

## An old oak succumbs to fungus rot



KOBBI R. BLAIR / Statesman Journal

**LIMB BY LIMB:** Jeremy Eucken of Elwood's Tree Service cuts limbs from an oak tree estimated to be hundreds of years old in South Salem. The tree is dying of an incurable root fungus called *armillaria mellea*, which probably was brought on by excessive watering around the base of the tree in the summer by previous homeowners.

# Sadly, a tall tree falls in Salem

It was a perfect day for what New Englanders call tree or leaf peeping.

With a strong autumn sun and a temperature near 70, conditions were ideal for a drive south to admire the fall foliage. The rolling hills along Pringle and Battle Creek roads SE screamed acrylic-paint names: Burnt umber; raw sienna; brassy mustard.

It would have been picturesque except this wasn't a pleasure drive to behold trees participating in their rite of fall. This was a trip to observe a very old oak tree fall victim to chain saws.

The brown leaves of the mammoth oak at the apex of Landau Street SE fell for the last time Monday as Elwood's Tree Ser-



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Commentary

vice began cutting it down.

Homeowner Uli Rasberry fought memories and melancholy as she watched the crew take off limbs before tackling the elephantine body. Tree experts say it could be hundreds of years old; opinions about how many hundreds of years differ.

Rasberry said she had no

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**THE CULPRIT:** This chunk of fungus called *armillaria mellea* was found all the way around the oak tree on property owned by Uli Rasberry, who debated taking down the old giant and realized her house was in danger if the tree fell on its own.

# CURRIE

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choice but to remove the 100-foot-tall tree because armillaria root rot had girdled its trunk. Raspberry was pained by the decision.

"I wish it had been in the field behind my home," Raspberry said. "I would have just left it to fall. But it is so big and heavy, and angling right over the roof, I couldn't risk our lives. It was mushy and soft in places. It could have fallen at any time."

Raspberry sought several opinions on the tree's condition before deciding to cut it. She also contacted the state Department of Forestry to see if there were any options other than removal. She learned there is no treatment or cure for the disease.

"It's frustrating because it could have been avoided. Elwood's told me the rot is caused by a fungus that probably started about 20 years ago because someone watering flowers in front of the house unwittingly soaked the tree's roots," Raspberry said.

Jeremy Eucken, a crew mem-

ber in a cherry picker shearing weighty branches off the tree, said Oregon oaks need the dry summers to thwart fungus. "They can survive wet weather, but not summer watering."

So Raspberry mourned the loss of the tree Monday, content to remember her daughters passing long hours on its rope swing, shady afternoons and the constant raking.

Several members of Salem Alliance Church will visit Raspberry next month to chop the wood into cords. She will keep half and donate the rest to less fortunate families to help them heat their homes.

She said she wants to do something to honor the tree and all the people who might have camped beneath it, climbed it or just rested under its canopy on their way to somewhere else.

"There's nothing to replace it."

Indeed. Today, the area's most visible landmark is a cell phone tower.

Not worth a peep, if you ask me.

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