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Toni Weyman
Western Washington University

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One man's fascination with steam-powered machines
Sieve Murray -- booker, bouncer and doorman for Speedy O'Tubbs' Rhythmic Underground. (Story, page 13) Photo by Dave Rubert

Cover photo of Gordon Sullivan's Steam-Driven Traction Engine by Matt Hulbert
Back cover photo of Bayview Cemetery by Matt Hulbert (related story, page 28).
Special thanks to: Teari Brown, business manager. Rik Dalvit, illustrator/cartoonist.
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Thomas Wittenberg, a senior plastics engineering technology major, can make everything from bottle openers to bicycle parts due to the skills he has acquired at Western. He has learned how to manufacture a product from start to finish and enjoys using his developed products as well.

"I enjoy being able to bring home something I made and display it or use it, like my bottle openers and bicycle parts. It's nice, too, when something breaks at home you can make it at school. I mean why buy a spatula when you can make it?"

Students of Western's engineering technology department receive hands-on training with manufacturing techniques used everyday in the industrial job market. These students graduate with the ability to design, build and manufacture everything from light fixtures to cars running on solar power.

Last summer, Wittenberg did his internship at Allsop Inc., here in Bellingham. He helped develop the Soft Ride bicycle part which acts as a shock absorber for bicycle seats. The piece is attached only to the top tube (cross bar) right behind the head tube. It extends at an upward angle toward the rear of the bike. The bike seat is attached to the end of the piece and is suspended over the top tube, giving the rider as bump-free a ride as possible.

Professor John Kutz said Wittenberg's internship with Allsop is just one example of the opportunities available for Western technology students and graduates. One student received an internship in Los Alamos, Calif., at the premiere research lab, just because he was a part of Western's program.

In the plastics classes, as well as in the other facets of the technology department, the emphasis is on creativity.

"There's a lot of concentrating on how to make things. I'm trying to get people to realize the scope and how it's changed," Kutz said of his introduction of polymer technology class. "There are eight projects in that class so it gets pretty busy. They work with anything from aerospace materials to recycled plastics; we try to cover the whole gamut."

The use of recycled plastics is one area Kutz and a few of his students are trying to develop for the Northwest. "Nobody's really making a big effort to address it. If there's a problem we should work to solve it. We're trying to incorporate that in the classroom," Kutz said. Two of his students were invited to a conference to present a paper they wrote on Northwest recycling opportunities.

"It's fantastic that we can work on these things at a university," Kutz said. Because students have the opportunity to do these kinds of projects, Western's technology department is set apart from other well-known programs such as the University of Washington and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Kutz said.

Dr. David Harris, director of the technology department, said his job is to explain the differences between Western's and other colleges' programs. "Engineering programs are different than engineering/technology programs. Basically if you could call it engineering science and applied engineering you'd get a better flavor for it," he said. "University of Washington and MIT grads are better educated in the science and research end of the engineering spectrum. They create new techniques and new methods," Harris said. "Our graduates take the methods and apply them to solving problems. Our grads are better prepared and better equipped to do the application process."

Western's program focuses on concurrent engineering, which includes every aspect of the engineering and manufacturing process. All of the concentrations at Western — electronics engineering technology, plastics engi-
engineering technology, manufacturing engineering technology and industrial design— are required skills in the manufacturing of any product. Harris said companies using concurrent engineering do their designs on a database program that can be shared with other engineers and designers.

"That’s exactly what we’ve been doing here. There is no school in the country that has all those areas in the same school or in the same administration," Harris said.

Though Western stands alone in its technology training, many students outside the technology department are not aware of it or of the success of its students and graduates.

"It’s pretty amusing that a lot of students sort of stumble across us. They come to Western ...then come across us in their studies," Harris said.

Perhaps the best way to promote the technology department is through the success of its graduates.

Western did receive a great deal of publicity with the vehicle research institute production of the Viking XX Solar Car. The car placed second in the GM Sunrayce, beating MIT and other engineering schools. This allowed them to participate in the Australian World Solar Challenge where the Viking XX placed fifth out of 36 cars.

Though the project was centered in the Vehicle Research Institute (VRI), it incorporated all the facets of the technology department. Harris can now speak to anyone across the country and be recognized from the Viking XX project, but he said the solar car is a very small part of Western’s technology department.

Perhaps the best way to promote the technology department is through the success of its graduates. Harris said in terms of placement rate, technology students have come out on top for years in graduate surveys.

Kutz said due to the recession, job openings are only two for every graduate. It used to be four for every graduate. Kutz, himself, is a graduate of the program and worked for Ford Motor Co., in research.

"There are some graduates who do not go out and forcefully look for a job; they expect it to come to them—which it has in the past," Wittenberg said. "About a year ago companies were coming to students saying ‘Here’s a plane ticket, fly yourself to California for an interview.’"

Kutz encourages his students to look for jobs and not to settle for one that’s handed to them.

"If they’re not going to put as much energy in finding a job as they do in class, they don’t deserve that job," Kutz said.

Wittenberg said the professors make an effort to announce to the students when major companies like Boeing or Microsoft are interviewing on campus. The faculty also tries to arrange tours of companies to give students an opportunity to meet people and establish contacts.

Most graduates will earn a starting salary of $30,000 or more. Though Western graduates are from an engineering/technology school, many will still find engineering positions. Harris said Boeing hires 35 percent of their employees with engineering titles from schools like Western.

Though the job placement and the salary may be attractive to students still seeking a major, the program is intensive and usually requires a five-year stay at Western. Because the technology department is based in a liberal arts curriculum, students have to complete general university requirements and core requirements for the department.

"It’s really good because it gives people a more liberal way of thinking and that you don’t have to follow conventional methods," Kutz said.

Though technology students take the expected physics, chemistry and math, they’re also required to take management, accounting, English and business courses for their core classes. Wittenberg said they must even have a course in law so they learn how to handle liability if the product they manufactured harms someone.

"Our students probably work harder than any other students on campus, simply because they have to," Harris said.

But the hard work is paying off. Western’s technology students are creating their own job opportunities in smaller towns like Bellingham as well as receiving job offers from larger companies. Because of their ability to create and apply engineering techniques to a developing product, Western technology students design their class projects as well as their future. K

Wittenberg and the Allsop Soft Ride Bicycle seat part.
Salt & Serenity
A better life through deprivation

Story by Lisa Helfer
Photos by Dave Rubert

Imagine yourself in a gravity-free world, suspended in air and floating through space as you cruise the inner highways of your mind. A plethora of images and colors pass in front of your eyes, sometimes in slow motion, other times fast and furious. Gentle music soothes your ears and you lose all sense of time and space.

No, you have not entered an episode of Star Trek, nor was it that extra shot of espresso which sent you off the deep end. You are experiencing a relaxing and mind altering technique in what is called a "float tank" or "sensory deprivation tank."

Float tanks are used to alleviate stress, anxiety and daily worries. After climbing in the tank, the user closes the hatch and lies back in the water to float. Float tanks are filled with only about a foot of water. It's the 1,100 pounds of Epsom salts added to the water that keeps the body floating. It's easy to lose the sensation of actually floating in water instead of air.

Float tanks first became popular in the 1960s after Dr. John Lilly, a specialist in neurophysiology, used them while conducting studies on the inner workings of the human brain. Lilly conducted experiments with float tanks and LSD at the National Institute of Mental Health. The purpose was to deprive his subjects of all sensation and learn how the human brain reacted when exposed to "solitude-isolation-confinement."

Since those early experiments in the 1960s, doctors and private tank owners have adapted flotation tanks to their own needs. Today they're used primarily in the treatment of injuries and for relaxing and meditation. For the average user the tank offers a chance to get away from it all.

Louise Smith, the president of the board at the Bellingham Food Co-Op, and her husband Reid, a jeweler, bought a used fiberglass flotation tank in 1988 for about $6,000. The 5-foot wide by 8-foot-long black and white tank looks as if a spaceship and an Orca whale mated and produced offspring.

The tank is complete with a musical speaker system, air filter, ultra violet water filtration system and a water pump to filter the tank every two hours.

The water inside a flotation tank is five times more buoyant than sea water and is heated to exact body temperature. Louise Smith said floating in a tank is nothing like being in a hot tub or swimming pool because you begin to forget where your skin stops and the water starts.

“I use the tank to relax and look inside myself. I think everyone should have a chance to look inside themselves and explore their silence,” Smith said. She floats in her tank about three times a week.

Smith said the first float for a person might be different than the hundredth float. At first she had a hard time concentrating and said her thoughts were racing and seemed very loud. Now it's easier for her to quiet her mind and she said she's even had a few out of body experiences. She said she also sees colors and images.

Most people experience a tingling in their limbs at first and since their bodies aren't used to floating they bump against

Louise Smith and the float tank she and her husband, Reid, own.
The black and white tank looks as if a spaceship and an Orca whale mated and produced offspring.

the walls of the tank, Smith said. Sometimes people even fall asleep while floating in the tank.

"Some people enter the tank and expect a light show or a life altering experience. It is not like 'Altered States'; the experience is different for everyone. It is important not to have too many expectations when you start," Louise said.

The Smiths' major expenses in running the tank include a new water pump each year, salt, ear plugs and towels. Each month they have to replace the tank with 1,100 pounds of salt at a cost of $600.

Louise Smith listens to "Hemisink" tones while floating. The tones are a type of music that sends different tones into each ear, allowing both sides of the brain to think together creating a "combined tone," she said.

Tim Newman, 20, an art education major at Western occasionally floats in the Smiths' tank. He tried floating to see if it would help alleviate some pain his was suffering in his neck and back — the after-effects of skiing and wrestling injuries. That was seven months ago, and the experience proved to be more than Newman expected. He said he’s noticed a rapid recovery in his injuries and discovered some astonishing things about the way his mind works.

"I drop into myself and lose consciousness in the sense that my conscious mind isn't drilling my feelings, I tend to observe why I think things and get away from analyzing my feelings," Newman said.

A typical float for Newman lasts about one hour. He said he doesn't usually go as deep into his thoughts when he listens to music — it can become a distraction for him. He usually listens to music for half of the hour long session.

"It depends what type of experience I want, if I want to relax the music stays on, if I want to be with my thoughts, I have it turned off," he said.

Newman said the floating experience is one of just "feeling" and not rationalizing and criticizing himself. He said the buoyant feeling allows all the tension in his body to be carried away and a sense of euphoria to set in.

Newman said he tries to make floating a positive experience, allowing him to enter into a deep state of relaxation. He uses the tank to try to feel more comfortable with himself by eliminating negative thoughts and images to reach a feeling of self-acceptance.

He said sometimes personal issues come up he hasn't wanted to deal with, and occasionally he recalls childhood fears. He said this letting-go process was the key element in his floating experiences.

Newman spoke of two negative experiences he had while floating. One time an air pump accidentally hit him in the head while he was in a deep meditative state. The sudden jarring caused his heart rate to skyrocket, and it proved to be very traumatic.

Another time, Newman floated while he was "detoxing" and emotionally and physically exhausted. When his floating time was up, he said he didn't want to get out of the tank's safe womb-like environment. He said it took him a while to come out of his meditative state, and at first he couldn't even remember his own phone number.

Each float experience is different, and Newman said the outcome usually depended on what his frame of mind was when he entered the tank. When he floated while feeling stressed, the experience was different than if he entered the tank relaxed. He said he always goes away feeling like a "limp rag."

"Floating can be a bizarre experience. At times I see colors, mostly blues and yellows — sometimes everything. Sometimes it's pretty phenomenal, lights flutter and you feel like you're spinning and swirling. It is LSD-like. It produces an orgasmic type rush and is great spiritual enjoyment," Newman said.

Newman floats about once every two weeks, but if something starts to bother him — an injury or an emotional problem — he floats more often. He said he thinks people really need to learn to relax and be comfortable.

"Some of my friends think I'm crazy and others can't wait to try it. It is definitely something one should try for the body and mind. Why not?"

The nearest public float tank available in the Puget Sound/Vancouver, B.C. area:
The Bodhi Tree Float Center 1896 West First Avenue Vancouver, B.C. V6J 1E5 (604) 737-2112

For more information on float tanks contact:
Float Tank Association P.O. Box 30648 Los Angeles, CA 90030

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"Why worry about what kind of job you’re going to have four or five years from now? I wouldn't worry too much about it. College should help you make some determination of things you do well and things you don't do well. You can do this without a specific career goal in mind."

President Kenneth P. Mortimer
Meet the President
Kenneth Mortimer adjusts to West Coast style

Story by Debra Pitts
Photos by Matt Hulbert

Kenneth P. Mortimer.
The “P” stands for Paul, but it could just as well stand for private, pensive, persistent — or president.

It also could stand for proper — the suit-and-tie-formal-dinner-by-invitation kind of proper that typifies Ken Mortimer, 11th president of Western. Mortimer — now in his fifth year as president — has been described as a man in a three-piece suit waiting for the invention of a four. He has an East Coast style that differs from the jeans-and-tee-shirt-hope-everyone-shows-up-tonight style common in the Pacific Northwest.

One of Mortimer’s earliest experiences here involved the difference between social customs of the East Coast and those of the Northwest. Al Froderberg, Western’s vice-president for external affairs, recalled Mortimer’s introduction to the differences in etiquette.

When dinner guests who had not sent RSVPs showed up at a function hosted by the Mortimers, the newly appointed president was shocked. “He asked me: ‘Do they do that here?’ I told him, ‘Yes. They do that here,’” Froderberg said.

Formerly the vice president and vice provost of The Pennsylvania State University, Mortimer, now 55, took over as top administrator at Western in the fall of 1988. He assumed the position following the death of President G. Robert Ross who died in a light plane crash in November 1987. The campus community still was grief-stricken when Mortimer arrived.

“It was important in that first year to be sensitive,” he said. “Some of our staff still was crying in meetings. I tried to comfort and soothe and let that grieving go on,” he said.

Sam Kelly, former faculty member and administrator at Western since 1965, currently works part time as a special assistant to President Mortimer. Kelly, who came to Western as an undergraduate student, said he has seen several presidents come and go.

Comparing Mortimer and Ross would be difficult. “They were different in manner and appearance, but they shared a consistency of purpose,” Kelly said. “I think he (Mortimer) is a man of considerable humor, a quick mind, an often humorous way of expressing things, which he hides behind a rather formal manner of appearance and dress.”

“He had a tough act to follow. Ross was well liked in the community and on campus... He brings first-hand knowledge, a depth of knowledge, with him,” Froderberg added.

However tough the act, Mortimer is tackling the job of president and is working toward the goals he established when he arrived on Western’s campus.

One of those goals — creating a more diverse university community in terms of ethnicity, race and gender — is being realized, Mortimer said. Since he arrived at Western in fall 1988, the number of minority students has grown from 4 to 5 percent of the student body to 9 percent, and Western has hired more women to fill faculty and staff positions, he said.

Mortimer said he’s made several attempts to attach a concrete definition to the term diversity but has not succeeded. The basic gist of diversity is that “everybody’s different, and they ought to be treated differently,” he said.

“He believes in both quality and equality of students,” Kelly said of his boss. “He wants to open more doors, to make the place more representative of the general populous.”

The president speaks of pride in the university, pride in the reputation the university has developed. Western is experiencing a “remarkable, heart-warming resurgence of pride in this university... becoming aware of the outstanding university it has become in the last 20 years,” Mortimer said.
As he continues to lead university efforts in areas such as minority recruitment, Mortimer also continues to grow professionally. He served as president of The Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) from 1977-78 and as Chairman of the Board of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems from 1987-91.

In 1991 he received the ASHE Leadership Award, and earlier this year he was elected to the Association of American Colleges Board of Directors. He currently chairs the Washington State Campus Compact, a group of colleges and universities that places emphasis on student preparation for civic leadership.

In spite of his accomplishments, Mortimer still is unaccustomed to being in the limelight.

Lorrie Mortimer said her husband wasn't prepared for the visibility associated with his job. "Vice presidents didn't entertain at Penn State, outside of what the president hosted." She said his notoriety is not necessarily troublesome. "But everyone likes to feel they have some anonymity," she said.

When Mortimer is able to get away from his administrative duties, he generally goes fishing or plays squash — a racquetball-like game.

Even when he's off campus, Mortimer's main focus still is higher education. "Even with his necktie off, he's more inclined to talk about higher education than baseball," Kelly said.

Mortimer is by no means all work and no play. "He's very concentrated, but he knows when to turn it on and turn it off. He's not monomaniac," Froderberg said.

Mark Aaserud, Associated Students president for the 1991-1992 school year, agrees with Froderberg's description of the president. Mortimer "has a great passion for doing this job right. He's trying to be not a mediocre president, but an excellent president," he said.

Aaserud said he discovered early in his first term of office that Mortimer was fairly accessible to students. At the beginning of fall quarter 1990, Mortimer joined him in Red Square to informally meet with students.

This type of event has never been Mortimer's preference; it was Aaserud's idea, Mortimer said. "I tend to resist advice and counsel that I go somewhere and hang out. If you want me to see students, tell me who and when." He regularly meets with students to get their input on campus-related issues.

Mortimer knows, from his own experiences, how tough college life can be. His family was poor by today's standards and unable to pay for his college education, he said.

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The Long Ride Home
Western's commuting students and faculty

Story by Brad Meyer
Illustration by Rik Dalvit

Kris Maraveller faces the challenges one might expect from being a first-year transfer student at Western. But adapting to the Bellingham area has been a more tedious process for Maraveller — especially considering she lives more than 60 miles from campus.

Maraveller's daily commute from Mountlake Terrace to Western keeps her on the road for almost three hours per day -- time she would love to have for studying.

For several Western students and faculty members, a daily commute has become as routine as their schedule of classes — and sometimes almost as lengthy. Although a large number of Western students have the luxury of living on or near campus, a surprising number consistently brave the I-5 corridor, and their numbers are steadily growing.

Almost as many reasons for long-distance commuting exist as there are long-distance commuters. Several students and faculty at Western find themselves tied down financially to their home town, be it owning their own home or raising their children. Other commuters simply can't afford to live in the Bellingham area because of the expense of living near campus. Still others have obligations to their spouses, who hold jobs in distant cities.

The latter case applies to Maraveller who makes the daily 1-hour and 15-minute drive from her home to Western. A junior and an education major, Maraveller is married and in the process of buying a house. She says she would rather live in Bellingham although she has never seriously considered it because of her husband's stable job at home.

Fortunately for Maraveller, she has someone to talk to during the 120-mile round trip, even though this regular passenger seldom gives a response. Maraveller's baby girl makes the trip with mom and is dropped off at the Fairhaven daycare facility before Maraveller goes to class.

Geography professor Bruce Prior makes his 1 to 1-1/2 hour commute by himself, but he has more than county lines to deal with before reaching his final destination. Prior lives in Surrey, British Columbia, and makes the drive across the border two to five days a week. But boredom and lost time aren't the biggest drawbacks to Prior's commute; he's more concerned about commuting's environmental aspects.

"My biggest concern is the amount of carbon dioxide my car is putting out into the atmosphere," said Prior.

Prior said he passes the time in his car listening to the radio and talking on his ham radio. Some of his time is invariably spent waiting at the border, which can be a few seconds to an hour wait to get across. He owns a special pass that helps to speed the process, but restrictions don't accommodate his sometimes late schedule. This PACE pass allows
frequent international commuters to use a faster lane when they cross the border.

One late night Prior said he waited more than one hour behind a string of cars passing through a single open gate. When he reached the gate he discovered he was behind a group of Canadians who had just got off a charter jet from Reno at the Bellingham airport. In that instant, Prior learned bad luck was also sometimes part of the commuting hassle.

When he isn’t teaching at Western, Prior makes the shorter drive to his other teaching job at Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C., Prior said he lives in Canada in part because he went to Simon Fraser University where he received his doctoral degree. He is a dual citizen of the United States and Canada.

Prior and Maraveller both expressed positive feelings about carpooling, even though the two rarely carpool because of schedule conflicts. However, carpooling has emerged as an option for several students who commute from the Everett and Marysville areas. Julie Penix is in a carpool of 28 to 30 Western students, most of whom make the trip to school daily.

Penix, who lives in Arlington, said group members choose students with compatible schedules to link up with for the trip to Bellingham. She said members drive an average of one day a week, usually with three or four people riding in each car. Penix said the carpool arrangement also depends heavily on where members live in relation to one another.

"Carpooling really makes the trip go by fast," said Penix. "You really meet a lot of neat people, which makes it hard to study."

Penix, a senior and an elementary education major, lives in Arlington because her husband works there, and because she wants her children raised in that community. She said most of the people who carpool in her group are older students with families. Penix said she chose to attend Western because she didn’t want to fight Seattle traffic to attend the University of Washington.

The issue of carpooling has also become a key priority with the university parking office in efforts to curb the demand for on-campus parking. Parking Manager Ann Wallace said the parking office plans to initiate a carpool matching program. Wallace said the program should help long distance commuters link up with one another.

"The program will attempt to provide a carpool match to commuters living in the same general area or taking similar routes to campus," said Wallace. "We're also going to try to get people together for a first meeting."

An informal survey conducted by the parking office in 1990 showed only 6 percent of students and faculty regularly carpool to campus. Wallace said she hopes long distance commuters will take advantage of the matching program as well as other services such as park-and-ride lots and the rideshare program.

However, for many long distance commuters, schedule conflicts often make carpooling nearly impossible. These commuters must also consider the issue of parking on the Western campus. Wallace said commuters living outside the city limits have first priority for on-campus parking permits, and the demand for such permits is growing steadily.

Western senior David Hrutfiord knows all too well about the parking situation. Hrutfiord, a senior majoring in geology, makes the daily commute from Blaine. He says the worst part of his daily one hour commute is finding a spot in the commuter parking lot. Although Hrutfiord was lucky enough to get a commuter parking permit this quarter, he says parking was a much bigger problem the quarter he forgot to buy his permit.

Communications professor Penny Britton must also battle commuters for a spot in the parking lots, but that isn’t the least favorite part of her two and one-half hour round-trip commute. Britton says the commute from her Anacortes home sometimes leaves her so drowsy she has to pull over for a quick nap at a rest stop along the way. But Britton admits most of the time the commute is refreshing due to the scenery and lack of traffic.

"It has not been as bad as I expected it to be," said Britton who says she also sometimes listens to tapes of her students’ speeches while she drives.

Although listening to the radio passes the time for many commuters, it doesn’t replace the time lost behind the wheel. It also doesn’t ease the other frequent complaints of commuting such as fatigue and increased transportation costs.

"The commute takes a lot of energy, and it often wears me out," said Western junior Janel Hathaway.

Hathaway, an art and elementary education major, says her daily two-hour round-trip commute from Everett costs her an average of $90 per month just for gas. She says another drawback is the amount of wear and tear her automobile suffers from the long drive.

It is this wear and tear that is often transferred from vehicle to commuter, as many long distance commuters have nearly become permanent fixtures of their automobiles. Chances are it is these people who are a bit more happy than most when the time comes to finally walk to class.
speedy o’tubbs’ main man murray
he books the bands and a whole lot more

Story by Sue Kidd
Photos by Dave Rubert

“I have the coolest job in town.”

So says Steve Murray, the primary entertainment booker at Speedy O’Tubbs’ Rhythmic Underground. A well-known Fairhaven night spot, Speedy O’s is gaining notoriety as a great place for people to dance and for bands to play.

This notoriety is largely due to the booking efforts of Murray. Patrons enjoy Speedy O’Tubbs' eclectic mix of music including African, Jamaican, Celtic and Reggae as well as the varieties of Rock music. Speedy O’s is the only bar in town offering third-world music on a regular basis, Murray said.

Bands enjoy playing at Speedy O’Tubbs' because of the way the staff treats them, Murray said. Bands are treated as guests, rather than slaves. “We’re hospitable. We don’t make any band stand in the rain. It’s like hospitality insurance at our bar. They know they’ll have a great time playing there.”

Murray, 35, also works as a doorman and substitute mix master of the tavern’s soundboard. But Murray’s actual job description is tough to pin down—he runs around the bar fixing this or that, helping bands set up, mopping a floor or wiping off one of the yellow stools or iridescent-blue table tops. Murray never stands in one place for very long, and he works very hard to create a fun atmosphere for the bar’s patrons.

Murray has worked at the bar for three years. He described Speedy O’s as a menagerie of blasting, exciting entertainment. Speedy O’s is more than a bar with a few stools, it’s an entertainment emporium, he said.

Murray said he tries to make the bar the best entertainment emporium in town by offering a variety of music.

Each night of the week brings a different clientele, said Paul Turpin, a doorman at Speedy O’s. Turpin is also in the music masters composition program at Western.

Speedy O’s is closed on Mondays. Turpin said Tuesday is techno dance night, which attracts a weird mixture of people. “Sometimes I wonder about the people who come in on Tuesday nights,” Turpin said. “They’re a wild, weird and noisy crowd.”

Wednesday is an open, free, happy, hippy night where everybody just gets loose and mellow. Thursday is the “scam scene,” because everybody picks up on one another. Friday, Saturday and Sunday are live-music nights, which attract a mixture of old and young, depending on the band, Turpin explained.

Steve Murray (right) in his role of doorman at Speedy O’Tubbs’ Rhythmic Underground
Murray, wearing round glasses with a cigarette constantly dangling out of his mouth, has an ever-present smile on his face making the Speedy O's patrons feel at ease in the bar.

His ease in making friends and contacts in the music industry has helped him in booking bands.

Murray said booking entertainment is sometimes difficult and challenging because he has to negotiate prices of the acts with booking agents. He said you have to be a pretty swift talker to get ahead in the industry. “This is hard work; sometimes I spend all day on the phone working on booking.”

Working in the music and bar business is very nasty and dirty at times because of the competition for business, he said. But, Murray said, Speedy O’Tubbs’ is the cleanest nasty bar he’s ever been in.

Booking bands was difficult in the beginning for Murray who took over as primary booker two-and-a-half years ago. Booking agents and bands didn’t know about the bar, he said. But over the last two years, Murray has booked large acts such as Canned Heat, the Paladins, Crazy 8’s, Bochinche, the Blasters and Flock of Seagulls.

Sometimes the bands get out of control. Murray remembered a real crowd pleaser: One of the band members from Sweaty Nipples hung from an I-beam once, and his pants fell off. “Flop (a Seattle band) trashed our dressing room and some equipment when they played. It all goes with the territory. It can be a risky business,” Murray said.

Murray said he balances out the acts with the other bars in town. If another bar has a grunge band booked, then Murray will book an African or Reggae band. Murray also tries to book as many benefit shows as he can. Speedy O’s has had benefits for Womencare Shelter, Citizens in Solidarity for People in El Salvador (CISPES) and the National Organization for Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML).

Tony Seldin, a vagabond poet, has performed at many of these benefits. He said he appreciates Murray’s enthusiasm for booking benefits and helping out small organizations. “You have to be a trooper to book acts in this town. It’s not an easy task — it’s not easy work. It takes a lot of talent and perseverance — and Steve has those qualities. Bellingham is very fortunate to have a great guy like Steve around.”
Annita Benedicto, who has managed the bar for the last two years, said Murray’s sense of humor helps to make the bar a fun place.

“He tends to come out of nowhere. It’s the way he sees things. He can turn a dire situation into a light event. He has a totally-caked sense of humor.”

Murray is also the relief mixer at the bar twice a week. Working the soundboard inside the sound booth, he explains the rows of complicated levers and buttons. “This is the master gain. Otherwise known as ‘the gas.’ It controls all the sound,” Murray says as he pulls the lever up and the bar reverberates with the echoing sound coming from the stage.

While working the sound board, Murray often has to leave the booth to listen to the overall sound the band on stage is producing. He said he can’t hear a damn thing inside the booth because the soundwaves bounce around in there.

When he’s down on the floor checking out the sound, Murray will stop at different tables and greets bar regulars. He’ll ask the lead singer on stage if the band wants anything. Finally, he’ll check their sound and return to the sound booth to make adjustments.

Before booking bands at Speedy O’ Tubbs’, Murray worked a variety of jobs including a recycling-bin distributor, a juice packer and a cartoonist for “The Fishwrapper.”

Murray is also a musician. He plays the guitar and harmonica. When he was in Europe five years ago, he was a “busker”—a British expression for a street musician. He played Bob Dylan tunes on the street corners and in the subway — the “tube” — in England. People would pass him by and throw some change into his hat. He said people never really stopped to listen, but he made a good earning from playing anyway.

Murray said he plans on working at Speedy O’Tubbs' until it loses its charm. When and if that day comes, he may form his own band and travel around.

Or, he might become a booking agent, he said.

But for now, booking agents call Murray because bands rave to their managers about the unique Bellingham crowd and the quality of the bar, he said. “The one thing we have going for us is the openness at the bar, both in attitude and the look of the bar...They call me now because we have gained some fame as a unique place to play. Bands love the fact that Bellingham patrons mosh to the music and just get far, far out of control sometimes. It’s very exciting.”

Steve Murray

coolest job town.
Sullivan's **Steamy Side**

* A retired plumber's fascination with steam-powered machines

Story by Art Hughes
Photos by Matt Hulbert

It's 70 degrees outside and Gordon Sullivan is throwing wood into the fire in his shop boiler.

"It'll take a couple minutes until it gets up to 80 pounds or so, and we can start this thing up," he said, sweat just barely making it to the skin's surface on his face. "I can get this up and running in eight minutes."

Hot steam expands under pressure in the boiler. When the gauge needle points to the right number he gives a soft turn of the steam engine pulley. It starts turning on its own, quietly chugging faster and faster as the single piston moves up and down. When Sullivan reaches up and pulls on a lever, antique wooden pulleys start spinning on metal shafts in the rafters of his shop; about 20 four-inch-wide belts turn and bounce in the air.

Sullivan, 61, retired in 1986 after owning his own Whatcom County plumbing business. He has a passionate commitment to the antiquated power of steam machinery and technology.

Sullivan moved to Whatcom County with his family right after World War II. He was the greenskeeper and bartender at a golf course his father owned near Birch Bay. In the late 1960s, Sullivan attended Western Washington University with a double major in art and technology and worked as a plumber in the evenings. He left Western to work full-time in 1971.

Sullivan came back to Western in 1974, this time to design and build the untitled steam sculpture under the direction of artist Robert Morris. The sculpture is located between the Environmental Studies Building and Fairhaven College.

In Sullivan’s shop, long leather and webbed-fabric belts drop from the pulleys in the rafters supplying power to 10 machines, including a drill press, a band saw and a 4,000 pound metal-turning lathe.

Sullivan said his machines are almost as old as the technology that drives them.

“That planer, drill press and band saw have been together since 1906,” he said. "I bought all three from the Union Foundry on Iowa Street.”

Steam was the driving force behind the industrial revolution. The first steam engines appeared in the 1600s and increased in strength and efficiency up until the 20th century when they started losing favor to the internal-combustion engine.

Sullivan turns the knob of one of the main clamps on the lathe. It completes nearly two revolutions before it catches—revealing the years of wear on the threads.

*A company logo is proudly displayed on Sullivan's steam-powered tractor.*
Leather and webbed-fabric belts drop from the pulleys in the rafters supplying power to 10 machines.
"You can always get another job outta them if you know where to put the rubber bands and shims," he said.

Sullivan said he's worked around steam engines since he was 12 years old when he worked in a steam-driven laundry shop in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. The engine at his first job was much like the one now powering his shop, he said.

He is drawn to both the ingenuity of steam power and the sheer artistry of the machines. Each one is a functioning tool. He talks excitedly about pounds-per-square-inch measurements or an injector that reintroduces used steam into the hot water of the boiler. Each machine is also a cast-iron monument to the artistry and precision craftsmanship of an obsolete and almost forgotten technology.

Sullivan said the cast-iron process requires each machine to first be built out of wood — as a pattern. The patterns are then used to make molds in compressed sand. Molten iron is then poured into the molds. When it cools, the iron is in the shape of the original wood pattern.

Sullivan opens the blade guard on the band saw to reveal a wagon-wheel pulley two feet across that turns the saw blade. It's painted black and probably looks as good as it did nearly 100 years ago. "Imagine making that outta wood," he said as he ran his fingers admiringly along one of the smooth, inch-thick spokes.

Sullivan has reached a tentative agreement to eventually donate his steam-driven shop to the Whatcom Museum.

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Each machine is also a cast-iron monument to the artistry and precision craftsmanship of an obsolete and almost forgotten technology.

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Museum Director George Thomas said if the museum acquired Sullivan's shop, it would need to be reconstructed to what it looks like now, complete with moving parts.

"All those machines and belts turning at once is part of the appeal," Thomas said. He said Sullivan's collection is a special one, especially since the machines are in such good condition.

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Gordon Sullivan carefully opens a bottle of mercury used in a switch in the steam process.
“They represent a segment of history that we don’t have right now,” Thomas said. “It’s an important part of our past. We have costumes and smaller things that are easier to display, but nothing on this scale.”

In addition to steam-driven shop tools, Sullivan has a restored 1922 steam car—an original Stanley Steamer. He also has a 9,000-pound Russell Steam-Driven Traction Engine, a polished and brightly-painted tractor that belies its condition when he found it rusting behind the Lynden Museum.

Sullivan’s love for steam-powered machinery has taken him to the water as well. Over the years, Sullivan has owned three steam boats, including a 78-foot tug named Moonlight.

“I paid $1,000 for the thing with a ton of coal in its hold,” Sullivan said. He sold the tug without restoring it soon after he bought it. He restored his other two steam boats, but sold them, as well.

Sullivan keeps many of the machines and engines he rebuilds and restores. On one table he has a portable steam engine he bought while on his honeymoon. Sullivan also built the main boiler that runs his shop. He has two other portables in his shop, and three steam engines on display in the front room of his house.

If he sells one of machines, it’s usually to someone in a loose network of steam-engine aficionados in the Northwest. Mostly, he restores them because he loves steam power and the machines that go with it.

Words almost fail him when he tries to explain the origin of his fascination with steam. “It was always kind of fun,” he said. “It’s just something I enjoy.”

Sullivan said he never could have made a living using the antique machines and steam engine in his shop. They require too much maintenance, he said. But now that he is retired, he has the time to spend keeping up the machinery and working on projects.

For his grandson’s birthday, Sullivan is building a scale railroad in the shop. He has already built 800 feet of track at his grandson’s house. A hand-powered rail car, just big enough for a child to fit in, and an accompanying flatcar sit freshly-painted on a table. Sullivan built both of the cars and added rail-track wheels he found under his house.

He said he’d like to extend the project he’s doing for his grandson and build a small-gauge steam railroad. That is, if something else doesn’t get in the way.

“A railroad is the next logical step,” he said. “But I just bought a pipe organ, which will be a bit of a diversion.”

Top: A custom-made cast-iron door on the boiler and the wood mold used to make it.
Bottom: A steam-powered drill press.
Can Roommates Be Friends?

Some real-life stories with suggestions for successful shared living

Story by Tara Perry
Photo by John Ketcham

When Bruce Livingston first moved into Mathes Hall he didn’t realize having a roommate also meant sharing a room with two people. “He’d always have his girlfriend over. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, I actually had two roommates,” Livingston said.

Livingston described his roommate’s girlfriend as a puppy dog, following his roommate everywhere like a shadow. Livingston’s voice raised as he added, “He couldn’t clue in I hated the girl being over all the time.” He remembered the nights his roommate and girlfriend slept together, having sex while Livingston tried to sleep. Livingston said sometimes the noise was unbearable and he couldn’t help but hear them.

Livingston said he dealt with his problem by escaping. He would spend most of his time away from his room, staying at his neighbors for hours, just to avoid the two. He didn’t do anything to solve his problem. “I felt bad; I didn’t want to be selfish, and anyway, there’s no perfect roommate,” he said.

Bad roommate experiences aren’t only confined to students sharing a dorm room. Christy Quemuel, a senior at Western, remembers moving into an apartment off campus with her best friend from high school.

“She had five alarm clocks. She set them all off at the same time and said she couldn’t hear any of them. I dented the wall trying to wake her up,” said Quemuel. She said her roommate wouldn’t make it to class because she slept through her alarm every day.

As weeks went by, little things started to build up with her roommate, Quemuel said. “Then something happened. She wanted me to be her mom. She never did the dishes, she never cleaned up, and — worst of all — she ate my food.”

Quemuel described things as being so tense, their friends no longer wanted to come by to visit. Their communication was finally reduced to bad feelings. Eventually her roommate moved out but without notifying Quemuel.

Quemuel wished she had communicated more with her roommate. “Just remember, if you move out with your friends and anything bothers you, talk to them before it turns into something big.”

But not all roommate experiences are bad.

Mark Watters and Reed Richardson share a dorm room on campus. “We get along great because we have respect for each other. We are kind of on the same wave length. Before doing something, we ask each other,” Richardson said.

“If one of us wants to have a party and the other doesn’t, then there’s no party. We both have to be in agreement, and if not, it doesn’t go down — but we are both reasonable guys,” said Watters.

Both roommates said they’d ask before using something belonging to the other, and if they didn’t have time to ask, they’d tell their roommate later. Communicating and working together has helped these two to get along, they said.

Watters and Richardson both said they respect each other’s personal privacy. If one wants to be alone with a girl, then the other spends the night in a friend’s room. Both roommates discuss this before the girl comes over. This way there are no unexpected surprises. “We are really flexible on things,” said Richardson.

Watters and Richardson both play on Western’s football team but maintain different circles of friends off the field. They said it keeps them from spending too much time together and also gives them a chance to meet new friends.

These two roommates avoided many potential problems by following some basic rules: Meet other people besides your roommate’s friends and don’t depend on your roommate to make new friends for you; get involved in activities outside your room and residence halls and, finally, compromise with one another.
Richardson and Watters also share chores, making their dorm room a comfortable home. If there are any conflicts, the guys communicate directly instead of waiting for little problems to build into bigger ones.

Watters said, "We skipped all the b.s. and got right down to the nitty gritty."

But getting down to the nitty gritty of roommate problems isn't always that easy. Moving in with a new roommate can be difficult, requiring adjustment by both parties. It can work best when roommates work out any problems between themselves.

But sometimes problems may become too big to work out, and that's when it's time to turn to someone else for advice and help in solving those problems.

When all else fails and you're still having problems working your troubles out, resident advisers and resident directors are available to offer their assistance to make working out problems an easier experience.

Solving roommate problems is possible even if one or both roommates don't agree. Wendy Finkleman has been an R.D. in Nash Hall for two years. She said, "Before seeing an R.A., sit and talk to each other about the problem. If there's too much tension that can't be handled, go see your R.A....Communication is the key to resolving any roommate conflict. If you can communicate with your roommate by yourself that's great."

Finkleman suggests several steps to follow to solve roommate problems. She said freshmen have to make a lot of adjustments to college in general, especially if they are living with a friend from high school. Old friends change when they come to college and meet new people.

The advice Finkleman gives on the first day of meeting your roommate is to get to know each other. She said roommates should use this period of adjustment as a time to do things together. It's also a good time to talk about likes and dislikes and set down guidelines over such items as study habits, furniture arrangement, sleeping habits and visitors. It's also a good time to set up any other rules you would want for the room.

Roommates can expect to experience a certain amount of tension at some point, Finkleman said. Also, those students accustomed to having their own room must adjust by learning how to share.

Resident advisers are specifically trained to deal with roommate problems. They can help by sitting both students down to air their dislikes, needs and frustrations with each other. They urge roommates to work together, but when all else fails, the resident adviser can intervene and set up a special contract where roommates outline what they agree upon such as: noise level, visitors, borrowing etc. The resident advisers also help roommates set up a list of rules for the room.

If the rules of the contract are broken, the roommates would meet with the R.A. for one last time. Finkleman said if the contract absolutely does not work, the resident director takes charge to meet with the roommates and resident adviser.

Finkleman added, "We do not suggest a room change right away. Room changes are our last resort. Conflicts are natural when having a new roommate. We'd rather teach students how to work through conflicts with each other."

The resident director makes suggestions for room changes, but moving to another building makes some roommates think twice. Living space in the residence halls is limited, so most students are faced with the choice of leaving the old roommate and many of their friends behind when moving to a new residence hall.

Finkleman said, "Friendship deteriorates without communication. Have an open mind. You need to communicate with your roommate to make your room a safe and comfortable place."
Networking with UNIX

Story by Scott Ryan
Photo by Gerald Reilly

Imagine having conversations with thousands of people around the world on numerous topics ranging from comic books to bio-engineering without leaving campus or paying a single penny.

Such a situation is not only possible, it's a reality for those who use Western's Unix computer system. Unix, a very powerful computer program, is especially suited for transferring information and is available to all Western students.

Those who sign up for an account with the Bond Hall Computer Center can access more than 1,200 different topics of discussion through Unix. Specific topics of interest are called newsgroups.

The discussions in each newsgroup are like reading letters to the editor in a newspaper, except the tone is generally more informal. Each writer's letter — or "posting" — is information or an opinion on a new topic of discussion or one already in progress.

"The whole 'net' (short for computer network) has a flavor of home-madeness," said Elizabeth Parish, 20, a frequent newsgroup reader. "It's people just talking to each other. It's really honest and uncommercialized."

Newsgroup conversations are very much like one would expect to hear at a lunch table. For example, a typical newsgroup like alt.tv.simpsons, which is a forum for "The Simpsons" television show, had a posting last year that said: "Hey all, I'm having a party at my house on the night of the season premiere and I want to serve only food that has appeared in a Simpsons episode.

"So far I plan to have: doughnuts, pizza, beer, jello (in a mold), triple chocolate ice cream and heavily salted snack-treats. Anything else I should include? Thanks, Dan."

Someone reposted the original letter and added: "How about . . . Krusty Flakes, pickled eggs (in a jar), cupcakes, French wine (with or without anti-freeze) and spiked punch. -Chris."

To the growing list, another person added: "Don't forget pork products, and make sure the jello molds have marshmallows in them."

The discussions on alt.tv.simpsons at that time weren't limited only to party food, though. Other discussions simultaneously in progress are listed on the newsgroup's ever-changing table of contents.

The table of contents at that time might have included discussions for: running gags in several Simpsons episodes; a list of Bart’s weekly chalkboard messages; comments about the guest appearance of a voice-actor and a compilation of funny and quotable lines.

Newsgroup postings are stored in a central mainframe computer on campus for about two weeks before they are erased to make room for newer postings. Terminals in Bond, Miller and Amtenz halls, as well as the Ross Technology Building and the Fairhaven computer center provide access to the postings through a link to the mainframe.

"Think of (the mainframe) as a central brain, sort of like the center of a wheel with different terminals being spokes," said Avery Acero, a consultant at the Miller Hall computer lab.

The mainframe computer storing the newsgroup files at Western is named Henson, in honor of The Muppets' creator Jim Henson. Henson costs between $7,000 and $8,000 and operates on a 300 megabyte hard drive, said Systems Manager Bent Faber. (A high density three and a half-inch disk, like the kind used in a Macintosh, has 1.4 megabytes).

Henson and Western's other mainframe computers are linked to numerous other universities and institutions by a global network called Internet, Faber said.

Since Internet operates globally, it's not surprising to see newsgroup postings from Japan, Australia or Europe. Sometimes the international perspective results in surprising revelations about other countries. For example, "The Simpsons" episode with Bart writing on the chalkboard: "I will not photocopy my butt" was replaced with, "I will not waste chalk" when it aired in Australia. Obviously, the censors have stricter regulations there.

The flavor and diversity of newsgroup topics are as vast as the kinds of books found in a well-stocked bookstore.
Matt Bracher, a computer science major and English minor, is a regular reader of such newsgroup topics as: Dr. Who, the half-dozen Star Trek-related groups and alt.prose. This last newsgroup is for poems, stories and personal accounts, which are written by its readers and range from cute to pornographic, Bracher said.

Physics major Don DeYoung said he has spent 10-15 hours per week reading the newsgroups pertaining to astronomy and discussions of Hewlett-Packard (HP) calculators.

From the HP newsgroups, DeYoung learned of design flaws the HP-48 calculator was having, which is a model he owns.

The astronomy newsgroups DeYoung reads discuss opinions and news about the space shuttle, space probes and current NASA projects, as well as posting addresses of engineers at NASA so readers can write to them, DeYoung said.

The astronomy newsgroups introduced DeYoung to another interesting feature of Unix called "file transfer protocol." Using this, he is able to transfer files from other mainframe computers around the country to his account at Western.

Among the files he has accessed are authentic pictures of the planets taken by space probes. The highly detailed and colorful pictures can only be viewed on a graphics monitor because Western lacks the capability to print them out, DeYoung said.

Because the newsgroups cover such a vast array of topics, often a posting is relevant to more than a single newsgroup. For example, an article about a new regulation in the Japanese video industry might be worthwhile for the newsgroup on Japanese society. It might also be important to the Japanese animation newsgroup. When the same article is sent to more than one newsgroup, it is called "cross-posting."

Cross-posting can become a problem if it is done indiscriminately.

"Sometimes someone will be talking about 'myths of the holocaust' and will cross-post on rec.woodworking," Parish said. "This is an open invitation to be flamed."

A "flame" is term used to describe a written insult sent to a person for something he or she posted. It’s not limited just to those who send articles to the improper newsgroup, though.

"If someone says something stupid, tactless or generally unformed, you get to flame them. Of course if you're wrong, you’ll be flamed back," Parish said.

"A flame is supposed to be witty, but often it's not; in fact sometimes it gets downright ugly," Parish said.

Since the newsgroups are self-regulated, the "flame" plays the important role in keeping the newsgroups relevant to their specific topics and keeps the discussions from disintegrating into pointlessness.

But, if flaming and counter-flaming get too out of hand or drag on for a long period of time, other readers of the newsgroup may ask that the argument either be discontinued or be taken to alt.flame. This is a newsgroup set up specifically for people to insult each other and vent their steam.

With the exception of out-of-control flaming and businesses trying to sell their products, newsgroups are an open forum for free speech in which anything is game. For this reason, many newsgroup readers at Western were upset about the restrictions placed on the alt.sex newsgroups in October 1991 by Western administration.

According to the Oct. 15, 1991 Western Front, Western administration deemed the alt.sex newsgroups irrelevant to the academic process and made them unavailable for reading.

A letter-writing campaign asking William Boles, provost for information and communication services, to reverse his decision was ineffective, Bracher said.

"I really don’t think alt.sex was that harmful," Parish said. "It was a source for information about sex and I don’t think that’s all that terrible."

"It also had information about safe sex, which was good because I, for one, would be too embarrassed to wander into the health center and say, 'Hello, tell me all about safe sex and its infinite variety.'"

Sex may be a forbidden topic for Western newsgroups for some time, but at present there is still an open dialog on over 1,200 newsgroups available for student enjoyment.
Chris Hook and Eric Burton demonstrate the Tai-Chi posture, "Dragon Creeps on the Ground."
Harmony & Rhythm in Martial Arts

Story by Donna Fairchild
Photos by Dave Rubert

Every Saturday morning, a dozen people gather in a large high-ceilinged rectangular room at Eagle's Nest Martial Arts Center in Bellingham. Bending and stretching, their swaying bodies are reflected in the two walls of mirrors.

Some wear sweat pants, tee shirts and athletic shoes. Others with bare feet are dressed in black martial arts clothing stamped with the Tai-Chi emblem in one corner. Cool air sweeps through the partially opened windows on the wall above the stretch bar.

Movements and murmurs subside as Chris Hook, the sifu — father teacher — enters the room, crosses the floor, looks around and smiles. He finds a spot for his things and moves to the front of the class. Tai-Chi begins.

The sound of deep breathing rises and falls until the room itself seems to swell and shrink to the rhythm. The students appear to be unwinding, relaxing their bodies, yet they look determined, as though this moment is a point of departure for a place long desired.

Hook has taught the martial arts, Tai-Chi, Karate and Kung Fu, in Bellingham for the past five years. He has also studied nutrition and practiced Yoga. He was drawn to Tai-Chi because it combined physical and meditative disciplines.

Hook says Kung Fu and Karate are abrupt, external fighting arts in which the hands and feet are used to strike out at another person. In contrast, Tai-Chi is soft and internal and more meditative than combative.

Tai-Chi in Chinese philosophy emerges from two primal forces: yin and yang, according to Simmone Kuo, author of “Long Life Good Health through Tai-Chi Chuan.” Yang represents light, the positive force and activity. Yin represents dark, the negative force and stillness.

Perhaps you’ve seen the teardrop-shaped symbol: one black and one white, enclosed in a circle, each containing an eye of a contrasting, yet complementary, shade. This symbol is popularly known as yin/yang, but it is actually Tai-Chi, the combining of yin and yang. “Tai” means “vast and all-encompassing,” and “Chi” means “ultimate or extreme point.”

In her book, Kuo writes that each created being carries a balance of yin and yang energies according to the ancient Chinese philosophers. These philosophers reflected on the natural world and saw a connection of all living things. They believed the two primal forces, yin and yang, complement one another. For example: After a time of stillness (yin), activity (yang) arises. Then yang, after a certain period of time, gives way to yin.

Taken one step further, Tai-Chi, the philosophy, becomes Tai-Chi Chuan, the martial art based on this philosophy. Kuo writes, “Feet, knees, legs, waist, hands, and head move in harmonious sequence, changing from yin to yang and yang to yin. Yang is yin in motion, yin is yang at rest. Hard is yang, soft is yin. Fast is yang, slow is yin.”

Without even moving, Hook embodies yin/yang. His eyes are a soft brown conveying a look of compassion; his hands transmit power and strength from far across the room. His body is slender, yet muscular. When he leads the class in a form called “Boxing,” it’s more like a graceful dance.

The students gather on one side of the room at arm’s-length spacing. Hook leads them through slow, gliding movements across the room to the other side, hands synchronized with the feet.
weight transferring from one side of the body to the other. Body movements, slow at first, gradually build with the crescendo of the soft background music. Strength, control, grace and agility meet and blend.

Then the students glide through the motions back to where they started. Hook says to his students: "Let's do this one more time."

A new student finds herself in an awkward position. During the first half of the exercise, she followed the other students, on the way back, she finds herself in the lead! But it doesn't matter. New and advanced, young and mature students maintain the Tai-Chi philosophy: Each one helps the other. Students assisted today will help someone new in class weeks from now.

One of the students, Bob Clarkson, has been doing Tai-Chi since July 1991. He's married and has two children and hasn't been able to practice as often as he'd like. But he plans to move Tai-Chi up on his scale of priorities. "I do this for body flexibility and general good health. Tai-Chi helps me to relax, and it gives me some personal time."

Along with floor exercises, students use a ballet bar and perform leg-stretching exercises. Colleen Johnson stretches like a ballerina. Watching her, you wouldn't believe a year ago she had a chronic back problem which at times kept her from walking. Sometimes she couldn't even get up. The pain nagged at her for six years due to sciatica, a disorder extending from the hip down the back of the thigh.

She says, "Since I started doing Tai-Chi in October 1991, I haven't had any problems. Also, I think after a while you get attached to the people there. They're a part of the experience. It's like group meditation in motion."

Tai-Chi's roots are imbedded in nature. Ideally, classes should meet outdoors where the body can be invigorated in the fresh air and where the student can observe nature's models — the animals.

In her book, Kuo writes of an ancient legend in which the creator made humans responsible for ruling the earth. Because animals were here before humans and able to defend their territories, each one in a unique way, humans learned from observing the animals in their environment. For example, humans imitated the movements of tigers, monkeys, birds, snakes and dragons to defend themselves as well. That's how the martial arts began.

This explains why so many Tai-Chi forms are named after animals: Repulse Monkey; Blue Dragon Emerges From the Water; Dragon Creeps on the Ground; White Crane Spreads Wings.

Eric Burton, Hook's assistant, is in a corner of the room working through some movements of an exercise, the Cat Stance. He's been active in Tai-Chi for about two years and plans to open his own school of martial arts between the Mount Vernon and Everett areas. He says he'd heard about Tai-Chi and was curious about the movements and philosophy that seemed almost mysterious.

"I discovered Tai-Chi classes when I was a student at Whatcom Community College. After talking with Chris, I knew I found what I was looking for. The thing that attracted me the most was the amount of self-discipline needed to do it — the balance of physical and mental control. Once you get into it, it gives you a sense of confidence that you can accomplish anything you put your mind to," Burton says.

Hook described the major plateaus students try to reach over years of practice: The first goal is to develop a harmony of rhythm between the hands and feet. The second is to develop breathing that creates a softness through the body while moving the hands and feet in rhythm. The third plateau emphasizes turning the body, hands and feet smoothly in a flowing..."Side-Heel Thrust"
motion. The final plateau concentrates on internalizing the human energy — the Chi.

“A man or woman can’t choose the enemy. The enemy comes to you. In the old days hands or weapons attacked you. Today Tai-Chi is a survival skill against the ravages of stress in civilized life,” Hook says.

He emphasized the importance of balance in the exercises and moving in spherical patterns so there’s an even flow of energy from one movement to the next. “You want to protect your physical entity from being cancelled out, so you must maintain calm in the middle of violence. As your self-defense skills get better, your health gets better. These days we work on weaknesses of the physical system so you can have that health.”

Rhythmic movements are connected with proper breathing Hook says. “When the body opens, the person breathes in. When the body closes, the person breathes out. You can tune in on locations of your body where pockets of stress are stored, and you can drain it off.”

Hook turns phrases as fluently as he moves through Tai-Chi forms. He says sometimes you release a “snap” that comes from the nervous system and reverberates through the bones. Another time you want a softness and a feeling of ease like silk being lifted up by a soft breeze. At other times you want the choice of standing like a bird on one leg perfectly balanced with wings outstretched. Each movement in Tai-Chi is like a “new little jewel” and every bone is like a “pearl on a string.”

Hook says students must learn to turn their bodies so the hands and feet turn with it. The waist is used like an axle; the spine is straight. “When you do that, you get incredible amounts of power and stability. You line up the body as though you’re going into a steady wind. Then it’s very difficult for someone to unbalance you,” he says.

Finally, all this strength is internalized. The student takes this energy and draws it into his or her bones, Hook says. “You enrich and charge the bone marrow until it’s like a highly charged battery. The main thing we try to get away from is stagnation.”

Stagnation doesn’t touch this class. The students continue exercising or they move quietly out the door to go on with their lives. And the energy flows on.
Helen Griffin immortalized her late husband Dewey’s love of cars with a 1941 Cadillac headstone.

What do you want on your tombstone?

Story by Jeff Collins
Photos by Matt Hulbert

Dewey Griffin loved cars but his all-time favorite was the 1941 Cadillac. As with most auto enthusiasts, Griffin finally found his perfect “caddie” in 1978 and worked to restore it from the bottom up.

Dewey Griffin died in 1981 and his widow, Helen Griffin helped to immortalize her husband and his love of cars with a 1941 Cadillac headstone. “Cars were his first love, so I decided to give him a special tombstone,” Helen Griffin said. “It was that or a telephone.” As owner of Dewey Griffin Cadillac for 15 years, Griffin spent much of his time either behind the wheel or on the phone.

His 3-foot-high granite tombstone, with its charcoal finish and off-white outline, is a close replica of his beloved Cadillac, immortalizing Dewey’s memory.

Helen Griffin’s idea for a unique headstone isn’t as unusual as it might sound. For centuries, families have tried to leave lasting tributes to cherished family members.

The tombstone artists who take such requests from families - be it a horse, a boat, a skier - either draw the design by hand or use a computer to create the image they need. Both techniques take their final shape when etched in stone. “I consider it art. And in most cases (my customers) do too. I don’t look at it like...”
I'm dealing with a dead person," said Sean Woodmansee, a self-taught tombstone artist. Much of his training came while on the job. Part of his job includes working with family members to design the type of headstone they want for the deceased. Woodmansee then begins actual work on the headstone, from the beginning stages of designing on paper, to the final carving of the design. Much of the huge granite and marble blocks are cut using hydraulic presses and chisels. The pre-polished stones arrive at the headstone crafter's workshop where they'll eventually take their final form as headstones. For the stone cutter, creating the design can take up to two hours to complete, while the actual chiseling takes only one quarter of the time.

Woodmansee's job starts after the stone blocks arrive at his workshop. "I draw the design almost to where it's a silk screen. The line thickness needs to be very accurate. A lot of work is involved, but the client has to OK it before it's final," Woodmansee said.

The layout is drawn and cut onto the stone, then the stone is frosted. The lines, designs and letters are cut and blasted in twice. All this was done by hand and chisel 50 years ago. Woodmansee said the craftsmanship half a century ago was "unbelievable." Today, the majority of the stone crafting is done by a sandblasting machine.

But the craft Woodmansee has worked on since 1989 is a dying one. Computers can now scan a detailed image and print it out within seconds.

While computers make the job of designing tombstones easier and faster, the hard work of actually chiseling and cutting the stone is still done by hand. Even those difficult designs involving curves are created by the skilled hand of the tombstone carver. Many tombstone companies sandblast the lettering on.

Sometimes what the stonemcutter would like to see differs from what a client wants on the tombstone. Woodmansee recalled one special carving he did for the family of a young motorcycle enthusiast. "I did this motorcycle when I was starting out, and everything looked dark except the engine. I didn't like it, but the family approved it. Depending on the stone, black and white looks better."

Many cemeteries also become involved in the art of creating tombstones as well. Dean DeBoer, who manages the Bayview Cemetery, invested in a computer, laser printer and scanner two years ago to enhance the quality and speed up the creative process involved in making tombstones. DeBoer and Marie Anderson, the Family Service Counselor at Bayview, work with clients in designing pictures on the computer for tombstones.

DeBoer helped a Bellingham family design a two-foot high, black octagon-shaped marble stone inscribed with Chinese writing — all with the help of his computer. The computer offers people purchasing tombstones an enormous range of possibilities for design. "People get a chance to look at and be able to visualize pictures," Anderson explained.

"With the technology, we're still able to keep costs where they're at. There's a lot more freedom for personal taste."

Anderson said people have brought in photos of cats, trucks, hummingbirds, seahorses, lighthouses, and even portraits and signatures to be duplicated on the computer and later etched in stone.

"More and more, people want some special things done. We sit down with a family, and talk about hobbies or something. We encourage the stone to be more personal," Anderson said.

Elaborate, ornate tombstones can be found throughout the older — 100 years or older — sections of Bayview Cemetery. Miniature Roman column tombstones made of cracking gray marble, four-foot high angels statues, and even a detailed tree stump with rippled bark in stone are some of the tombstones surrounding Bayview Cemetery.

Anderson says large, elaborate tombstones were more common 50 to 100 years ago.

"When we think of what families had to spend money on 100 years ago, it's just amazing how beautiful the stones were. We're much more conservative now. Even though we think we have more money than previous generations, we go for more simplified tomb."
Nine women are celebrating a friend's few remaining days as a bachelorette. As they laugh and talk, a stereotypical nerd bursts into the living room dressed in turquoise blue-and-black-checkered pants, an old tan sports coat and a blue baseball hat with its bill turned up. His glasses are missing one arm and are held together with masking tape.

He is carrying a bouquet of balloons. As he trips over his own feet and almost falls onto the living room table, he notices his pants zipper is down.

"Oops! I forgot to zip that up - hee hee," he says in a squealing voice. He reads the card on the bouquet of balloons and looks for the bride-to-be. Then the music begins and the clothes start to come off.

With the hat and glasses off, he turns out to be a physically fit, handsome young man with black hair and brown eyes -- just the opposite of the nerd who entered the room. He starts dancing for the bride-to-be, his body gyrating in time with the music as he encourages her to help him first take off his sports coat and then his pants.

He dances around the room encouraging the other women to look at his body and enjoy the show. Dressed only in multi-colored, striped briefs he returns to the bride-to-be. Turning his back toward her he grabs her hands and puts them on the waistband of his briefs. Slowly he helps her pull them off revealing his g-string. As the women clap, giggle and scream, he continues to dance around the room inviting them to dance with him.

After the stripper leaves the room, the bride-to-be goes to the kitchen to get a drink. "That was magnificent. He is really good," she says blushing and giggling.

The nine women gave this bride-to-be her own personal strip-o-gram. The stripper was Jaime, the only male stripper for Northern Notes. Northern Notes offers a variety of entertainment options including singing telegrams, gorilla-grams, balloon bouquets and strip-o-grams.

"I never thought I'd be a stripper... I've never felt like I was good looking. I've always thought of a male stripper as a blond, tall, blue-eyed dude who's just got the body," Jaime says.

Jaime, who dances at bachelor and birthday parties, relates stripping to an acting job. He says when he enters a room he's hired to entertain people. The person performing isn't really him.

"The thing about male strippers is that they have a stereotype and reputation. When people say 'stripper' you think of a male slut. I'm not anything like that... People think I can't stick around and be cool. A lot of people say I'm not like a regular person. Yes, I am. I'm probably more regular than other people. The only thing is I strip. I take my clothes off. I do have morals and I don't go all the way down. I've never been tempted to and I don't think I ever will," Jaime says.

Jaime isn't the only stripper working for Northern Notes. Ann Marie, 24, is his female counterpart — the only female entertainer to deliver strip-o-grams for Northern Notes. She's a student at Whatcom Community College and plans to go to law school after completing her undergraduate degree at Western.

Ann Marie has stripped at numerous occasions including birthday parties, bachelor parties and even divorce parties. She estimates 80 percent of her audience at parties are over 50 years old, made up of both men and women. A few months ago she performed in Deming at a man's 100-year birthday party. She says no one's ever left the room during her performance nor has
she ever encountered any negative feedback.

"Every single person, especially the older women, have come up to me when I'm in the restroom dressing and say, 'That was done so tastefully and it was wonderful.' A lot of them ask for my name and say they want to hire me for their husband's birthday party," Ann Marie says.

Even though she has been dancing in clubs and at parties for six years, Ann Marie says she still feels jitters before every show.

"If I'm in a bad mood, forget it. I'm not going to have any fun and other people aren't going to have fun either. That's my job - to make people laugh," Jaime says.

When Ann Marie performs, she is scantily dressed in a black sequined hat, long black gloves and a black sequined jacket. Under that she wears a black, sequined top and a sheer-black skirt. Under the skirt she wears a red, silk negligee and a black belt with thigh-length black fringe attached to it. At the end of her performance she is wearing only a red and black thong bikini and red shoes.

Anne Marie starts her show by entering the room and dancing to a compilation of five songs. Layer by layer she begins to remove her clothes. Often after taking off the black fringe belt she puts it over the head of the man she is dancing for.

Unlike Jaime's performance, no one is allowed to touch Ann Marie and she does not encourage the recipient of the strip-o-gram to help her take off her clothing. She prefers not to let the men touch her.

Ann Marie says usually men sit back and watch the show without causing problems, but she still makes it a practice to never go to a party without bringing another person with her.

"You never know what you're walking into, especially when it comes to bachelor parties. You don't know how much they've been drinking and there's always one in the crowd, every single time, it never fails. There is always one that has to be the loudmouth and the show-off and he's always going to cause problems. Sometimes his friends can't do anything about it, so it's always good to be prepared. Better safe than sorry," Ann Marie says.

Because she's cautious, Ann Marie has never had any problems from her male customers. Jaime, on the other hand, had one woman chase him around the room.

"I really thought I was going to get in trouble. I thought she was going to tie me down," Jaime says.

Ann Marie and Jaime earn between $60 to $130 for a 20-minute show, depending on tips. Jaime says tipping is a courtesy, and most women tip, while men won't. Jaime often leaves open the option of staying at a party for more than 20 minutes depending on whether or not the recipients are having a good time.

"Men are so conservative," Jaime says. "Guys will get together, buy a keg of beer, get a stripper and talk about the sex they haven't had. That's a bachelor party. They don't tip. Women are footloose and wild. I get them going sometimes and they're unbelievable."