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Rick LaPorte
Western Washington University

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Letter from the editor

Happy New Year and welcome to the first issue of '94. I'm sure you'll find at least one story that grabs your interest. Topics range from prostitutes to comedians, surfing to calligraphy, carcass removal to marriage. Plus a bonus not-so-fictitious fiction entry from J Overstreet. If that doesn't inspire some angry letters, nothing will. But that's the price we pay for hard hitting, honest journalism. So, just for the record, let me say the story “Road Trippin’” is in no way promoting drinking, smoking, cursing, driving, screaming, thinking or any other activity that may inspire creativity. We wouldn't want to accidentally influence our readership, now would we? But enough about us. This magazine is for you — to enjoy and cherish for as long as it holds your interest. Finally, you may be wondering why this is the “January / February” issue. The reason lies in the fact that KLIPSUN Magazine is published twice per quarter, three quarters a year. Therefore, if this change sticks, there will be an issue to account for every month of the year. You see? It's all very simple.

Rick LaPorte

EDITOR
Rick LaPorte

MANAGING EDITOR
Chris Geer

PHOTO EDITOR
Chong Kim

STORY EDITORS
Nicci Noteboom
Jason Overstreet
Jennifer Tipps

DESIGN EDITOR
Steve Dunkelberger

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Mark Rensink
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Mark Scholten
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Let me tell you a story about a man named Bob.
He's like you and me—'till you hear about his job.
He was out one day wonderin' what to do,
Then he saw his career in a dead moo-moo.
Carcass that is—Rigor mortis, swarming flies.

Not many businesses have same-day service these days, but state-licensed Proctor Carcass Removal service has been providing just that since they took over an already established business in 1962 — and business has been stiff and steady ever since, thank you very much. The Proctors now service the area from Arlington to the Canadian border.

For $30 a cow, $10 a calf, life for them is doing pretty good.

Carcass removal servicers have the glorious task of removing dead animals from the road side as well as from farms, dairy farms mostly.

"It's a business that, well, not a lot of people realize how many dead animals there are. We keep busy all year 'round," said Dixie Proctor, bookkeeper and half-owner of Proctor Animal Carcass Removal.

With the aid of four blood-tight trucks, two drivers and a sophisticated communication system, the Proctors keep the roads and farms of the Fourth Corner clean.

Because the Proctors shoot for same-day service, they devise clever ways of providing prompt pick up. The Proctors don't take reservations; they work on a first-come-first-served basis.

"We want the call as soon as they're dead," Bob Proctor said. "We don't care what time of the day or night it is."

If a cow dies on Friday and the farmer doesn't call until Monday — that carcass might not be picked up until Tuesday afternoon, depending on how lively business is.

"If somebody calls after the trucks leave, we've got radios in the trucks. As long as the CB is in range, I can tell 'em to go, and we also have farmers go over and leave notes on that guy's cow," Bob said as he took a chain-smoker's drag on his cigarette, "It is a message relay system."

"I've only gagged a couple of times," Stoltz said.

"It's really not that bad. It's not as bad as a lot of people think. A lot of people say, "Ooh dead animals, you know." The only time it bad is if they're really rotten or something, and then you don't pick them up. Now, since the weather is cooler pretty much, they stay fresh."

— Kevin Stoltz
removal helps farmers carrion

health inspector’s problem is: Cows are going to die, and they know we try to get same-day service, so if they know it is going to get picked up, you know.”

Farmers usually try to designate a place to put cows for pick up, usually right outside the barn and out of sight from passers-by.

“We got one farmer up there (Whatcom County). He doesn’t care and puts it right out there in his front yard, so we don’t even have to go to the barnyard,” Bob said.

The job isn’t all that bad once one gets use to it, and for $45 for a 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. day, the money seems to draw employees like flies.

Most of the Proctors employees stay with the business for a year or more. One female driver worked for them for nine years before she left. Bob said he actually prefers working with women drivers, and during the years, the Proctors have employed five.

“I’d rather have girl drivers; they’re more conscientious, believe it or not.” Bob said. “They let me know right away if there’s something wrong with truck before it breaks, you know.”

Driver Kevin Stoltz has been working there for about a year and said he is enjoying the work — though it took a little getting used to.

“I’ve only gagged a couple of times,” Stoltz said.

His queasiness usually happens when a rotten carcass explodes when being dumped from the truck — kind of like a balloon.

“They just pop,” Stoltz said, “or when you pull them in and the cow comes and the head and all the guts stay on the ground.”

Besides such unpleasantness, Stoltz said he enjoys his work and recommends it to anyone with a driver’s license and the guts enough to do it.

“It’s really not that bad. It’s not as bad as a lot of people think,” Stoltz said. “A lot of people say ‘ooh dead animals, you know.’ They only time it’s bad is if they’re really rotten or something, and then you don’t pick them up. Now since the weather is cooler pretty much, they stay fresh.”

Most of their business comes from Whatcom County because it’s home to more than 400 dairy farms as opposed to the only 50 or so in Skagit County.

Just like the postal carriers, the Proctors pick up in all kinds of weather. The worst of weather draws the most business. During a silver thaw two years ago the Proctors were backed up for four weeks for rendering services to mainly dairy farmers. One Monday morning they had 70 calls. They managed to pick up 43, and when they returned, they still had 70 more to pick up.

“It was like we hadn’t made a dent in it.” Bob said. “They

At the rendering plant, bodies are made into lubricants, paint thinners and bait.

were froze solid — they weren’t gonna decay.”

Though the bodies don’t go bad as quickly in winter, hazards are still involved. Stoltz has serviced many carcass-cicles.

“In the wintertime if they’re stuck to the ground or something like that, your truck pulls back instead of the cow coming,” Stoltz said.

The Proctors service mostly dairy farmers. Bob said dairy cows tend to be more stressed than beef cow because of the constant milking, so they die more frequently.
But cows aren't the only source of income for the service, the Proctors also pick up the occasional horse, pig, deer and loads from the Humane Society and veterinarians.

Carcass removal is a necessary service because burial is usually not an option in many cases. In Whatcom County, carcasses must be buried at least 100 yards from any water source, with at least two feet of ground cover.

Retrieving a carcass is a simple procedure. The trucks are equipped with a hydraulic machine which, along with a winch, allow the carcasses to be lifted from the ground in a hands-off manner.

"You wear rubber boots and rubber gloves, and you wrap a cable around, punch the button and it comes in. And you put the (machine) in gear, raise the box, dump them out, wash it out and go home," Bob said.

The bodies are delivered to a rendering plant in Ferndale by 5 p.m. They are skinned, ground up and converted into tallow, industrial lubricants, paint thinners, cow feed and imitation crab used in commercial fishing. It's a green business; it all gets recycled.

"Beef meat works just as good as the old shrimp they were using... they put a dye on it, so it is not edible to humans," Bob said.

Once, about seven years ago, the Proctors actually sent 5,000 pounds of scrap carcass to be used as dog food for the Alaskan dogs in the Iditarod sled race. But it didn't work out that well because apparently the meat didn't keep long enough.

"I don't know why it wouldn't. It would be freezing up there," Bob said.

Over the years, however, the Proctors have been blessed with the opportunity to remove some unlikely animals including: llamas (victims of a drive-by shooting), buffalo, an ostrich and even a seal that had washed up on the beach in LaConner.

"Half the job was tying the cable up to it," Bob said.

But cows and horses are their bread and butter.

Cow people are pretty detached from their animals, where as horse people seem to take an animal death a little more to heart.

Once the Proctors got a bouquet from a little girl whose horse they had taken away; she thought they had buried it.

"And we weren't about to tell her what happened — there's no sense in making her feel worse," Dixie said.

Stoltz said horses are more difficult to kill.

"Horses fall a lot harder than cows. Cows will usually drop — you stand away from a horse," Stoltz said.

When the removal service picks up a horse that has been euthanized by a veterinarian, they try to arrange to be on site immediately because — "Where there's horses, there's usually kids," Dixie said.

The removal service also shoots dying animals or animals with unrepairable broken legs.

Many clients avoid anything to do with shooting their animals. Sometimes the farmer will simply point out the animal and walk away.

Stoltz said they just don't want to hear the gun go off.

"They'll help you pull it out after it's dead, but they won't shoot it," Stoltz said.

Though animal carcass removal can be a rather messy way to make a living, Bob and Dixie have grown fond of their profession of three decades.

"It's really as not as bad as it sounds. There's some smell in the summertime, but other than that, it's not bad at all," Bob said.
IN WELCOME, WASHINGTON

Story by Russ Kasselman
Photos by Chong Kim

Don’t blink or you might miss it.
Welcome to Welcome, Wash. A dingy-gray Texaco gas-station coated by countless seasons of dust from the highway, an adjoining laundromat with public showers and the barn-sized Deming Excavation Co., which doubles as the community center, are the only indications the sleepy little town on the Mount Baker Highway exists.

Four mailboxes down the road, a private gravel drive with a keep-out sign extends into the thick alders and Douglas firs. Up the drive and past a barking golden retriever stands a two-door garage, resonating with the sound of an electric sander.

Entertainment centers, bookshelves and other objects in various stages of assembly are scattered among planers and table saws, obscured by air thick with dust.

Behind an ordinary looking door is the pride and joy of the proprietor.

Surfboards!
Long boards and short boards hang from the walls on specially constructed racks.
Pages cut out of surfing magazines adorn the walls; huge waves dwarfing surfers in wet suits; surfers on the beach, their white-blonde hair falling into their eyes, next to beautiful women in revealing outfits.

It seems highly improbable that anyone in Welcome, a town of flannel shirts, heavy boots and 4X4 trucks adorned with gun racks, would be a dedicated surfer. Nonetheless, Ralph Smallwood, a 20-year resident, decided to provide a valuable service by selling quality surfboards.

His business, the Word of Mouth Surf Shop, specializes in performance long boards made by his Californian friend, Wild Bill. Wild Bill is actually Bill Stembridge, a surfboard shaper experimenting with new designs for lighter, more maneuverable longboards.

Smallwood does not fit the typical surfer profile. Dressed in faded blue jeans and a dark-blue sweatshirt covered with sawdust, he proudly announced his shop as a testing ground for Wild Bill’s new boards and designs.

“I sell a couple boards a month, maybe, but it’s mainly for me so I can get a new board or so a month,” Smallwood said.

Smallwood is a cabinet maker by trade, but has no desire to shape his own surfboards. He is, however, working on templates to consistently reproduce boards that Wild Bill has designed especially well.

He has dreams of opening a Bellingham retail shop with all the surfing amenities, but not for awhile. He doesn’t want his current shop to get too big and would rather deal with people on a personal basis.

His most aggressive sales technique involves taking a new board with him whenever he heads out on a surfing trip. Then he shows the other surfers what Wild Bill’s boards can do; he even lets interested surfers try the board for themselves. If someone decides to order a board, Smallwood sets up a meeting to discuss what the potential customer wants.
Smallwood then calls Wild Bill and gives specifics.

A board's thickness is determined by the person's height and weight, and its length and shape depend on what style the person wants to surf. (Smallwood believes his performance long boards are perfect for beginners and intermediate level surfers. He does not believe in what he calls "acrobatic surfing", but rather the classic style of reading and following the wave as it breaks.)

The shaped, 6 inch foam-rubber core of board is coated with fiberglass, and then passed to the graffiti artist, who decorates the board according to the desires of the customer, incorporating the Wild Bill logo, of course.

The whole process can take up to three weeks, but Smallwood said people are usually willing to wait for a quality board. Wild Bill's boards cost from $400-500, and each one surfs differently because they are hand made.

At 46, Smallwood is still an avid surfer, traveling to Westport in southwestern Washington as often as he can and constantly looking for new spots to surf on the Washington coast.

"Part of the surfing thing is to find it (the spot)," Smallwood said. "There are places that literally haven't been surfed here yet."

His thick glasses and graying mustache belie his agility. He is quick on his feet and when he assumes a surfer's stance to explain how a board will perform, the agile grace of a surfer shows through.

The Santa Barbara area was his original surfing haunt. He moved to Washington to get away from Californian attitudes.

"Up until three or four years ago, I was still commuting to California to surf," Smallwood said, shaking his head at the absurdity of it. "I needed a lifestyle change. I needed to get away so I came out here to the middle of the woods. That's when I discovered there was a coast here."

Smallwood said California surfers are vindictive and violent in the water and out of it. No one respects anyone else, and the locals will get irate if an outsider steals a wave from them. He said he has seen other surfers trash a person's car just because that person was surfing out of his territory.

"It gets really bad down in California," Smallwood said, remembering with a frown. "But up here, since surfing is so new, there is a lot more camaraderie. People are just buddies."

He said he doesn't miss the California attitudes. He's been surfing the Washington coast for about four years and he believes the surfing is comparable to California's. At Westport, the waves get as big as 15 feet and have all the force one could want.

"There are less crowds and more pristine areas to surf. Like when I was a kid, the vibe is good. People are there for the essence of surfing."

He said he appreciates the atti
tudes of the locals in Westport because people don't get nasty towards strangers. Instead they take the novice surfers aside and try to explain surfing etiquette in a nice way.

They also don't put up with people who want to fight over waves. The locals want to keep the surfers coming back, and so they try to keep everybody happy, he said.

Smallwood said surfing in Washington is picking up. Westport, which is the state's most popular surfing spot, is beginning to fill up on the weekends.

"There could be 50 guys in the water," Smallwood said. "These range from total 'kooks' (novice surfers) to guys that really know what they're doing. The locals don't even surf on the weekends anymore."

Surfing the Washington coast is definitely more treacherous, Smallwood said. Having the right equipment, such as a thick wet suit, gloves and booties, is important.

The climate in Washington does not prevent surfing from occurring year round, so surfers must be wary of hypothermia and staying in the water too long. Smallwood said he's even seen people out surfing when there's snow on the beach.

"You've got to be geared up for it," he said with a knowing smile. "It's just a lot gnarlier here."

The weather is a big factor in surfing Washington's coast, Smallwood said.

In the summer the storms come from the south and west and provide good surfing on the southern part of the coast, he said.

In the winter the storms come from the north and west allowing surfing all the way into the Straight of Juan de Fuca and Port Angeles.

"You have to be part weatherman," Smallwood said with a laugh. "You have to know the force of the wave, the swell and the direction. You have to be able to follow the wave as it breaks."

He said surfing is one of the toughest sports in the world to learn. He has taken professional snow boarders out on the waves and watched them work for hours and never get it. The balance and control in the unstable water, plus the fact that the waves are different every time makes for some hard learning experiences, he said.

Surfing has been the love of Smallwood's life. He figures he'll still be surfing when he's 70.

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... the wave as it breaks.
Prostitutes: wishing

Story by Steve Dunkelberger
and Nicci Noteboom
Photographs by Steve Dunkelberger

A lone hundred dollar bill bought a 20-year-old woman’s innocence.

For that money, Juanita had sex with a 60-year-old co-worker and his son.

She needed money to buy food for her mother, daughter and brother. This first trick was Juanita’s introduction to a seven-year career as a prostitute in Canada.

“I felt ashamed about it, but I also felt like, glad, you know, because I had some food money now — this is great,” she said.

Juanita lied to her mother by telling her she worked an extra shift. She didn’t want her know what she had done.

“T was raining out when I was coming home, and I took that hundred dollar bill and put it in a puddle of water to make it soft and wet.

“ And I went in and said ‘Look what I found, a hundred dollar bill.’

“I wanted to share it with my family, but I didn’t want to make them suspicious of where I got the money,” Juanita said.

They believed her and used the money to buy food. Juanita continued to prostitute herself whenever her family needed money.

This developed over time, and eventually, Juanita said she had a steady clientele list of 15 men who she had sex with four or five times a week until she quit a year and a half ago.

Other women don’t get off the streets so easily. Vancouver is home to more than a 1,000 prostitutes, not including those affiliated with escort services.

Under current British Columbia laws, having sex for money is legal, but it’s illegal to solicit for it. Several prostitutes have been brutally murdered and dumped in alleys or abandoned cars in past months. Every night prostitutes run the risk of being beaten, raped or robbed.

One refuge is a small room in the First United Church in the shadier-side of east Vancouver. The church provides a safe-haven for prostitutes in the form of WISH — Women’s Information Safe House. WISH offers prostitutes an area where they can rest, shower, have a cup of coffee, receive first aid and obtain legal and medical referrals.

Although housed in a church, this one of its kind streetwalkers sanctuary does not religiously pressure the women to stop working the streets.

“A lot of time with churches, and particularly with church money, they want to see results ‘Well, how many souls have you saved, how many women have you cleaned up,’ and this is not what this place is for,” said former corrections worker and director Margaret Derrick.

“This place is to provide a safe place for them to come where they’re not going to get hassled, where they’re not going to get beat up,” said Derrick

“It’s simply a ministry to provide some place for these women to relax for a while, where they don’t have to look over their shoulder, where they don’t have to be afraid.

“There’s precious little of that in most of their lives, Juanita worked as a prostitute for seven years.
particularly those who live on the streets.”

Derrick acts as guard, nurse, counselor and friend for the approximately 80 prostitutes who frequent this small room tucked away in the back of the church. When Juanita was a prostitute, she attended WISH and said there was nothing religious about WISH except its location.

“The woman who was running it at the time, she’s gone now, she used to wear a cross around her neck, but that’s about as religious as it got,” Juanita said. “But that was her own personal belief. She swore like a trooper.”

WISH caters to a variety of prostitutes. They range between the ages of 18 to 40. Many have been physically, sexually and mentally abused.

“I can guarantee you every woman that comes through the door has come from an abusive home and an abusive childhood,” Derrick said. “Some will admit to it and talk about it and others won’t.”

Other characteristics aren’t so easy to detect. Some are HIV positive, some have children, some are lesbians, others are bisexual, and on Monday and Tuesday nights the safe house is opened to transsexual prostitutes — men who dress as woman and service men, virtually all. Derrick said, are HIV positive.

Derrick said WISH was originally opened to service all prostitutes all of the time. Eventually, however, tension developed between the female and transsexual prostitutes, and WISH limited transsexual prostitute participation to twice a week.

“There’s male energy involved here, and however cliche that may sound, it’s here when the trannies are here,” Derrick said.

One thing most of the prostitutes who attend WISH have in common is IV drug use. Brenda, a prostitute, started hooking and using IV drugs when she was 17. She’s now 32.

“The day my mother died was the very day I stuck a needle in my arm, and the very day I started working on the streets,” Brenda said. “I really didn’t give a damn for about a year after and from there it just kept on going.”

At one point, she quit prostitution and drugs all together and kept a regular job, but eventually she found herself back on the streets and using drugs. Brenda said the streets have gotten progressively worse since she began, but she stays on the street to support her and her boyfriend’s addiction. On average, she can make $200 to $300 a night from having sex with three to five men, and all but $40 of that goes to buy drugs. She works seven days a week.

“My drug addiction and working on the street go hand and hand. If I wasn’t using, I wouldn’t be out there,” Brenda said.

She praised the needle exchange — a place where old needles are exchanged for new ones — as a godsend especially with the threat of AIDS. Brenda also gets tested for HIV every six months — unless a condom breaks then she goes in right away.

A broken condom is a minor problem compared to the dangers of a “bad date.”

One summer evening, while it was still light out, Brenda was picked up by a man in a truck who asked her to turn around to see if they were close to hitting a telephone pole. When she turned her head, he grabbed her by the hair, pushed her to the floor of the truck and began beating her with a billy-club.

“He kept on hitting me over and over again. He wouldn’t stop,” she said. “I wasn’t given a chance to do anything. I’m screaming, I’m crying, and I’m saying, ‘OK, OK! I’ll do anything you want just quit hitting me.’”

The man’s response was to tell her that the beating was to let her know who was in charge. As they drove off, Brenda wished for a red light, so she could jump out. The knife, she was too afraid use, remained concealed in her jacket.

“But when you’re in a hurry and you’re scared to death — I mean, I just couldn’t get it out. I was tearing the shit out of the inside of my pocket,” Brenda said.

At one point, she got halfway out of the truck, and the man began hitting her even harder. Blood was everywhere. Finally, she grabbed her knife and began stabbing blindly. Brenda said she stabbed him at least three times.

“As Brenda fled the scene, the man warned her not to call the

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"He said something like, 'if you call the cops, I'll make sure you regret it for the rest of your life — if you even last that long,'" she said.

During the whole incident, no one tried to help Brenda or get involved. It wasn't until the man began to drive off that anyone offered assistance.

"I was pissed off, and I just said, 'Get the fuck away from me. You couldn't help me before — why would you bother to start helping me now?'"

At this point, her attacker put the truck in reverse and tried to run her over. This was the last she saw of him... until she went to an Alcoholic Anonymous dance.

"I wasn't about to go up to him and shake his hand and say 'let by-gones be by-gones,' but naturally, after that, I bumped into him at meetings and stuff," Brenda said.

She said he didn't recognize her, but she always caught him looking at her. Then one night Brenda met up with him again — not at AA, but while she was working the streets, and she picked him up as a customer.

"I don't know what got into me this one night, but I went out with him. I don't know why.

"It was dark, and when I got in, I didn't recognize him right away until after we started talking... and my eyes just went uh-oh, and I was wondering does this guy know who I am, but we went through the whole thing and what not.

"Everything went along fine, and when I got out, I mean, my heart was going bump-bump," she said.

From then on, she really started to pay attention to people's vibes.

"It's not like they have a label on their forehead saying 'bad date,'" Brenda said. "I like to talk to them, and that way I don't feel so cheap, so I don't feel like a piece of meat."

Though disagreeing with her work in the beginning, her boyfriend has grown to accept it because of their drug use.

"He was really like the old-fashioned type. But he was using before we started going out but not as much we're using now," Brenda said.

Like Brenda, Kelly, a prostitute of 11 years, also prostitutes herself to support a drug habit. But with only a high school education, Kelly said this is the only career opportunity for many prostitutes.

"They're a lot of mums out there I know who work the streets. It not just a junky situation... It's a real mixed bag. They do it for the money basically because the welfare rates don't give them enough, and they just go out there to make the money," Kelly said.

Kelly said prostituting is the only job in which she can make enough money to survive.

"I started when I was 21, and I started by my own choice because," Kelly said.

"It was the middle of the month, there was no money, there was no food, there was no cigarettes, and this guy came up. And this guy said to me 'I'll give you $80 for a lay', which is straight sex, and I went to a couple of friends mine and said 'what do I do?'

"First of all you get the money, second of all you put a condom on, third of all you turn around and let him fuck you and fourth you leave."

But sometimes it's not that simple.

Over the years, Kelly has learned to deal with her "bad dates." Kelly is especially good at dealing with customers who had too much to drink. She often politely tells these dates to

Margaret Derrick acts as a guard and confidante to those who attend W.I.S.H.
come back another time

"When a guy is really drunk, I turn around and say, 'Hey why don't you come back when you're sober,'” Kelly said. “I say, 'How much have you had to drink,' and they say, 'This much,' and I say, 'No wonder you can't get off. You can't even get it up.'"

The other kind of “Bad Date” prostitutes often face is the date who fails to pay. Brenda, Kelly and Juanita have all been in the situation where their dates have not paid. Kelly had one man try to steal her purse as well as not pay for the date.

Juanita luckily got the upper hand when one of her dates tried to not pay. She and her customer had negotiated on price for one service, and then he decided he wanted to do more, which Juanita told him would cost more.

When they finished, the man tried to pay Juanita only part of the money she had coming.

Juanita quickly summoned her 300-pound Jamaican friend, Lou. The two cornered the man with a hunting knife, and Juanita took the rest of the money he owed her.

"I said, 'Get the fuck out of here, and don't come back. That's it for you,'” Juanita said. "I said, 'This is a business here. You buy something, you pay for it, just like going into a store. You don't rip them off, you don't rip me off.'"

On another occasion, a date tried skip payment, and Juanita again had to use forceful measures to get her money.

"I grabbed all his clothes and threw them out in the rain and the dark... and then he came back into the house and said, 'I paid you, I paid you.'"

At this point, a friend of Juanita’s came in from another room to back her up. She wanted some collateral and took the man’s paycheck.

"I said, 'I'm going to hold on to this. You come back tomorrow, or I'm going to rip it into shreds and hunt you down until I find you.'"

The next day, the man came back gave Juanita her money, and she told him never to come back again.

"Bad dates" are a grim reality prostitutes face every night. Some girls deal with them by carrying weapons, such as knives, and others use hair spray or mace-like substances to protect themselves.

Another safety resource for these women is the “bad trick sheet” provided by the Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society. The weekly sheet informs prostitutes of possible dangerous “Johns” they should watch out for.

The sheet warns the prostitutes about every sort of “Bad John”— from possible drunken, high or STD-carrying dates to potential murderers.

For example, one sheet warned prostitutes of a man who pulled a woman into his car and attempted to cut off her breasts.

Another bulletin advised women to be wary of a man and woman team who held a woman and beat her to point at which she had to be hospitalized.

To avoid bad dates, Brenda and Juanita have developed an instinct for detecting good and bad “Johns.” Kelly looks for a lot of eye contact in “Good Johns,” and both swear by regular customers.

“I’ve got lots of regulars. That’s what I depend on,” Brenda said.

Juanita said she doesn’t miss having to worry about “bad dates” anymore, and she looks back on her days as a prostitute with remorse. There was nothing she enjoyed about the job.

“It’s stressful, it’s boring,” she said. "To have sex with somebody you’re not attracted to, it’s revolting.”

For every trick, Juanita had to psyche herself up and pretend she was attracted to her customer, but she was always thinking about something else.

“I was thinking about stuff I needed to buy or maybe I would have the TV on at the same time and be watching TV,” Juanita said. “I think with this one person I was reading a book.”

Juanita said every six months or so, she gets the urge to become a prostitute again because the money comes so easy, but the way it made her feel will keep her off the streets.

“It’s really bad for your self esteem for one thing, and it’s also dangerous,” Juanita said.

“I’m also a homosexual, so it interferes with my sexuality. It just, like, confuses the shit right out of you.

“I don’t want to pick up any disease, I don’t want to get beat up.
“Living on the streets can be addictive. It’s sometimes hard to leave the street behind because of the excitement there,” Derrick said.

“We hope, but we’re not realistic. You help them try, but you don’t hold your breath expecting them to make it.

“I’m not going to say ‘look who’s off the streets,’ because odds are they’re not.”

One group trying to beat the odds and get girls off the street is Parents for Sexually Exploited Children.

Since this group formalized in June, it has had more than 1,000 calls from parents who are trying to get their children off the street.

The group concentrates on those under the age of 18, and they have dealt with teens as young as 12.

It is a conglomeration of parents, police and ex-prostitutes working together.

“It’s the first time parents and prostitutes have worked together,” Anne Dion, founder of the group said.

More than a 100 families have opened their homes to the group and allow teens to stay with them as they rehabilitate. The group is also trying to open up a safe house.

Dion said many people have misconceptions about prostitutes. Though she said 70 to 75 percent are addicted to drugs, many of them come from stable homes and go to regular schools.

Dion said one high school principal reported to her that 50 students had been approached to become prostitutes in a one month period.

Since the group began earlier this year, 10 girls have been saved from the streets without returning.

“The longer they’re out there the harder it is to get them off,” Dion said.

Nobody knows how hard it is to get off the streets better than those who have been on most of their lives. But these prostitutes still hold on to the dream that one day they will be able to make the transition.

“I quit once, so I know I’m perfectly capable. It’s just a matter of getting myself motivated and strong enough mentally,” Brenda said.

Hometown Hooker

Tall, dark, lanky Margo St. James sips her coffee and strokes her affectionate cat as she reminisces about her past. What kind of memory lane is it from county girl walking down? Country fairs and ice cream socials? Hardly. St. James is proudly and happily chatting about her former careers of prostitute and founding member of the prostitutes’ rights group COYOTE.

St. James grew up in the small Whatcom County town of Kendall. In the early ’60s she left Whatcom County and eventually settled in San Francisco where she had her first brush with prostitution.

St. James was living the life of an ex-beatnik and budding hippy — dancing, smoking pot and screwing.

“I was basically a farm girl having a good time,” she said.

The police thought she was having too good a time and arrested her on prostitution charges.

“I ended up in front of this absolutely misogynist judge. I said, ‘Your honor, I’ve never turned a trick in my life,’ and he said, ‘Anyone who can speak the language is obviously a professional.’” St. James said.

She was convicted on prostitution charges; however, she appealed and won after a two-year battle. During the time of her appeal, St. James was attending law school. At one point her father stopped giving her tuition money, and she was having money troubles.

Through her lawyer connections at school and working for a bail bondsman, St. James started prostituting herself.

“I had the name already, so the trauma was over with, and it was simply a matter of capitalizing on the name,” St. James said.

From the ages of 25 to 30, St. James worked as a prostitute. Then at 35, she returned to prostitution in the form of COYOTE. St. James formed COYOTE, Call off Your Old Tired Ethics, in 1973 in San Francisco.

The group got its name after author Tom Robbins spent an evening with St. James and a dozen of her friends singing and dancing. The next day Robbins told St. James she reminded him of the mythical, Native American character the “Coyote Trickster,” and the name stuck.

“There’s the Black Panthers, there’s the Gray Panthers, there’s the Moose, the Elks and everybody else, so why not COYOTE?”

St. James started the group off in a small office donated by the Glide Methodist Church in the Tenderloin of San Francisco. On one hand, she said she created the prostitutes’ rights group as an information base for researchers and journalists, and on the other hand she created it for hookers who were in trouble. One of the main beliefs of COYOTE was that the criminalization of prostitution kept men in control of women.

“I said to a Dutch chief of police from Rotterdam once, ‘Why do you want to keep it criminalized,’ and he said, ‘for the social control of women,’” St. James said.

The major events of the group were the Hooker’s Balls which were held from 1974 -1979. St. James said every ball had too many people in attendance — everyone wanted to be there, especially in 1976.

“There was a traffic jam for four to five blocks around the hotel. You couldn’t go anywhere. People were starting to come in costume, half-naked in the lobby at five in the afternoon ... There was a woman from the Women’s Health Collective doing cervical examinations ... it was incredible,” St. James said.

After 1979, St. James began to slowly withdraw from COYOTE, and began working toward hookers’ rights in other ways.

In 1985, she moved to France and was one of the organizers of the International Committee for the Rights of Hookers. After that, she semi-retired from working for prostitutes’ rights.

Now in her fifties, St. James lives in San Francisco, and she even considers running for a city supervisor position.

She is also getting back involved with prostitutes’ rights. She hopes to start a lottery in which people can write the cause they wish their money to go to, and then the drawing itself could be an event.
Story by J Overstreet

“Close call man,” Rip said as we pulled out of the tardust parking lot of the Jackpot BP Flying J Chevron Gas-N-Go on the other side of the mountains, “We could have almost caused a potential accident.”

“That happens,” I tell him, “but if you have an emergency cigarette —”

“IT’S NOT AN EMERGENCY!” Rip shouts with an exaggerated, sardonic falsetto.

We’ve had this same conversation a million times and you’d think we’d be a little sick of it and for god’s sake —

“For god’s sakes Rip, will you open the god damn smokes?”

I’m kind of edged; it’s hotter than a pistol at 9 a.m. in the godforsaken wastes of eastern Washington. Heat isn’t too bad if you aren’t in the car, but unfortunately I am. And I will be for quite a while because our destination is still a few hours off. We’re going camping at Whiskey Dick Creek, which, according to the crude map drawn by Lafe on the back of an envelope, lays somewhere outside of Ellensburg.

Some people have a graduation tassel, others a smelly tree, and some sickos have a plastic Jesus. We got St. Christopher. St. Christopher has been with the car since the start of the summer. I had just completed my first year of college and the grades had come in, I got a 3.2 so everyone at home was relatively happy (good job, son) and I was drinking beers with Lafe and Rip after work over at Ben and Tweak’s place and Tweak suggested we check out this house where he knew the people had been evicted.

And I will be for quite a while because our destination is still a few hours off. We’re going camping at Whiskey Dick Creek, which, according to the crude map drawn by Lafe on the back of an envelope, lays somewhere outside of Ellensburg.

“Easy turbo, would ya fuckin’ relax? You fascist bastard, you Nazi sympathizer, I’ll hafta turn your member into an ember.”

“Ouch! What the—”

Rip had been so courteous as to light me a smoke, and further extended said courtesy by tossing said lit cigarette into my crotch, irrefutable proof that you can indeed be too polite.

I feel a hot point on the underside of my leg and it hurts. Naturally I let go of the steering wheel, rip off my seatbelt and lift my ass away from the source of pain, jamming my balls against the wheel.

“Get offfman inthenameof Christ that hurts you baastaard!”

I’m swerving us into the ditch, my ass is on fire, and Rip is grabbing the smoke from where it lay on the car seat smoldering in a puddle of melted maroon vinyl. I straighten out in the nick of time and the bastard’s laughing maniacally. Laughing.

“I’ll hafta turn your member into an ember.”

“Oooh. A little beer’ll put that fire out,” Rip says, eyes bulging in a feebly comical impression of Homer Simpson. He’s cracked open one of the 22-ounce bottles of cheap malt liquor we bought at the Jackpot AM PM Mini-Mart Stuckey’s Chevron Gas-N-Go and now he’s waving it back and forth, so close yet so far.

“Jesus Christ, will you pass that bottle?”

He passes it and cracks another for himself. Clink. We clash the bottles.

“Fuckin’ CHEERS!” we toast to the day.

I tilt the big bottle and the guzzle greedily. Mmm Mmm Mmm—it’s tay-stee.

“Oh, here man,” Rip says, holding out the smoke he lit for me. I take a drag and another slug of the malt.

“Hang on St. Christopher,” I remark, nodding at St. Christopher, the 18-inch high white rubber skeleton hanging by a string from the rearview mirror.

Some people have a graduation tassel, others a smelly tree, and some sickos have a plastic Jesus. We got St. Christopher.

St. Christopher has been with the car since the start of the summer. I had just completed my first year of college and the grades had come in, I got a 3.2 so everyone at home was relatively happy (good job, son) and I was drinking beers with Lafe and Rip after work over at Ben and Tweak’s place and Tweak suggested we check out this house where he knew the people had been evicted.
stuffed. Either way, he got the beer light and I got Saint Christopher; I am free, Tweak is rotting in Walla Walla and St. Christopher is hanging on my rearview mirror.

St. Christopher doesn’t have anything to say. Saint Christopher never has anything to say. I ease onto the gas, accelerating with intoxicated smoothness, and roll down the interstate. We’re in the left lane, the fast lane. It’s a great day for a drive and I’m driving great. As I tilt my head back and put the bottle to my lips, I look down over the length of the bottle, using it to sight along the white lane-markers on the road.

The radio’s on. Rip’s got it cranked to the Son-of-a-Bitch song. It’s by Nazareth, which I know only because the deejay said so.

“You know, this song’s actually called ‘Hair of the Dog.’” I inform him. “Why the hell do they call it ‘Hair of the Dog’? And you sometimes hear people say, ‘Let’s try the hair of the dog.’”

Rip looks over with a bemused look on his face. His mouth and nose are twisted. He’s trying to drink malt with one side of his mouth and talk with the other, and his eye is googly green peering through the emeraldine bottle. He’s having a hard time drinking and talking, beer foaming onto his chest, sputtering.

With one final gulp the bottle is dry and he unceremoniously slings the empty vessel out the car window. I can see it in the rearview as it crashes into a million glinty pieces.

“‘Y’know, this song’s actually called ‘Hair of the Dog,’” I think. “Why the hell do they call it ‘Hair of the Dog?’” And you sometimes hear people say, ‘Let’s try the hair of the dog.’”

“Rough break,” I think. “Kids, get some new parents.”

The glinting subsides into a forgotten mess as Rip speaks, in a tone paradoxically interested yet dispassionate.

“I think it’s about Edison.”

“Yeah,” Rip patiently explains, “The inventor guy. I read somewhere that he tried some few dozen materials when he was inventing the filament for his light bulb. You know, odd stuff like toenails, barbed wire, hell, maybe even 7-11 spoon-straws. I don’t know.”

I can see where this is going, so I interrupt. “Lemme guess. After exhausting all other likely options, finally he decides, ‘Gee, let’s try the hair of the dog.’ Right?”

“Almost,” Rip continues, not missing a beat. “The hair is a miserable failure. The dog-hair light bulb explodes, causing blackouts and fires all over town, his lab is burnt to a smoldering ruin and he screams —”

“SON OF A BITCH!” we shout in unison. Great minds think alike.

“Could be the case,” I grant him, “But somehow I don’t think that’s precisely what the songwriter had in mind. Who knows? Maybe you’re right.”

The song fades out, and the trustworthy, modulated voice of Tom Shane implores us to turn the car around this very minute and drive back to Seattle and buy a diamond at the Shane Company. Then it’s Bob Zimmer from the Men’s Wearhouse, telling me I can get a designer wool suit for half the price — “I guarantee it.”

It’s 90 degrees in the car; I’m not in the market for a diamond ring or a wool suit; I am, however, in the market for a place to offload the toxic urinary byproduct of the cheap malt I have been drinking.

“The Son-of-a-Bitch song is about Edison,” Rip says.

“That’s just rude! Why don’t you go see a doctor for that?” my offended passenger comments, fanning the air in front of his face. “You could at least warn me. Jesus, I gotta pee so bad I can taste it.”

Evidently I am not the only one with a bladder full of beer. “I hear ya, loud and clear ya.” I pull over and pop the hood so it looks like we’re fixing the car. We pee into the ditch, drop the hood, hop in and once again we’re patching down the road. I’m sick of this heat and it’s only been a half hour since we stopped for smokes, and we’ve got miles to go to get to Whiskey Dick Creek and do some serious camping. Nothing to do but keep on driving.

And driving. And there’s nothing to look at but grass, hills and grass. Brown hills. Brown grass. Brown hills and brown grass. Brown grass and brown and brown and brown like the barn jacket on the cover of the J. Crew catalog the women down the hall kept on their coffee table on top of the Victoria’s Secret catalog that they sent for months after one of them bought a pair of socks at the mall.

Great coffee table catalog, though. The J. Crew one ain’t bad either, the one with the tallowy-skinned man modeling the brown barn jacket on the front. East coast weekend apparel for those crisp New England mornings. Put on an overpriced and decidedly non-grungy flannel and the L.L. Bean boots (see catalog stashed under Victoria’s Secret) and you’re stoked for a frosty fall frolic in Walden Woods.

Chestnuts a-roastin’ on an open fire, and my nuts a roastin’ in a car with no air conditioning. I envy the cool, combed-cotton comfort of the queerbait on the catalog cover.

Barn jacket and all. If he gets sick of Walden Woods he can hop onto the cover of the National Geographic next to the J. Crew, laying on the coffee table looking somewhat less read and significantly less exotic than the Victoria’s Secret.

The barn jacket looks sturdy, but canvas duck isn’t exactly bulletproof Kevlar, and National Geographic is heading (oh my!) smack into the malaria-infested gooddom of the Mekong River delta, ha -ha, I’m going camping at Whiskey Dick Creek and he’s not.

But the jacket is “pull over, man” a very
neutral brown like hills and grass (hey, remember the hills and grass?) and probably will blend well “dude, pull over” with the jungle and maybe the east-coast adventurer won’t get shot. Wearing his jacket the color of brown hills and brown grass and a big white barn in the distance on the left side of the freeway. Must be near Thorpe, Washington.

“Pull over!” Rip screams, scaring me aware, “Pull over man here and stop the car!”

“What is your problem? Have you gone mad? Would you shut up and tell me precisely what is your fucking problem?”

“Bung cherries, man! Bung cherries!”

At the white barn? Couldn’t be. It’s a fruit stand slash antique mall slash flea market.

“Uh, where Rip? I don’t see any bung cherries.”

“At the barn, you idiot, the barn!”

Obviously the heat and the liquor have boiled his brain. He might be dangerous, I mean you never can tell until it’s too late, so I pull over. He’s foaming at the mouth.

“Didn’t you see the sign? It said ‘bung cherries next right.’ Don’t you want some bung cherries?”

I pull in There’s families and old folks and tourists from a big Greyhound bus and fruit and antiques and a flea market and enough boxes of Applets and Cotlets to give Yakima a case of the skitters, but I don’t see any bung cherries, or anything remotely resembling a bung cherry.

“Uh, Rip?”

“Yeah,” he says flatly.

“I think the sign said ‘bing cherries next right,’” I tell him, “Not ‘bung cherries.’”

“Oh, I knew that.” He’s glum, remotely disappointed.

I figure what the hell, long as we’re here we may as well go on in, they might have a bathroom and I could use a soda or some alternative to beer.

I slink into the shade of the barn and it’s somewhat cooler and the air smells sweet like hay or something wholesome. I’m newly refreshed, and I wonder if the Thorpe fruit stand slash antique mall slash flea market is in that Time Life Book of Mystic Places. It’s like apple pie for the soul.

While hiking to the restrooms, I look over a pyramid of of peaches and wink at some girl about fourteen, young and skinny and trying so hard to not look like she’s with her parents, as if she just happened to be some sophisticated deb shopping for fruit and a cocktail dress in the middle of nowhere. She’s feeling self conscious now and her face is turning red and she giggles as she looks around to check if her parents are looking.

They aren’t and she smiles and lifts her arms as if to fix her hair and she winks back. I keep walking and pretend not to notice. I mean, she’s just a kid. Her mother in the meantime has noticed and with semaphore eyes sends an a telepathic mother-daughter mind bowl-out, telling the daughter to “get your derrière back in the car this instant young lady or there’s gonna be hell to pay!” I chuckle and head on into the can.

Regrettably, the bathroom does not smell half as wholesome as the rest of the place, but there’s plenty of local humor on the bathroom stall for me to read, if only I could decipher the cave drawings.

Crash!! A loud dissonant smashing sound disrupts my reading, and I get this sinking feeling in my gut. “Oh shit,” telling me Rip has, “Oh shit,” done something stupid and we’d better, “Oh shit,” get outta Dodge and pronto.

The sinking feeling dissolves as I come out of the can to see Rip keeled over laughing so hard he can’t speak, tears cruisin’ down his face, and he’s pointing at the skinny girl’s mother.

With meaningful coughs and inventive sign language, he tells me that the girl’s mom, pissed at the daughter’s brazen display of willing nubility, tried to drag the girl out by the hand, only mom’s purse strap caught an antique dressmaker’s form, which succumbed to gravity and fell to the floor where it broke upon impact into several pieces.

Now it’s my turn to be glum, since I missed out. It’s not all that funny unless you see it happen, which Rip did. Now the proprietor is coming over to congratulate the woman on her purchase of a smashed antique dress form. This oughtta be good.

Rip and I saunter coolly out of the barn, pausing, for a moment, to look at the lady and shake our heads, “Tsk, tsk, tsk, tut-tut what a shame — sucker!” The lady frowns at me, as if I’m the klutz the broke the damn thing.

Rip and I quietly ooze back to our car, which has kept cool in the shadow of a minivan where the girl is war- rying her hair with her hands and sopp- ing with embarrassment. I give her a low, rude whistle that she didn’t really deserve and that any woman over the age of 17 would consider an insult or at best a sign of poor breeding and lack of sophis- tication.

She stops sobbing (little faker) and smiles shyly, obviously pleased. Apparently she’s still young enough to feel flattered by a callous sophomoric whistle from some young man she doesn’t even know. I start the car.

We circle the lot slowly and pause a moment by the barn where the klutzy mother is in a pre-connipitive state hagg- gling about the damage. It’s really quite funny. With perfect form Rip flips her the badfinger. We’re burnin’ daylight. Head ‘em and move ‘em out. It’s time to roll.

I lay on the gas and we tear out of the lot in a cloud of icy tire smoke. The rear end fishtails in a spray of gravel and we laugh loudly as I recover and accelerate to freeway speed and then some, exultant in the joy of deliberate immaturity and the certainty that we are going camping.
Pioneer County
Locals fight for lost rights the old-fashioned way:
SECESSION

Story by Ric Brewer
Illustration by Jean Kimmich

When farmers in Whatcom County wanted to clear new land a generation ago, they would bore holes into the trunks of the largest trees, stuff the cavities with burning embers and wait for the mighty Douglas Firs or cedars to bum themselves to the ground from the inside out.

Now the scion of these pioneers say they can't even prune an apple tree without a long list of regulations they say hinder their given right to use their land as they see fit.

"It's ridiculous, just ridiculous," says Gayle Luedke of the treatment county residents receive from the Whatcom County government. Luedke is secretary and one of the founding members of the Pioneer Country committee, an ad hoc group dedicated to forcing secession of the mostly agrarian area north of Bellingham and west of the Guide Meridian into a new county.

In what appears to be fast becoming a Northwest tradition, this populist, post-Perot drive for independence from Whatcom County was spurred by similar grassroots secession frenzies by other disgruntled rural folk in other counties.

"We originally were going to call it 'Limbaugh County,'" jokes Luedke.

The Pioneers claim that Whatcom County officials have repeatedly and deliberately ignored the rights to the rural property owners, replacing common sense with ordinances that restrict people from utilizing their property.

True to their self-appointed folksy title, the Pioneers have tales resplendent with the ineptness and deception of the government.

"I heard of one person who was turned in for pruning their apple tree," says Luedke. The person, she says, was fined for cutting a tree without a proper permit.

Others complain of laws which limit the uses of properties deemed "critical areas" or wetlands by local authorities. This tantamount, for these property-proud folks, to high-tech highway robbery.

"If you have any kind of a little puddle on your land they consider it a wetland," Luedke scoffs. "That makes western Washington wetlands. Period. That designation keeps you from really using your land the way you want to."

But according to officials from Whatcom County Building and Codes, wetland area guidelines are developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and mandated by state and federal laws, not by local councils. Local zoning councils merely act as the "wetland police."

Gary Gibbons, a former city councilman for the city of Ferndale shrugs when the wetlands issue comes up.

"We have to do what the state tells us," he says almost wistfully. "Local governments have little control over issues such as wetlands, even when they have a significant impact on us."

Another arrow in their quiver of stories is listed on a pink brochure entitled "Land Disturbance Regulations" handed out at weekly meetings and petition drives. Land disturbance is a euphemistic term used by the county to describe when earth is moved, particularly when building, logging or excavating. A permit must be procured anytime soil is to be moved with machinery heavier than 2,000 pounds. This proviso, according to the Pioneers, is totally misguided when one considers the daily use of such equipment on a farm.

"We want to protect the farmlands. We want to preserve the country aspect," says Luedke. "But we would like to do it and not have someone else force their rules and regulations on us."

One discovers just how serious these people are when attending one of their weekly meetings at the Custer Sportsman Club, a typically unadorned, utilitarian meeting place where more than 80 people gather on a rainy Tuesday night. They are mostly retired senior citizens, men in cotton flannel shirts with ample bellies and white-haired, doting women, all of whom feel both disenfranchised and confused by a political system that seems to have abandoned them.

Meetings are run like tent revivals complete with a solemn opening prayer and passing the hat for donations.

The Pledge of Allegiance begins each session, with a bit of Robert's Rules of Order peppered throughout the evening to make it official. Everyone knows each other because they are neighbors, some for their entire lives, and these relationships lubricate an almost festive atmosphere.

Howard Andreasen, the chairman of the group, is a quiet man who looks uncomfortable holding the gavel, but nevertheless seems to provide a calm during some otherwise stormy planning sessions. At this meeting the subjects on the floor range from lighting the huge "Support Pioneer County" sign mounted on a tractor trailer bordering I-5 to designing a county seal and flag.

The Pioneers are finding the going rough. Of the 7,500 to 8,000 needed signatures, they've collected just over 1,000. As long as they gather signatures of 50 percent of the areas registered voters, no formal, county-wide vote is required. But time is running short. The state legislature, they
say, is drawing up new and more complex procedures to hinder the acquisition of their goal.

Gibbons says he feels the Pioneer County group may be the ultimate in do-it-yourself politics, although he reserves judgment on its *modus operandi*.

"I don't have a great deal of information about them," he says. "I just have a gut feeling that they aren't prepared for what they're attempting."

Barbara Brenner, one of Whatcom County council's more vocal members, says that despite the Pioneer Group's misgivings and frustrations with the present council system, no members of the organization have met with or formerly spoken to her about their complaints or concerns.

"I wouldn't want my children, if they didn't get what they wanted to just pick up their marbles and go," says Brenner, "and that's exactly what the Pioneer County people seem to be doing. I'd rather see them try to work from within to change things."

The Pioneer County crew are insistent in their claims of holding the line on taxes and providing the same quality of public services as is with the present system. Their method of acquiring and maintaining proper police, fire and medical facilities and manpower is shadowy. Andreasen fends off such questions during meetings saying that now is not the time to discuss matters of particularity, that details of policy and procedure are best left until after the new county is formed. Most services, he states, will be contracted either through private companies or with Whatcom County, a solution that would seem to be antithetical for the cause.

"I can't see how (more government) is going to be more efficient and cost effective," Gibbons points out. "It would seem to go against the idea of getting smaller and less bureaucratic."

Pioneer County would, by virtue of the Washington Constitution, inherit any existing county owned building and property after the new county's inception. But not the services. These would have to wade through the same contract proposal quagmire as other government entities.

Polly Keith, director of Whatcom County's 9-1-1 dispatch center says that any plans for a potential contracting of services by Pioneer County have not been communicated to her. 9-1-1 would not be legally bound to provide their services and, according to other 9-1-1 staff members, such a contract probably would not be taken on by the already overburdened agency.

"Right now the urban areas subsidize the rural areas," "claims Brenner. "If they contract out what they're going to end up doing is paying exactly what it would cost if spread out among the all the taxpayers."

Despite the adversities, the Pioneers will continue their down-home fight for recognition since a "system in place for so long won't change," says Luedke. "If I had my way, it'd be nice to have fences all the way around the border and have my nice little area to myself." she laments. "But I know that things just don't work like that anymore."
Kermit Apio warms up the crowd at Bellis Fair for week two of the 14th Annual Seattle International Stand-Up Comedy Competition, of which
Drunken hecklers. Smelly, smoke-filled rooms. Watered-down drinks. Cranky club owners. All the while some poor schmuck is standing in the spotlight holding a microphone.

Welcome to stand-up comedy, kid. Better say something funny ... quick.

"Some people say I look too young to be in this business," comedian Stu Stuart tells the crowd at a comedy competition in Bellingham. "I don't know. Actually I was talking to my parents about that just tonight ... before they dropped me off."

"I just joined a gym," says Ian Williams. "I walk in and the guy goes, 'Welcome to Gold's Gym. We have over 12,000 pounds of weights.' What am I supposed to say? 'Yeah — well that's not enough for me pal! What about my left arm?'"

"I just got a police dog," Dave Richards tells the crowd. "It's obedient, well-trained ... and I have no problem getting drugs now."

We've all seen them on TV really late at night. Some make us laugh; others make us wince. They are comedians, and they are an interesting bunch.

"For the most part, comedians are eccentric, they're sensitive, and they are the class clowns grown up. They have a need to be on stage," said Laura Crocker, co-manager of the Comedy Underground in Seattle.

"This is probably the coolest job in the world," said comedian Chris Siler of Seattle. "Sure, you're in a different city every night and you're meeting different people, but that's the point. You're travelling. You're on the road. I have a life at home, but when you're on the road, it's cool."

Ah, yes. A different city every night. A different crowd, each with its own collective personality. Just ask a comic for a story and get out of the way.

"I had a guy, I told him to shut up because I'm working and I don't bother him at work," recalled Siler. "I told him if he kept messing with me, I was gonna show up where he works and light his paper hat on fire. He goes,
‘Well, I wear the headphones.’ He admitted he worked at McDonald’s — so I put the microphone around my head like a headset and I talked into it like Beavis and Butt-head — ‘huh-huh-huh.’ That’s all I had to do, and the crowd went nuts.”

And if you think hecklers always take a human form, guess again.

“I did a college where they put us in a gymnasium that had been closed for two years,” said Williams, a comic of nine years. “In the middle of my show it seemed like the audience had been a little distracted. It turned out that there are two bats flying into the audience and diving at the light. I mean, how do you heckle a bat? ‘What are you, blind as a... oh.’ What are you gonna do? I tried to deal with them, but I was like, ‘I don’t want to get rabies from a show. Good night, everybody.’”

But of course you can reasonably expect to be safe when the club owner’s family is in the audience. Right?

“I played a place in Tumwater during my ‘Standing in Front of the Dartboard’ Tour of the United States,” said Kristen Kirkham, ducking imaginary darts. “I was heckled by the owner’s brother, who was so drunk he wouldn’t leave. He sat on the back of a chair right next to me. I was dodging him all night. At one point — I can’t believe this happened to me — I had the mike in one hand, and he wouldn’t shut up — my hand shot out — and I grabbed him around the throat. Not only this, but I’m getting it videotaped — the tape now known as ‘Exhibit A.’ I’m just goin’, ‘Great, this is gonna get me on Evening at the Improv.’”

Oh, the glamour of it all. Being a comedian doesn’t just mean waiting for a limo ride to the Tonight Show.

“Mostly the performers approach the venue and say they’re looking for work,” said Ron Reid, who teaches comedy at Skagit Valley Community College in Mount Vernon. “Comedians spend a lot of their time on the phone, calling booking agents, calling clubs, saying, ‘Hey, I’m available these dates.’ Then the club will say, ‘Never heard of ya. Send us a videotape.’”

And if they get a gig, they’re going to need an act.

“Every comedian has a Set List,” said Stuart, a full-time comedian of three years. “We do bits — every bit has a name,” he said, producing a computer printout. “In my head I can see this. I was watching the clock and I got down to about (pointing) here. I knew I was in the danger zone because you lose points in you go over time. I skipped the ‘single and avail-able’ bit, and I went right to the mannequin bit and sped up at the end. When you get more experienced, you’re able to edit it as you go along.”

At one time or another, in varying states or sobriety, everyone has thought they could be a stand-up comedian. So how did the real ones get started?

“I was on the rap tour with Sir Mix-A-Lot and Kid Sensation,” said first-year comedian Corky Mac, of Seattle. “I started making a lot of jokes, and it kind of escalated. I got on stage at a mike check and started messing around. A lot of the guys thought it was pretty funny. They said, ‘Why don’t you incorporate that into an act and do it during the show?’”

Kirkham started out doing improvisation with Robin Williams improv group in San Francisco 10 years ago.

“I don’t look like a comedian like some of the others do. I asked somebody what the first thing people thought was when they saw me on
Siler has been writing and producing his own material since age 14.

"People always say, 'Wow, you're a comedian? Say something funny!' I say, 'You're a lawyer? Lie to me. You're a shoe salesman? Be a loser. You're a doctor? Give me a pelvic exam,'" he said.

As one of the comics talks off stage, a big rough-looking guy approaches and motions him over.

"He's (the big guy) co-owner of a club in Canada, and I didn't get paid in full from them. I'm telling all these other comics, 'Be very careful. It's best to keep you ears and eyes open and your mouth shut until you know what's going on. Being funny is one thing—but remember there's a business side to it.'"

Stuart adds that there are a lot of horror stories. People yanking you around, not getting paid what you're supposed to, having trouble with papers at the border, just some terrible stuff."

Crocker, who's been in the comedy business for 15 years, says that the Pacific Northwest comedy scene is more pleasant than some.

"Here the comics like each other. You go to San Francisco or LA and you get the attitude: 'Oh, you're a comic? You're more competition. Go away. Here we really are happy when our friends are doing well and are successful. It's like, 'Yay for them,' as opposed to, 'How dare that bastard!'"

But back to the funny stuff.

"I love hecklers," said Bernie Prussing, a comedian for eight years and recent winner of $3000 on America's Funniest People. "I don't like to demean people, so I just flip off into other personalities. I jump off stage and turn the scene into something form Alice in Wonderland or Shakespeare. By the end he's just going, 'I'm going to shut up now. The Thorazine will wear off soon, I hope.'"

Hecklers are synonymous with comedy. Every comedian in history has been yelled at by spectators who've had a few too many.

"I've only been heckled really effectively once where it threw me off," Anderson recounted. "The opening act had been talking about, 'What would you do if you had a million dollars?' and somebody yelled, 'Get a new comedian!,' So I'm up there doing my act, and it seems like everything is going OK. Then I hear, 'Anybody got another million dollars?' Just go, 'Whoa, that's clever.' Instead of letting it go on by, I had to make it the focal point of the rest of the show. 'Hmmm, let's examine why you said that. That was a clever heckle. I am now pissed off at you, sir.'"

"I've had some crowds that just kind of looked at me like, 'Oh my God ... his career guidance counselor must've pointed him in the wrong direction. How does he make a living at this?'" said Stuart.

"I always say that 90 percent of the world has a sense of humor and the other 10 percent comes to my show," laughed Williams.

Prussing does his best drunk guy voice when imitating the average audience member who approaches him after a show:

"I know ... I was being ... (hic)... a little obnoxious ... but I was just ... trying to ... (burp) ... help you ... with your show ..."

"It's from these type of people, of course, that the professional comedians get all their 'A' material."

"I love it when people come up to me after the show and say, 'Hey, I really liked your style. I got a joke for you. These two Jews go into a bar ...' And I'm like, 'I don't think we share the same style,'" Williams said.

Stuart, who teaches a class on beginning stand-up comedy at the University of Washington, said no quality comedian would take a joke like that, even if it were repeatable in mixed company.

"People always want to give you jokes," he said. "They always come up to you and tell the most horrific street jokes. And the kicker is that they always say, 'You can use that.' Rule number one: All good comedians do all original material."

But in this age of mass media, original material is becoming harder to come up with all the time.

"Television has really hurt comedy," said Williams. "The proliferation — there's no such thing as stolen material anymore because there's so much on TV. The comedy channel has a show where they basically say, 'Here's five people doing the same premise.'"

I wonder if Kirkham ever got on Evening at the Improv for choking the life out of that one heckler.
The art of beautiful writing

Story by Robyn Johnson
Photos by Chong Kim

The strong, ink-stained fingers manipulate the pen as it flows over the crisp white vellum. The hand-ground ink streams through the blackened nib, forming thick and thin strokes that merge into swash capitals, complex flourishes, and intricate Italic script. The calloused grip relaxes as Stanley Knight scrutinizes the latest product of his lifelong pursuit, calligraphy.

Calligraphy, which translates from a Greek word for "beautiful writing," finds its roots reaching back to medieval times when scribes meticulously reproduced manuscripts to preserve and circulate the written word.

In a favorite piece entitled, "Kyrie Eleison," translated as "Lord, Have mercy," Knight rewrote Kyrie Eleison in varying sizes and shades of blue in wave-like layers to convey movement and rhythm.

"The special thing about calligraphy is you can never get it totally right," Knight said, enunciating every syllable with his British accent. "It's like music. It's not just learning the notes and being able to press them in the right order when playing the piano. It's making music out of the notes. When you get to a professional level of calligraphy, you are not just putting letters in the correct order. You are making art out of the letters."

Knight has been making music with letters since an art teacher in "Birkenhead, across the River Mersey from Liverpool, England" had him paint large Roman capitals.

"I got the bug for lettering from a painting and decorating teacher named Jack Squires," Knight said, flashing a thoughtful grin. "He just loved lettering, although he didn't know a great deal about it."

Ironically, Knight admits to having "terrible handwriting as a child." Fortunately, that didn’t stop him from attending England’s Leeds College of Art in 1958 to study lettering, calligraphy and bookbinding. At Leeds, Knight was one of three students to study under Thomas Swindlehurst, a famous 20th-century calligrapher.

"I was making paintings out of letters in 1958, before I had ever seen any abstract lettering art," Knights said proudly as he strokes his well-trimmed, salt-and-pepper beard. "I wouldn't use the letters or words as content; instead, they were visual symbols which make techniques and methods of calligraphy disappeared."

The craft was revived at the beginning of the 20th-century by an Englishman, Edward Johnston. Knowing nothing, Johnston taught himself lettering while looking at medieval manuscripts. He reinvented the art of calligraphy and his students later developed the techniques and refined it through the 1950s.

"In the 1960s, lettering was taken out of the art school situation and put in with graphic design and therefore lost," Knight said. "Calligraphy is no longer taught by specialists, and no degree calligraphy courses exist anywhere in the western world. Donald Jackson, an English calligrapher who does work for the Queen, and I were the last generation to be trained in an art school situation."

Knight moved from England to a vintage 1906 farmhouse in rural Skagit County after he married Denys Taipale-Knight, a well-known calligrapher, in 1989.

"We travelled the coast from Olympia to the Canadian border, looking for a place to live and work," Knight said as he looked at the autumn-colored farmlands that stretch beyond his deck. "This particular house and place seemed to attract us when we saw the notice outside. We needed a rural place where we could teach and offer our weekend course for experienced calligraphers."

Many of Knight’s works have taken him years to complete. "Antarctica," a six-paneled piece, took him 18 months to plan and research and six months to execute.

"You have to be in love with what you do, especially if it is going to take a long time to complete," he said with a twinkle in his eye. "You just can’t sit down and produce a
Ink pots and tools of a calligrapher’s trade.

masterpiece.

“‘Antarctica’ is a true venue for (Knight’s) many talents,” Nicole Jones, a private student of Knight, said. “It is a mixed-media portfolio, showcasing his calligraphy, design, painting and artistic abilities.”

Along with scripts and designs, a calligrapher needs words, sayings and quotations to convey the message of the work. Knight uses Greek, Latin and his favorite, Celtic verse.

“I was looking for sayings that were not sentimental or trivial (for “The Four Seasons” project),” Knight said. “I wanted the words as well as the finished images to be something you could look at. When it was read again, it would give you new insights. I ended up using Celtic verses. As it happened, a lot of my drawings and photographs were from Wales, so there was a tie-up with the imagery, the source of landscape pictures and the source of words.”

Original calligraphy is always unique and unretouched. If a mistake is made, it usually can’t be corrected.

“When I am writing something, every letter I make — I’m trying to get a flow in that letter form,” Knight said arching his eyebrows. “One stroke grows out of another. When I add a bottom on badly, it doesn’t flow or meld into the next stroke. You’re knitting the letters together into a texture.”

Knight teaches a year-long course at Seattle’s Cornish College of the Arts, where he introduces hand lettering and calligraphy. When that is mastered, he moves his students into typography and modern computer productions.

“Hand lettering has subtlety, flexibility and a quality that can’t be reproduced by a machine,” he said. “However, today’s calligraphers have to be more versatile for commercial work. I teach quality in typography, taking what a computer can do and adjusting it with visual awareness from hand lettering.”

“I had some calligraphy experience, but Stan’s class made students focus on the intricacies of individual letter forms,” said Western senior Dave Wegener, who took Knight’s class at Western. “His focus was optical, not mathematical, as far as letter shape and spacing. Now when I work on special projects for customers on the computer, I break up the words and spaces (the computer generates), remaking them optically.”

Until last summer, Knight taught calligraphy at Western, but unfortunately he was one of the resources that was lost to budget cuts.

“His greatest gift as a teacher and historian is his ability to share his genuine love and respect of calligraphy and to make it come alive,” Jones said.

“I had never done calligraphy,” Western junior Jessie Erickson said. “But because of (Knight’s class), I decided to major in graphic design with, maybe, a computer design minor.”

Knight is known as a specialist in the historical aspects of calligraphy. He recently published “A Book of Formal Scripts,” with John Woodcock, a SSI fellow. Woodcock wrote about the technique of each script and Knight wrote the historical precedents and explanations.

“Some people in the calligraphical world have been put up on a pedestal, but have suffered from public adulation. It’s gone to their heads, their work has suffered and they are frightened about their next work. Fortunately, people see me as ordinary, and I try not to stand up here and look down at them.

“To be honest, I don’t have a public opinion of myself,” Knight said. “I know I have a lot of knowledge because of my background, training and experience. Therefore, I know I have to share that knowledge with people through teaching.”

Knight works in a studio in the basement of his house in Mount Vernon.
Living with a disability

Story by Holly Yip

Overcoming what society portrays as negative aspects is challenging, especially in a world that constantly depicts physical fitness and beauty as a priority. Any type of disability can be hard to overcome.

Aaron Schubach, 20, a junior at Western majoring in English, was diagnosed with dyslexia in the fourth grade. His learning disability was discovered through testing.

Wearing a T-shirt and jeans, Schubach looks like most students.

Schubach came to Western in 1991 as a freshman and attended the Disabled Student Services (DSS) orientation at the beginning of fall quarter.

The majority of the students the DSS works with have some type of learning disability. Students with hidden disabilities like a head injury or dyslexia, are required by law to provide written documentation of their disability before services are provided.

A learning disability (LD) is a permanent disorder which affects the way individuals with normal or above average intelligence take in, retain and express information. Incoming or outgoing information may become scrambled as it travels between the eye, ear, skin and brain.

Some problems LD students have are with reading, language, math and organizational and study skills.

Schubach’s learning disability affects his math and science skills.

“I have a lot of problems with math and science, but I’ve come to enjoy it,” he said. “I have some language problems too.”

Because of his dyslexia, Schubach receives extra time on his tests and visits the tutorial center for help in his math and science classes.

According to a pamphlet titled Testing for Learning Disabilities, about 95 percent of the learning disabled have severe problems with spelling.

The second most common characteristic is difficulty writing research papers, according to a pamphlet titled College Students With Learning Disabilities. LD students may understand the material presented, but have difficulty expressing their ideas on paper.

A learning disability also may manifest itself in only one specific academic area, such as math or English.

A learning disability is often inconsistent, it may disappear during high school and resurface during college.

A LD is not a form of mental retardation or an emotional disorder. The cause of learning disabilities is not completely known, but often arises from genetic variations.

Learning disabilities may run in the family, occur from events in the prenatal period, or any traumatic experience.

Schubach says that since he’s been diagnosed with dyslexia, he has learned to cope with his learning disability.

“I’ve been diagnosed for such a long time now ... I still get frustrated once in awhile,” he said. “I got frustrated a lot more in high school.”

Schubach suggests that students with a disability research and learn about it.

“The more you know, the more you don’t get frustrated with yourself,” he said. “A lot of people blame themselves and end up having a negative experience. But if they realize there are certain things they can do and people to help them, that can really help,” Schubach said with a smile.

Schubach uses his positive attitude working as an adviser in the DSS. He helps with GUR evaluations and general advising.

Having a firm grip on his learning disability, Schubach isn’t going to let it stand in his way. He would like to get his master’s degree in fine arts one day.

Disabilities come in more than just one form. More obvious are physical disabilities.

Shoshana Kehoe, 20, a junior majoring in law and diversity from Fairhaven, has dwarfism.

Kehoe has the most common kind of dwarfism where she has shortened arms and legs.

Sitting on a yellow chair, Kehoe’s legs dangle right below the edge of the seat. With her friendly attitude and smile, one hardly notices that she comes about waist high on most people.

Kehoe started working as an adviser in the DSS during her freshman year, and has found the staff to be very supportive and helpful.

Kehoe says they offer many services such as academic advisement, classroom relocation services, disability counseling and taping services.

“It (DSS) helped so I could schedule my classes so they weren’t back to back,” she said. “So if you had a class in lecture hall and a class in Fairhaven you could get to it.”

Kehoe said she hasn’t had lots of problems getting around campus. But daily activity, such as going to the cash machine, can cause problems.

“The cash machine was difficult for me to reach. The Disabled Student Services arranged to get a stool,” she said. “A lot of things are inconvenient, I’m sure it’s that people are unaware of these things.”

Although Kehoe said she has gone through periods when she wished she didn’t have her physical disability because of the way people have treated her. She has overcome this with a positive attitude.

“I guess I don’t deny having a disability,” Kehoe said. “I work on being independent... I incorporate my disability with who I am.”

Her strong identity also stems from a national support group she belongs to.

“Primarily, I have a pretty good attitude,” she said. “I belong to a national organization called Little People of America. It’s a really good support group and my parents have really helped me get involved.”

Kehoe said disabled people are a minority group not acknowledged as much as they need to be. She said it’s mainly the fact of low visibility and pretending that disabled people don’t exist.

Schubach and Kehoe are just two Western students who have some type of disability. Their challenges haven’t always been easy for them, but they weren’t afraid to face their disability and ask for help.
Red, yellow, green and blue plastic bowling pins wiz by creating a rainbow blur of color. In a swift, synchronized moment the muscular left hand releases a bright yellow pin and almost as quickly clutches another. Jason Quick has been juggling things as a means of survival ever since he was a young boy.

"Since I lost my arm, I've juggled two things at a time because I could pick them up and they were able to stay in the air," Jason says.

As a curious, mischievous 6-year-old, Jason climbed into an electrical substation in Bellingham. Intrigued by the wires, he was drawn too close and electrocuted himself. The damage was too severe and his arm was amputated. Sixteen years later he still remembers the day vividly.

He was recently introduced to other forms of juggling by a friend.

"My roommate was a juggler and had clubs. About nine months ago I picked them up, and I've been working on juggling clubs and balls ever since."

Steam accompanies the words from his lips as the late afternoon autumn chill begins to set in.

"I've just really gotten into juggling. That's one of the things that I do more that anything right now."

Jason practices a couple hours a day by himself and with Western Washington University's juggling club around five hours a week.

The club was established this year and currently boasts eight members.

"It's really challenging. It's not relaxing; actually it's stressful. It's like exercise. It has a different level that is always changing. Once you master three balls, you go onto the next level. It is a continuous challenge."

"I can't really get bored with it because I can always do something new with it."

Jason sees juggling as a metaphor for life. He created a juggling-performance-techniques class with the theater department and tries to integrate juggling with teaching techniques for the environment.

Moving his arm up and down, opening his hand at certain points as if releasing a ball, he simulates his juggling routine and how it represents our fragile ecosystem.

"You pick up one ball," he explains, "and it's easy to throw it up in the air and catch it again."

"With two balls, it is a little more difficult, but you can do it — similar to the effects human population has on the earth. The more people you put on the earth, the harder it is to juggle. Soon you add so many balls, you can't go any further and you drop them."

An environmental-education and biology major, Jason hopes to educate children and adults about the importance of preserving the planet. He attributes most of his wonder and respect for nature to his grandmother who taught him a valuable lesson years ago.

"When I was a boy, my Grandmother caught me chopping down a tree and made me write a one-page report on why it was wrong. It really sunk in, simply because it made me realize that trees have the right to exist too." Jason's kind brown eyes stare intently ahead as he speaks.

Not restricted to teaching in a strict school system, Jason can also see himself happy as an interpreter or guide for trails with a land management agency. Just as long as he is outdoors.
The wood of the bench dampens from the mist around him. Jason's body stiffens as a chill runs through. He opens his green and purple canvas pack, pulls out a woolen gray sweater and effortlessly pulls over his green cotton shirt with his one hand.

Sometimes he feels as if people don't know him at all.

"It's just what I do. It's not extraordinary...just different from other people. It makes me feel good that they notice, but only because it's different." He speaks hesitantly and sometimes stops to reorganize his thoughts.

"People notice that I'm a juggler with one arm instead of a juggler," Jason observes, with a bit of a nervous, uncomfortable laugh and tucks a piece of brown curly hair that has escaped from underneath his red floppy hat.

His voice becomes a bit gravely.

"People say it must have been difficult, but it wasn't really. These things happen and that's the way it was."

A train's whistle faintly whines in the distance as the gray clouds that fill the sky slowly turn to a sullen pink behind the San Juan Islands.

Jason says he wants to perform at Children's Orthopedic Hospital in Seattle, where he stayed for over a month after his accident.

"I want to show people it's not the end of the world, whether you have all your limbs or not."

To relax, Jason likes to draw. His love for his surroundings is reflected on the large boards that hold sketches of environmental scenes.

"I enjoy art because it keeps my hand working. I like to mess with media and be creative. It keeps me busy."

Later, Jason meets up with the juggling club in Carver Gym C to practice routines for their upcoming debut in a local production of Hamlet.

Jason's hand disappears into his bag and reappears with two red and one blue ball. The crunching sound made as he kneads it in his palm and between his fingers suggests the stuffing consists of beans.

"It's actually filled with sand because it gives it more consistency. Oh! But look at this one!"

His hand dives into the bag's large front pocket. This time his hand is filled with small rubber balls that resemble racquetballs. He throws it up and as it travels above his head, it loops around and sails down behind him and he catches it near the small of his back.

"I made this one myself! I stripped a tennis ball and sliced it open."

He now has the ball on the ground in front of him and demonstrates the surgical procedure.

"I filled it with white rice and covered it with a balloon. It's now the perfect weight; and look..." He throws it up in the air and lets it drop to the ground with a lifeless thump.

"See, it doesn't roll away! A regular tennis ball would be sure to roll across the floor!"

As a broad smile expands across his face, he begins squirming like an excited little boy.

Unable to stand still a moment longer he jumps up and tosses a ball in the air.

"You sure you don't want to try?! It's really fairly easy. You just have to do it — kinda like life!"
The wedding guests are restless, shifting from side to side on the white metal fold-up chairs waiting for the ceremony to begin. Only the children seem occupied, entertained by the two aquariums bubbling in front, just to the right of where the ceremony will take place.

An old-fashioned candy machine sits against the wall, inviting the nervous to munch on a Snickers bar.

Brown carpet and walls contrast with two silver wall-length candle holders, located on each side of the kneeling bench, the place where couples give their vows.

Suddenly, the ‘Wedding March’ blares over the PA, and the bride, draped in white from head to toe, enters the room. As the onlookers watch expectantly, she moves nimbly through the pathway of metal chairs and joins her future husband at the front of the room.

The townspeople of Custer scoffed at the Rev. David Sims and his wife, Diane, when they opened the Hitching Post eight years ago. Who would ever come to Custer to get married, they asked. After nearly a decade of love-struck couples scurrying to tie the knot in the backwoods of rural Whatcom county, nobody is laughing anymore.

The little white-brick building, which more closely resembles a shower house at a campground than a church, has been around longer than the majority of businesses in Custer. Yet, if you’re not careful, it would be easy to drive right past it. Only a red heart-shaped street sign indicates the presence of the chapel. That and the “Come in, we’re open” sign on the glass front door.

“We’ve managed to keep this chapel open for eight years, and I tell you that’s short of a miracle,” Sims said as his graying sideburns expand with the smile on his face. “This whole chapel is a labor of love because it’s never made a profit. My wife and I work, and we keep this chapel open out of our own money.”

A Western graduate and Baptist minister, Sims works as a
photographer on the side and takes wedding pictures for his customers at an affordable price. Diane is business manager for a Bellingham office.

"I got tired of all the children having to go down to the Justice of the Peace because ministers wouldn’t marry them. I don’t believe any minister has the right to judge anyone. That’s my belief. The Lord does the judging. No minister has the right to play God."

Since Sims opened the wedding chapel, he’s hitched 1,087 couples, some of whom he would rather have not married. But that’s not up to him decide, he said.

"When their minds are made up, their minds are made up. Did you ever try to tell someone who’s in love that they’re not made for each other?" he asked. "See how far you get. Love is blind 'cause you can’t see nothin’ else. You can’t see the truth, you’re not going to listen to the truth. You learn from your own mistakes I guess."

The two didn’t listen to their friends and relatives who said their own marriage would never last even though they were extremely young and had no money to support themselves. They were married in a wedding chapel 31 years ago in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho.

"You look at marriages when people say, ‘This couple is made for one another.’ They never stay married long. They really don’t. Then you look at a couple and they say, ‘Well, they’re never gonna make it.’ They ain’t never gonna make it, you know. And that’s the ones who will stay married forever. We was a couple that they said would never make it... People think they have all the answers. They don’t have any of them," the 49-year old reverend said.

The business also involves some traveling. Sims and his wife once hiked Deception Pass to marry a couple of hikers who had met there.

“We about died because we weren’t used to walking up hills,” he laughed.

They traveled to Yakima to marry a couple in a museum in which the entire wedding consisted of a country western theme.

“There’s so many strange weddings that it’s difficult to remember them all,” he said. “But we go all over to marry people.”

And people come from all over to get married at the Hitching Post. Sims has married couples from as faraway as Switzerland, Africa and England. A couple from Japan flew into Bellingham, got hitched and headed back to Japan the same day.

"Why would someone want to do that?" Sims asked, shaking his head in amazement. “I don’t even know how people find out about this place.”

Sims has become quite a celebrity in the county. He can’t go to the Lynden Fair without someone tapping him on the shoulder or giving him a wave.

He remembered a time when he and a friend entered a restaurant, and within minutes, virtually everyone in the restaurant was pointing at Sims and whispering among themselves. He realized that six couples he had married were seated around him, and he remembered every one of them.

"People really are surprised that I remember who they are. It seems like people don’t think that you should remember who they are. Why wouldn’t you remember who they are? They’re important. Don’t they know they’re important?"

Often times, Sims marries couples for free, one reason the chapel never turns a profit and why he and Diane must struggle to keep the doors open. He charges $45 at the chapel and $55 on location.

"I try to keep the cost down," he said. "I don’t like to see anyone do without something because they don’t have the money."

This year, Sims and Diane had trouble making their monthly mortgage payments because the number of weddings has dropped off sharply. He said the Yellow Pages misprinted the chapel’s phone number, and potential customers sometimes think the chapel is no longer open.

"If I was more business-like, we might make a lot more money. I can’t bring it in my heart to do it. It’s in here," he said, pointing to his heart. "So we get by the best we can.

The Rev. David Sims.