

The fate of the Campbell Club: How a handful of anti-capitalist students are trying to save their home

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The Campbell Club's dish drainer was "fucked."

"I cut through the pipe and gallons of stagnant sink waste started spraying out," said Waldo Przekop, the job and maintenance coordinator at the University of Oregon's oldest co-op.

Drenched in foul-smelling fluid, Przekop ran to fellow co-opper Jimi Wood for help.

"He comes upstairs covered in straight poop water like, 'Jimi help me!'" said Wood.

Wood towed off Przekop's face and the two of them rushed downstairs to fix the dish system. After much trial and error, they managed to get it running again.

"But people still throw food in the sink," Przekop said, laughing.

They could have called a plumber, but the Campbell Club is already \$17,000 in debt. If the clubbers can't scrounge this amount together by March 20, the co-op will be shut down by the Student Cooperative Association, its overseeing body.

The Campbell Club was the first project of the Student Cooperative Organization, a group that UO students founded in 1935, inspired by alumnus Wallace J. Campbell's senior thesis on Depression-era cooperative living. It's currently one of three SCA co-ops, alongside the Lorax Manner and the Janet Smith House; all are located within a few blocks of each

other on Alder Street.

Just about any Duck can tell you something about the Campbell Club: about its hippies, about its parties, about the police raids that tend to bring them to a halt. Even if they don't know it by name, they might have seen a towering, spooky-looking old building just off campus and wondered what goes on within its rickety walls.

Over the last few years, the Campbell Club has struggled with a high turnover rate. Though rent is cheap — between \$300 and \$400 depending on the room — members tend to move in, stay for a few months and move out, often without paying the owed rent, the source of the debt. The co-op's lack of funds and “anti-capitalist” stance make it reluctant to hire debt collectors.

“Whether we like it or not, [we] live in a capitalist system and we are all affected by it,” said Wood, who currently serves as the Campbell Club's house representative, membership coordinator and social coordinator. (Due to a lack of membership, many members have had to take on numerous positions.)



Jimi Wood, center, with fellow Campbell Club residents. (Cole Elsasser/Emerald)

Wood first arrived at the Campbell Club in winter 2010, cold and homeless. A resident invited her to spend a couple nights there; she ended up spending a month as a guest before applying full-time.

“I'd never seen anything like this place before,” she said. “The people who lived here were amazing. It was a full house. There were shows all the time.”

Wood continued traveling and settled in New Orleans, where she used her savings to found a co-op based on her former residence. This endeavor failed, and Wood returned to Eugene last year only to find out that the Campbell Club was in danger.

Living at the Campbell Club is often a learning experience. Many residents leave enlightened about elbow-grease skills – and sometimes miss the work enough to come back and do more of it.

“I learned how to cook, how to fix things,” said Phoebe Roberts, a UO senior who left the Campbell Club two years ago but returns to do door duties at their parties. “That house has meant so much to me for most of my college life, so it would be really sad to see it go.”

The Campbell Club is rife with artists and musicians, and even people from outside the community respect its creative culture.

Jordan Blaisdell, drummer for local rock duo the Critical Shakes, admires the Campbell Club’s spirit of artistic freedom. But he’s noticed a dearth of activity as of late. He thinks the problem is motivation.

“I thought this would be an artist utopia if the right set of motivated and creative and inspired people lived there,” he said. “But in the time I’ve been there, I can’t help but get the feeling there’s a lack of motivation.”

Music is central to the Campbell Club’s reputation, and it might just be their salvation. Since mid-December, the co-op has been staging benefit concerts almost every week. So far, they’ve been able to raise about \$3,000: \$2,000 from a crowdsourcing campaign, the rest from concerts or direct donations.

These shows are wide-ranging to draw as diverse a crowd as possible. Last week, they hosted an EDM show. This weekend’s show will be Mardi Gras-themed, and they’ll follow it up with a ‘70s-themed party on Feb. 5 and an acoustic show on Feb. 13.



The Campbell Club is hosting a series of shows through March 20, the deadline when it has to provide \$17,000 or shut down. (Cole Elsasser/Emerald)

The Campbell Club has always hosted concerts, most of them with a suggested donation of \$3 to \$5. These new fundraiser shows come with required donations at the door – a slightly more capitalist move than is characteristic for the co-op.

In its promotional efforts, the co-op has increasingly reached out to potential tenants who don’t share its political values.

“Our major hurdle has been to be more accepting of people who we’re not sure would function well in our community instead of just trying to pre-judge,” said Wood. “If we need to, we can ask them to leave later.”

The Campbell Club has stepped up its promotional game, printing membership pamphlets and relentlessly promoting its shows and free open mics.

“We’ve tried to not only aim for students – because it is a student co-op – but anyone who’s into the DIY [do-it-yourself] culture,” said Kim Chavez, membership and job coordinator at the Campbell Club.

The Campbell Club is officially only open to students at UO, Lane Community College or Northwest Christian University. However, they accept non-students as work traders or if they plan on becoming students in the future.

Despite all these efforts, Wood doesn’t think they have enough time to fill the house with paying members before they run out of money. Raising \$14,000 in less than two months is no small feat. She believes that unless something miraculous happens, the house will close by the end of winter term.

But not all hope is lost. If the Campbell Club can’t raise the money, the SCA will stage one last recruitment drive to find enough potential tenants to keep the Campbell Club alive – while keeping the co-op closed to save money. If not, the building will be leased to other tenants.

If the Campbell Club does close permanently, a lot of memories will disappear with it.

“The dynamic in this house has always been so amazing and it’s so interesting to see how people who are so different from each other get along,” said Wood. “It’s so cool. I wish there were more large-scale communal living spaces in Eugene. It’s challenging, it’s fun. I learn things here.”

Editor’s note: a previous version of this article stated the Campbell Club accepts non-students as residents. This is not entirely true. They accept non-students as work traders or if they plan on becoming students in the future.

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