



COVER STORY

## BLAH, BLAH, BLOG

Portland is home to thousands of Web logs. Most of them suck. Here are 17 that don't.

BY TAYLOR CLARK AND MARK BAUMGARTEN

Early on March 5, Randy Leonard was at it again, battling opponents of gay marriage. "I reject the theory that a majority vote somehow makes a public policy 'right,'" Leonard declared.

The Portland city commissioner was carrying on a raging cultural war, not in some stuffy conference room at City Hall but at home--sitting in front of his computer just after midnight, logged into bojack.org, one of Portland's most popular Web logs.

"Some blogs are great at fostering polite debate, which I like," says Leonard, who admits he can't resist the blogging impulse. "In City Council, true debate is stifled."

At their best, blogs are like online columns, in which an author--anonymous or not--can post anything from gossip to grocery lists. And they aren't just for the computerati anymore. Nationally, blog creation tripled in 2003, from about 3,000 launched daily to some 9,000, according to the national tracking service Technorati.

Thanks to Aloha High grad Brad Fitzpatrick, Portland has a place in blogger lore. In 1997, Fitzpatrick created the framework for LiveJournal, a publishing service that makes it a snap to publish a blog even for people who don't know computer code. Now his site is second only to Blogger (owned by Google) in popularity among users.

Of course, the urge to shout out your crazy beliefs to anyone who will listen has been around since cavemen carved odes to the mastodon into their living-room walls. Millennia after those Stone Age postings, the need to be heard drove criers to step on soapboxes, and later, head on down to Kinko's for a little zine publishing. Now, opinion spinners have entered the blogosphere.

Last month, in one of many breathless media accounts, *Time* described the rise like this: "Over the past five years, blogs have gone from an obscure and, frankly, somewhat nerdy fad to a genuine alternative to mainstream news outlets, a shadow media empire that is rivaling networks and newspapers in power and influence."

Such hype may be overstated, but the size of this "empire" is impressive: There are roughly 3 million active blogs nationally, according to Technorati. A few dozen national sites--like Gawker, Instapundit and the Drudge Report--see hundreds of thousands of hits per day. A handful of elite bloggers are popular enough that they've received press credentials at the upcoming national Democratic and Republican conventions.

All of the attention is making media bigwigs nervous about the pack of amateur scribes who might be cutting into their market share. In some respects, the concern is justified.

"There's been a controversy in the news industry about this, mainly because blogs are unedited," says University of Oregon journalism professor John Russial. "The potential to do damage to people's reputations and to misreport facts is much greater."

Back at Portland City Hall, where politicians know something about being smeared, a number of local blogs are making the suits snap to attention. Portland bloggers like The One True b!X (see page 19) and Jack Bogdanski (see "Death of a Blog," page 23) are covering stories and providing analysis that is both unique and--for better or worse--unconstrained by editors.

Even though this story may help make the newspaper you're holding obsolete, we've assembled a list of the best blogs in Portland. Among the thousands of (mostly awful) blogs written in the City of Roses, we found the following ones well-written, topical, frequently updated and uncluttered with personal blather. And if you check them out and come away with the belief that they're pointless or annoying--well, at least you know what your city commissioners might be doing in the middle of the night.

## NEWS AND POLITICS

### Portland Communique

**Address:** [communique.portland.or.us](http://communique.portland.or.us)

**Author:** Christopher Frankonis (a.k.a. The One True b!X), 34, professional blogger

**Blog birthdate:** December 2002

**Unique visitors per month:** 10,000

**What it is:** A one-man Portland news machine.

**Why we picked it:** Of all the blogs in Portland, this one poses the biggest threat to napping news organizations. Frankonis is a fixture at public meetings, and he updates his site obsessively (1,300 posts to date) with news and on-point analysis.

**Excerpt, from July 4 post responding to city commissioners' complaints about the media pointing out possible conflicts of interest in their votes:** "Don't want to look dirty as you sit in Council Chambers making decisions on behalf on the public? Then either get out of the game, or clean it up. In the meantime, stop complaining. It only makes you look worse, and we resent the implication that we're not allowed to point it out."

### Michael J. Totten

**Address:** [michaeltotten.com](http://michaeltotten.com)

**Author:** Michael Totten, 33, tech writer

**Blog birthdate:** July 2003

**Unique visitors per month:** 60,000

**What it is:** A nonpartisan look at national politics.

**Why we picked it:** Though Totten's blog seldom mentions the City of Roses, the man behind it is a writer on the rise (in fact, blogging just landed him a travel-writing gig in Africa for *LA Weekly*). Totten's commentary on the national political scene can be compelling and sincere--doubly so since the writer is casting about for a candidate he can support.

**Excerpt:** "We keep hearing about the Red States versus the Blue States, as if it means something important. ... My own state of Oregon was only declared 'blue' after first being lumped in with the red. ... I live in a seriously blue neighborhood in a heavily blue city. But my *state* is only half blue. It's actually purple. Or checkered. Or striped. Or something."

### Isaac Laquedem

**Address:** [isaac.blogs.com](http://isaac.blogs.com)

**Author:** Anonymous ("Isaac Laquedem" is a *nom de blog*)

**Blog birthdate:** March 2004

**Hits per month:** 1,200

**What it is:** A look at Portland in the context of the city's history.

**Why we picked it:** This blog is worth a read for the "Good Old Days" posts alone. The mysterious Laquedem has an expert grasp of the city's history and can weave together the disgrace of financial scoundrel Andrew Wiederhorn and a local connection to the John Wayne film *Stagecoach*, for example, without skipping a beat.

**Excerpt:** "In the 1960's [the Goodnaugh building on Southwest 5th Avenue and Yamhill Street] had a restaurant called 'Danny's' on the ground floor. Connected to Danny's was the Harvester Bar. The operator had a certain sense of humor and installed a bathtub outside the Fifth Avenue door in the planter box, across from the Pioneer Post Office. As far as I know, no one bathed in it. ... Things really did look different in Oregon, before the state adopted 'Things look different here' as its slogan."

## AboutItAll

**Address:** [www.aboutitall.com](http://www.aboutitall.com)

**Author:** Rob Salzman, 44, software engineer

**Blog birthdate:** March 2003

**Unique visitors per month:** 2,000

**What it is:** A parade of links to Oregon-centric news.

**Why we picked it:** Salzman concentrates on Oregon news, surfing the Web so you don't have to. His frequent posts are generally short on words but big on links, and they include the occasional cogent soliloquy on national politics.

**Excerpt:** "Online, I don't know many people who aren't liberal...or at the very least, Bush haters. In the real world, however, I don't know many people who don't support Bush. Whenever I try to tease out why, we always seem to end up on the 'Bush never got a blowjob in the White House' riff. ... So help me out here. What is the correct response to the blowjob line?"

## RoguePundit

**Address:** [roguepundit.typepad.com](http://roguepundit.typepad.com)

**Author:** Gordie Dickinson, 43, retired veteran

**Blog birthdate:** August 2003

**Hits per month:** 2,500

**What it is:** A look at state news from a southern Oregon perspective.

**Why we picked it:** Dickinson lives near Grants Pass but seems to read every newspaper in the state--and it shows in his thorough postings.

**Excerpt:** "Representative Earl Blumenauer (D) is about as anonymous to us Rural Oregonians as our Greg Walden (R) is to Willamette Valley folks. Earl's probably working hard for his district, but we almost never hear about him. I wouldn't recognize him if I passed him on the street...unless maybe he was wearing a bow-tie."

## Alas a Blog

**Address:** [www.amptoons.com/blog/](http://www.amptoons.com/blog/)

**Author:** Barry Deutsch (a.k.a. Ampersand), 35, cartoonist

**Blog birthdate:** June 2002

**Hits per month:** 15,000-20,000

**What it is:** Four writers unleashing a barrage of invective--with cartoons!

**Why we picked it:** A dedicated table-tennis match between four bloggers, Alas a Blog offers deeply opinionated, intellectually dense views on political and cultural issues. Deutsch's cartoons decorate the page, where he and his

cohorts discuss linguistics, parenting, husband-battering, Voltaire and more. In the following exchange, Deutsch dissects an earlier commentary posted by Julian, a blog reader.

**Excerpt:** "Next, Julian takes on a silly essay by a philosophy professor, which argues that liberals have generally had easy lives in which everything was handed to them on a silver platter, unlike hard-working conservatives who have learned to value labor and so aren't so willing to give other people's tax money away. (Apparently the good professor is unfamiliar with the respective biographies of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.)"

## SPORTS

### TimberLog

**Address:** [www.users.qwest.net/~dallen3/timbers.html](http://www.users.qwest.net/~dallen3/timbers.html)

**Author:** David Allen, 40, engineer

**Blog birthdate:** January 2001

**Hits per month:** Doesn't track

**What it is:** A superfan's Timbers journal.

**Why we picked it:** Allen, a devotee of Portland's A-league soccer franchise, packs his blog with more Timbers news than you thought existed. Aside from the player interviews, analysis and game recaps, TimberLog is notable for its awesome smack talk. (In one post, Allen superimposes the head of a Milwaukee Wave United player onto the body of a rodeo clown.)

**Excerpt:** "Come see who is in line to replace the Best mascot in the Whole World™--Timber Jim--as he announces his retirement. So far it's an Albino Monkey and people who look like Timber Jim from afar!"

### Blazers Blog

**Address:** [www.oregonlive.com/weblogs/blazersblog/](http://www.oregonlive.com/weblogs/blazersblog/)

**Author:** Eric Marentette, 33, OregonLive.com sports producer

**Blog birthdate:** May 2003

**Hits per month:** Confidential

**What it is:** The entire Blazers rumor mill in one blog.

**Why we picked it:** Intended for unabashed Blazers junkies (fans, we mean, not the players), Marentette's blog, published on *The Oregonian's* awful, difficult-to-search OregonLive website, remains THE source for team news and brazen gossip.

**Excerpt:** "Yesterday we asked you to vote on your favorite Theo Ratliff nickname. ... The results were overwhelming. Despite a late charge by the 'Blockness Monster' and 'T&R Block,' 'The Rattler' got the nod." (Other entries included "The Rim Reaper," "Count Blockula" and "Theo Blockstable.")

## CULTURE

### Lacunae

**Address:** [www.douglaswolk.com](http://www.douglaswolk.com)

**Author:** Douglas Wolk, 34, writer

**Blog birthdate:** June 1999

**Hits per month:** Doesn't track

**What it is:** Musical babble and adventures in Portland.

**Why we picked it:** A newish transplant to town, Wolk reports--in geeky detail--on house-hunting, comic-book conventions and adventures in music journalism. Most recently, he has begun posting music files of obscure independent bands from the past two decades--all with the artists' approval, of course.

**Excerpt:** "Lil Bunnies' 'Bunny Hop' (MP3) is a brief but mighty representative of one of the greatest high-concept bands ever: a full-throttle hardcore band whose songs were ALL about being, well, cute little bunnies. Other song titles included 'Carrot Belly Bunny Rock' and 'Hop, Fight & Fuck.'"

### Cowboyz 'n' Poodles

**Address:** [www.urbanhonking.com/cowboyz/](http://www.urbanhonking.com/cowboyz/)

**Author:** Julianne Shepherd, 28, music editor

**Birthdate of blog:** November 2003

**Hits per month:** 6,000

**What it is:** Portland music and assorted detritus.

**Why we picked it:** The *Portland Mercury* editrix writes at length about politics, personal intrigue, the Blazers and, most importantly, music. Her inquisitive nature is unwavering, her ideas about hip-hop culture interesting, and her love of 'Sheed unquestionable.

**Excerpt:** "Last night, I engaged in Portland's favorite pastime, karaoke, at The Paragon. The Paragon is like a gullier One-Eyed Jack's; you get the feeling that by merely entering, your chances of becoming a meth addict increase by 20%."

### Get In My Belly!

**Address:** [www.getinmybelly.org](http://www.getinmybelly.org)

**Author:** Cat Winterfox (seriously), 39, "geek lite"

**Blog birthdate:** January 2003

**Hits per month:** 1,500

**What it is:** Food crit and an unhealthy fascination with bento boxes.

**Why we picked it:** Winterfox's blog features regular restaurant reviews, but its true personality comes from other topics, such as when she photographs the bento meals she sends with her "spousal unit" to work.

**Excerpt (accompanying a bento-box photo):** "If making faces in food is wrong, I don't wanna be right. Here we see Sunday's ball theme in action. Rice balls, falafel balls, and that's a mozzarella ball on top of more marinated zucchini."

### Scott Bateman's Journal

**Address:** [scottbateman.livejournal.com](http://scottbateman.livejournal.com)

**Author:** Scott Bateman, 40, political cartoonist

**Blog birthdate:** May 2000

**Hits per month:** 100,000

**What it is:** The genesis of the artist's political cartoons.

**Why we picked it:** Irreverent and angry, Bateman uses his cartoons to skewer the Bush administration. The blog features the best of his cartoons, which are syndicated to 400 newspapers nationally, as well as an impressive weekly MP3 list and consistently funny observations.

**Excerpt:** "[The doctor] gave me a little kit so I can *check my own damn stool for blood*. Honestly, when did this

become MY job, huh?"

## Oh Dog, You Sleuth!

**Address:** [www.ohdog.org](http://www.ohdog.org)

**Author:** Scott Jackson, 31, motion graphics designer

**Blog birthdate:** January 2003

**Hits per month:** 65,000

**What it is:** Visual Portland nostalgia.

**Why we picked it:** Jackson's photos offer a visual tour of Portland, aided by sparse commentary. Beautiful pictures of enthralling subjects.

**Excerpt (accompanying a photo of Sloan's restaurant):** "We celebrated my birthday last week at Sloan's restaurant in North Portland and as soon as I sat down, I had all these false-suppressed memories of maybe not even me, but some child being taken here in the late seventies and being told their parents were splitting up. I have no idea why. It was a really great place. The waitress told Stephen she used to hang out with Heart."

## Welcome to Blog

**Address:** [www.laurabush.info](http://www.laurabush.info)

**Author:** Brandon Hartley, 25, call-center drone

**Hits per month:** Doesn't track

**Blog birthdate:** January 2003

**What it is:** Hyperactive commentary and random pop nuggets.

**Why we picked it:** Anyone willing to co-opt the first lady's name for a Web address creates high expectations, which Hartley meets with style. Hartley's blog is unpredictable, witty and insightful, featuring a fair mix of Portland gossip and general notes on pop culture.

**Excerpt:** "What sort of mental image comes to mind when someone in, say, NYC thinks of Oregon? Once upon a time it may have been an atypical lumberjack. Now I imagine it's a serial-killing, ice-skating lumberjack that hates capitalism, lusts after teenage girls and always forgets to take the tinfoil off their pot when going through airport security."

## LITERATURE

### Long Story Short Pier

**Address:** [www.longstoryshortpier.com](http://www.longstoryshortpier.com)

**Author:** Kip Manley, 35, project manager

**Blog birthdate:** January 2002

**Hits per month:** 14,500

**What it is:** A shot of soapbox rants and literary frustration.

**Why we picked it:** Manley's at his best when dissecting literary works, but he also writes honestly about his own writer's neurosis, which makes his blog a good read for anyone looking for an excuse to procrastinate.

**Excerpt:** "Rage. At the moment. The current juncture. This place where we've found ourselves. My fingers get all tangled up in the keys and when I pound the desk in frustration it makes an ominous croak."

### Sublethal

**Address:** [www.sublethal.net](http://www.sublethal.net)

**Author:** Ronnie Cordova, 40, unemployed

**Blog birthdate:** March 2003

**Unique visitors per month:** 2,000

**What it is:** Sharp literary ramblings.

**Why we picked it:** It's a rare writer who can make his digressions on minutiae interesting and even funny. Cordova does both, spiking the mix with sardonic wit and paranoid commentary.

**Excerpt:** "I actually live in the Sunnyside neighborhood, which is jam-packed with women who self-identify as 'hip mamas,' presumably because they push baby strollers but would prefer you didn't think of them as 'mothers' in the vaguely pejorative way they are certain you mean that term. They are always putting ads in Craigslist looking for other 'hip mamas' to get together with, perhaps with the intention of linking their individual smugnesses into larger more formidable smugness battalions."

### Anti:freeze

**Address:** [www.littlemotors.org/antifreeze](http://www.littlemotors.org/antifreeze)

**Author:** Karrie Higgins, 29, writer

**Blog birthdate:** April 2003

**Hits per month:** 2,300

**What it is:** Creative writing, with Portland as a character.

**Why we picked it:** The immediacy of the literary blog often results in writers exercising more liberal (read: sloppy) forms of writing. Not here. Well-thought-out and well-executed, Higgins' blog presents fiction and snippets of images from her day-to-day existence, cut out with a careful hand.

**Excerpt:** "*Tuesday*. A hypodermic needle on the back stairs. *Friday*. Blood on the pedestrian bridge again. And dried vomit on the back stairwell wall. ... And rent is going up. I hate to think what would make it go *down*."

### Death of a Blog

On June 22, a post on the popular Bojack.org site sent tremors through the Portland blogging world. "July 6 will be the second anniversary of this blog," wrote Jack Bogdanski. "It will also be the last day of this blog, at least for a good long while."

Bogdanski says he decided to stop updating the blog--which attracted an average of 500 visitors a day--because he was becoming obsessed.

"At least for people like me, blogging is highly addictive," says Bogdanski, who published 1,400 separate entries in two years. "Once you start, you just keep doing it."

Bogdanski found himself spending up to 20 hours a week on his blog, which he thought was a worthwhile way to capture the attention of local politicians--without leaving his house.

"I'm a guy with a family and a job who would never go and sit in council chambers for two hours just to get my three minutes to be heard," says the Lewis & Clark Law School professor. "This way, I could do it when I had two minutes to spare."

Bogdanski, who was profiled in Tuesday's *Oregonian*, can identify the highlights of his blogging career. There was the time that Instapundit--one of the Web's most widely read blogs --linked to a photo he had doctored of Saddam Hussein wearing a New York Yankees cap, which spiked page views on his site up to 20,000 per day. Then there was the time when he learned that his site was the top result on Google when someone searched for the phrase: "How do I jack off another guy?"

Bogdanski is already having second thoughts about quitting; he prefers to call this a sabbatical. "I'll probably start up again after summer vacation," he says. "Maybe just one little entry every now and then?"

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