

# INK TANK

## Tim Eagan masters the art of controversy

By John Sammon

Santa Cruz area resident Tim Eagan is among the few remaining practitioners of perhaps the most American of art forms next to rock and roll — the political cartoon. But if this might be described as a vanishing act, Eagan is helping keep it alive.

"To be a political cartoonist, I think your perception of events needs to be a couple degrees off mainstream," Eagan said. "It helps to have a slightly odd point of view, to see things in a little different light than most people."

In the murky and commonly negative and dishonest world of politics, a single cartoon often says more in a few poignant words and images than any other medium.

With newspaper revenues declining and print and operating costs increasing, however, there are far fewer cartoonists.

"There used to be hundreds of political cartoonists," Eagan noted. "Now there's about forty full-time salaried cartoonists nationwide."

A member of the American Association of Editorial Cartoonists, Eagan is among the most prominent. He also teaches the art to young people, most recently at Mission Hill Middle School in Santa Cruz.

"Cartooning is kind of a teenage art form, a rebel thing," Eagan said. "I like teaching young people because they're into the art form of comics. They really get it. They get

excited and I don't want to discourage them, but I tell them I'm not rich from doing it."

Born in San Francisco in 1944, Eagan began perfecting his cartooning skills at an early age.

"When I was four years old I did my first cartoon," he recalled.

After moving to Santa Rosa at the age of 10 in 1954 where his dad was a California Highway Patrol officer, one of his first political cartoons portrayed presidential candidate Richard Nixon in 1960 — then running against John F. Kennedy. The cartoon showed Nixon in an unflattering light, with the shifty eyes and dark, glowering five o'clock-shadow face for which he was famous. The cartoon's

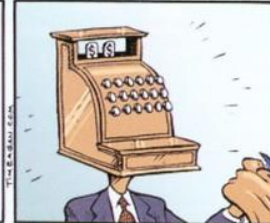


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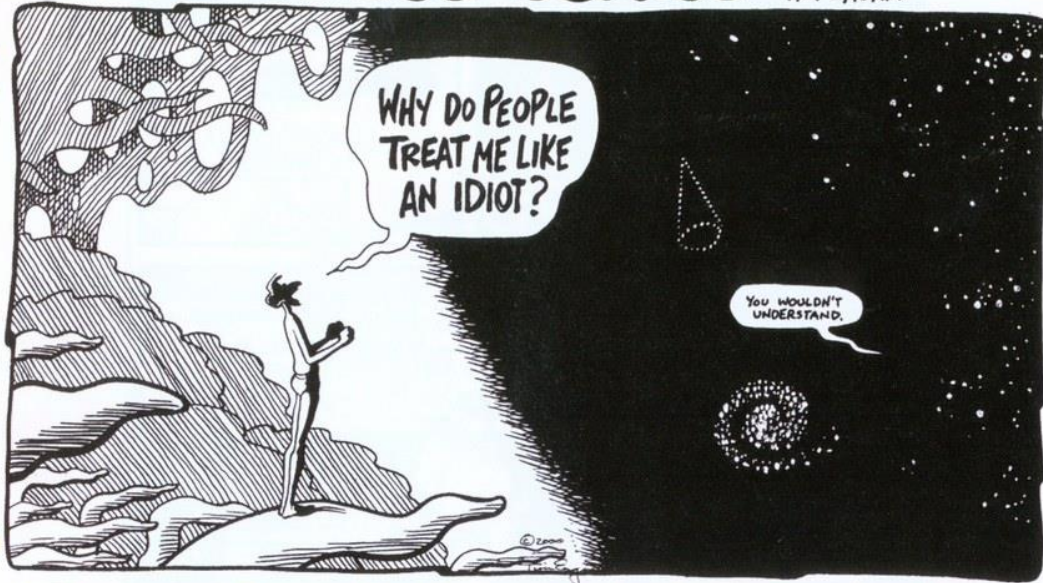


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admonition read, "Would you buy a used car from this man?"

"We had a lot of Republicans in the neighborhood and they didn't like the cartoon," Eagan said. "As revenge, somebody egged my house."

Eagan attended Dartmouth College in New Hampshire where he majored in government studies and Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco, part of the University of California system.

"I've always been interested in politics," he said. "This was back in the days when political conventions meant something, when they really picked the candidates. I was fascinated by it."

Eagan, who worked as a deputy district attorney in Santa Clara County from 1970 to 1972, decided to move to Santa Cruz in 1972 and by this time had become an accomplished cartoonist.

"I went down to the old Santa Cruz Times, before it became Good Times," he said. "Jay Shore was the founder. I had been looking at cartoons in newspapers and said to myself, 'I can do that.' I had some wordless whimsical cartoon examples I had drawn and I just walked in the door and the people at the Santa Cruz Times liked them."

His work eventually appeared in

the San Francisco Examiner, a daily with a national audience, considered the flagship of the Hearst chain of newspapers. The Examiner ran Eagan's cartoons for 10 years, often sharing them with the Sunday Edition of the San Francisco Chronicle, but in 2000 the paper sold to new owners. Though it retains the same title today, the Examiner cut back its services and went to strictly local coverage.

Eagan decided to move on and took an offer to do a strip for the Santa Rosa Press Democrat, where he still can be seen today. His work has also appeared in the Washington Post, High Times, the National Lampoon and Penthouse Magazine among others.

"I'm also on the web doing cartooning independently for myself," he said. "I'm content to collect a little paycheck."

One of Eagan's strips, "Subconscious Comics," was an exploration of the inner psyche of the mind involving two characters, The Boss and Nemo. Eagan discontinued the strip in 2000 but has posted previous examples on his website ([timeagan.com](http://timeagan.com)). A current strip called "Deep Cover" deals more with social and political issues. He also publishes a blog of social-political commentary on his site and is currently planning the publication of a graphic novel based on the "Subconscious Comics" strip.

Eagan, who describes himself as a "lefty," was asked how he comes up with the ideas for his political commentary. In one strip, he portrayed the mindless gun violence that is poisoning America with a grim reaper character.

"Anger is a good part of where I get my ideas," Eagan said. "Absurdity is always a source."

One of his most memorable cartoons was the wordless image of an angry mob of villagers from a Frankenstein movie marching with pitchforks and torches up the hill to the U.S. Capitol.

"You want a cartoon simple and to the point," said Eagan, who occasionally gets angry emails from people offended by his point of view. "I respond to each one, and I try to be as gentle as I can with them," he said.

Despite the decline of the newspaper industry, Eagan said he's always looking to publish the perfect political cartoon that gets a billion hits on the Internet. A big bonus to working independently is that he gets to do it from a place he loves, his home in Santa Cruz.

"You've got the ocean and redwoods," he said. "It's a good culture here." ▶