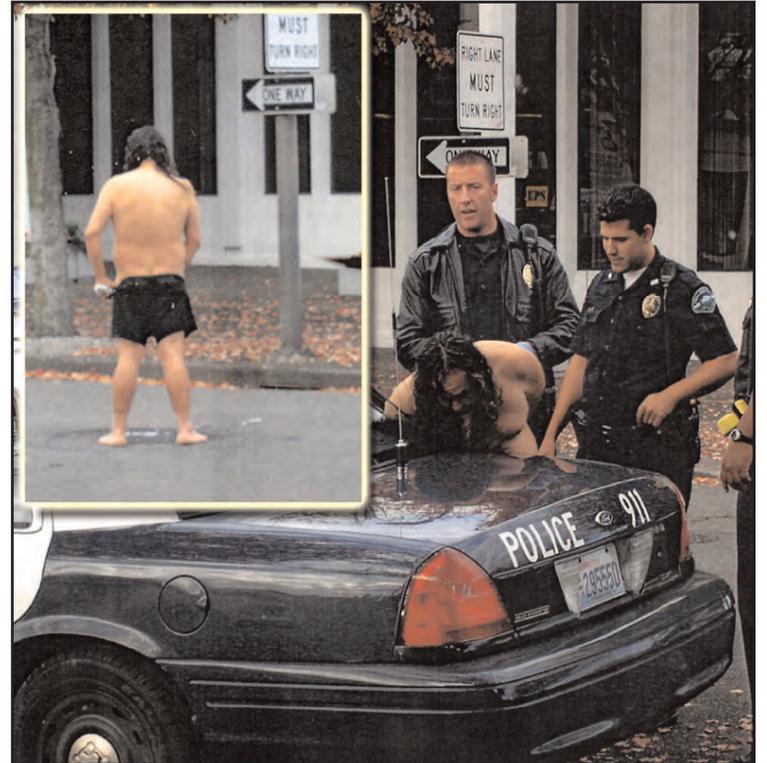
Westbury. "There's no doubt we're losing business. People see a crowd of rowdy drunks near the store and they just drive away." A journal kept by Richter records numerous incidents each day - from drinking, drugs and general loud behavior to prostitutes openly soliciting.

"Every day when we open the front door, the sidewalk is wet with urine," said Pritchard. "One day, we even saw a guy urinating in the middle of Champion Street."

"These folks don't seem to have any idea of right and wrong," said Westbury. "They're shameless."

Drugs are another problem. "All

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Police tell merchants they can only make an arrest if they catch a criminal in the act. In this case they did.

photo by Brian Haney

Imagine yourself living and working in the heart of a vibrant, sophisticated, Northwest community. The City depends on your experience, creativity, and strategic thinking skills. City officials and co-workers appreciate your ability to tackle the complexities of your position with integrity and humor. Your day-to-day work demands energy, passion, diplomacy, and a talent for seeing the big picture. And like you, the people you work with are talented and dedicated.

If you love being a technology leader, and seek the challenges and responsibilities of an influential, complex position

—this is your dream job.

Imagine yourself living and working in the heart of a vibrant, sophisticated, Northwest community. The City depends on your experience, creativity, and strategic thinking skills. City officials and co-workers appreciate your ability to tackle the complexities of your position with integrity and humor. Your day-to-day work demands energy, passion, diplomacy, and a talent for seeing the big picture. Your boss is smart, supportive, and loves to laugh—and your colleagues are talented and fun to work with.

If you love engaging with the public to guide the vision and development of a community, and seek the challenges and responsibilities of an influential, complex position

—this is your dream job.

"This is your dream job"

Would you like to work in Bellingham or Seattle, or maybe as the consultant?

by TAYLOR PHIFER
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BELLINGHAM - If you fit the profile, filling Planning Director Jorge Vegas shoes could be your "dream job." Although so could Chief Technology Officer for the City of Seattle. This, at least, is according to the brochure created by the consulting firm the City of Bellingham contracted to help find Vega's replacement. Adams Consulting of Bothell has been charged with this job. However, the brochure Tara Lee Adams has produced for Bellingham looks a lot like the one she did for the City of Seattle - actually nearly identical.

The job solicitation on the Seattle brochure starts out, "Imagine yourself living and working in the heart of a vibrant, sophisticated, Northwest community. The city depends on

your experience, creativity, and strategic thinking skills"

For Bellingham, "Imagine yourself living and working in the heart of a vibrant, sophisticated, Northwest community. The city depends on your experience, creativity and

for two vastly different jobs. Although the cities do seem to have remarkably similar mayors, described in each brochure as follows: "He has been a popular choice of the voters and is known for being smart, progressive and decisive...He has worked to advance the city's customer service philosophy, and provide exceptional, cost effective services that meet the community's needs."

The City has compensated Adams for past work to the tune of around \$20,000 (plus up to \$12,000 for trav-

One would hope the city of Bellingham would have received a significant discount on the brochures, since Adams' contract reads, "Every search we do is customized."

strategic thinking skills...." Needless to say, what follows is almost identical word for word, and concludes with the heart-warming phrase, "This is your dream job."

Not only were these documents for two completely different cities but

el and expenses) for finding qualified candidates.

One would hope the city of Bellingham would have received a significant discount on the brochures, since Adams' contract reads, "Every search we do is customized." ♦WI

@ For the Bellingham brochure, see whatcomindy.com

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The China communique

Worst typhoon in 100 years in Fuzhou City

by LARRY KLEPINGER
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Earlier this year, 2004 Congressional Candidate Larry Klepinger moved to Fujian province in China and accepted a teaching position at Fuzhou University. The WI has invited him to write a series of articles communicating what is really happening in China—through the eyes of a casual observer—without the major media spin. You can contact Larry via email at larry@larryklepinger.com. Or visit his website www.larryklepinger.com for more information.

FUZHOU, CHINA - A little over a month ago Fuzhou experienced its worst typhoon in 100 years. The following day my wife Akiko and I walked through town to survey the situation for ourselves.

Devastation was on a grand scale, trees uprooted, houses torn apart, brick walls toppled, buildings totally gutted, Mother Nature's rampage simply beyond description.

In the wake of all this, people were netting 18-inch catfish in storm drains, underground parking garages—loaded with expensive automobiles—were completely submerged, while small shops along with mega-supermarkets were coping with massive economic losses.

Yet amid all this destruction the Chinese people were working together to bail themselves out of yet another horrific natural disaster. However, there was no looting, no murders and no social unrest. I wish I could report the same for how Americans reacted in the wake of Katrina.

Free medical benefits rapidly disappearing

In my last article I made reference to the large number of beggars

on the streets of Fuzhou. A number of readers e-mailed me wanting to know, "If China is a communist country why are there so many poor people on the streets? I thought communism was suppose to eradicate poverty."

In earlier years China took care of the people's medical ailments free of charge. But unbeknownst to the outside world China is undergoing a massive shift in the way it provides medical services to its citizens. In a move that is not going down well with the populace, the government is doing away with "socialized medicine" and replacing it with a "pay-as-you-go" arrangement. What is happening now is that those who can afford to pay for good treatment get it—and those who can't afford it, don't.

This inequality of treatment was driven home to me when I had to accompany a teacher to Fuzhou General Hospital who had fallen seriously ill. He was whisked into the emergency room without question and treated with the utmost of care. Twenty minutes later a day-worker was brought in on a stretcher, summarily placed on the waiting room floor and was forced to stay there until the administrative staff could verify that he had money to pay for any treatment he might receive. While his wife pleaded with nurses for some sort of pain relief, my teacher friend was being so well taken care of that I felt embarrassed.

It is a given that foreigners have money. No so with most Chinese. Since this type of medical service is on the rise, people who cannot afford proper treatment are forced onto the streets—thus so many beggars. It is not unlike the days when government funding for many med-

SOME FACTS THAT RELATE TO THE CHINESE MEDICAL SCENE

China's population is approximately 1.3 billion. The "point" 3 billion is somewhat misleading at first glance. That decimal figure roughly equals the population of the US. Then you add 1,000,000,000 (billion) more citizens on top of that.

The number of elderly people in China, above the age of 60, is expected to reach 243 million by 2020.

To put this into proper perspective consider that the total population of Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland and Britain

equal approximately 214 million people. Then add another 29 million and you have the number of people over 60 in China by 2020. The figures are simply mind-boggling.

The Chinese government is working around the clock to try to rectify this situation before it is too late. If the people's medical and dental needs are not met—and met soon—there might be serious social consequences in store for this rapidly developing, yet still decidedly, third world country.

ical services in America was curtailed and neighborhoods were consequently inundated with "ambulatory" patients with drug dependency problems, serious mental illnesses or other medical disorders.

China is rapidly transforming its medical profession—along with the pharmaceutical industry—into a

profit driven enterprise, literally, at the expense of the average Chinese citizen.

I'm afraid that it won't be long before the majority of Chinese people are completely shut out of hospitals—unless they can first prove they possess adequate funds for needed services. After that it will only be a matter of time before

most Chinese are either being coerced into paying astronomical fees for medical insurance or being forced into bankruptcy to finance desperately needed medical help.

In a recent survey of Americans, a full 40 percent cited medical costs as the reason for filing for bankruptcy. One can see China treading down that same slippery slope. ♦WI



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Seattle Optometrist Helps Legally Blind to See Again

By Elena Lombardi
Freelance Writer

Seattle, Wash. – Just because you have macular degeneration or other eye diseases like diabetic retinopathy doesn't mean you must give up driving.

Ever look through a pair of field glasses or binoculars? Things look bigger and closer, and much easier to see. California Optometrist, Dr. Richard J. Shuldiner and Washington Optometrist, Dr. Ross Cusic, are using miniaturized binoculars or telescopes to help people who have lost vision from macular degeneration or other eye conditions.

"Some of my patients consider me the last stop for people who have vision loss," said Dr. Cusic, a low vision Optometrist who has just completed training with Dr. Shuldiner in California. "People don't know that there are doctors who are very experienced in low vision care."

Irv Matthes drove all the way from Penticton, BC to Kirkland. "Thank you for putting some living back into my life. I could never have done this without these reading glasses. Now I can write this letter and solve the daily cryptogram in the newspaper."

Macular Degeneration is the most common eye disease amongst the senior population. As many as 25% of those over 65 have some degree of degeneration. The macula is one small part of the entire retina, but it is the most sensitive and gives us sharp images. When it degenerates, macular degeneration leaves a blind spot right in the center of vision



ELLEN IMBODEN WITH BIOPTIC TELESCOPES

making it impossible to recognize faces, read a book, or pass the driver's vision test.

The experts do not know what causes macular degenerations. But it is known that UV light from the sun is a major contributing factor. Other factors are smoking, aging of course, and improper nutrition. 15 to 20% of the time it is genetic.

There are two types, wet and dry. The wet type involves leaky blood vessels and can be lasered shut. Unfortunately, it's a temporary fix since other leaks usually occur.

"Our job is to figure out everything and anything possible to keep a person functioning," says Dr. Cusic.

Washington and Oregon are among many states that allow the use of telescopic glasses to help meet the vision requirements for driving.

Donald Paquette, 72, a former county assessor from Anaheim, California was seen last November. "I could not read the street signs soon enough when driving, and I couldn't read my saxophone music anymore."

The Doctor fit him with bioptic telescope glasses. "Amazing!" says Donald. "I can read the street signs twice as far as I did before. I can play my sax again. Happy day!"

Dr. Cusic also provides special prismatic reading glasses to make

the newspaper a little easier to read.

Carole Buckles, 71, of Arcadia California came on the advice of a friend. "I wanted to be able to keep driving and do the fun things in life" One of those fun things is baseball. I love going to baseball games and now I can see those close plays again," said Carole.

Bioptic Telescopic glasses were prescribed to read signs and see traffic lights farther away. As Carole puts it, "These telescope glasses not only allow me to read signs from a farther distance, but make driving much easier. I've also used them to watch television so I don't have to sit so close. Definitely worth the \$1750 cost. I don't know why I waited two years to do this; I should have come sooner."

Peter Rhodes traveled from Manchester, UK to be fit for special amorphic glasses for Retinitis Pigmentosa. He is one of the first patients in the United States or the UK to be helped with this rare eye disorder.

Ellen Imboden traveled from Sweden and was helped with two pairs of glasses: Special \$475 prismatic glasses that let her read newsprint, as well as bioptic telescopes to continue driving in Sweden.

Low vision devices are not always expensive. Some reading glasses cost as little as \$375 and some magnifiers under \$100. Every case is different because people have different levels of vision and different desires.

Dr. Cusic sees patients in his offices in Kirkland and Bellingham

and can be reached at
(425) 285-1230
or toll free at 1-877-823-2020.

49th Unparallel

by ben mann



"Of course Grandma loves skating! How else would she stay in shape for the Ski to Sea race?"