

PORTLAND, OREGON

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35¢

# Commentary

"THE GATES" TOOK 26 YEARS TO ACCOMPLISH, AND AT \$26 MILLION THAT'S A COOL MILLION PER ANNUM. THIS PROJECT WOULD TAKE LESS THAN A YEAR, COST PENNIES PER PERSON AND, FOR ONCE, NO ONE WOULD COMPLAIN.

## The art of living in the material world

**D**ear Christo and Jeanne-Claude:

Forgive the familiarity, but since everyone seems to be on a first-name basis, I'm Burt. I used to be a hotshot in the airline manufacturing industry, but now I'm just one more victim — of downsizing, pinkslipping, outsourcing and all those other words jammed together that sound fancier than they are.

So, here's the deal. According to my ex-Arthur Andersen pals from New York City, they were somewhat surprised that you didn't consider recycling your last art project — you know, "The Gates" thing in Central Park — by donating all those tangerine squares to the homeless. Just think: The you-call-it-saffron-but-it-sure-looks-like-orange-to-me flags would have made great blankies, especially in the dead of winter. You'd have been hailed as heroes, and after all the negative uproar over wasting \$26 million, a nice word thrown in your direction wouldn't hurt, huh?

But no need to cry over spilled silk. I've got some great news. Some of my

disenfranchised buds from the Port of Portland and I were jawing ... well, more like gumming ... at the soup kitchen the other day, and we came up with an idea that you might want to run up the vinyl orange flagpole.

Next time you decide to wrap something transient and unusual: Wrap us.

According to the Oregon Shelter Network, about 1,800 people are homeless on any given night in greater Portland. (It was up to 2,300 this last January.) And one more fact before you turn back to draping every-

thing but the windows: A whopping 16,000 in greater Portland experience homelessness during the course of a year.

You make statements about how you love your art as your children, how you desire to share it with the people. Why not "share it with the people" by actually giving them something they can use? To quote Jeanne-Claude, "We believe that money is the same as manure. It is good only if you spread it around." So how about flinging some of that green guano in our direction?



### IN MY OPINION

Kimberly Gadette

### To our readers:

*Have a moving, unusual or humorous insight into life in Oregon or the Northwest? We are looking for such stories for publication on the Saturday Commentary page. Mail or e-mail your submission to the address printed at the top of this page.*

Speaking of color, let's consider a fabric of deep, rich burgundy. Imagine burgundy cloth individually wrapped around 16,000 homeless men, women and children as they wend their way against a gray wintry backdrop. Gorgeous. A practical hue, burgundy would hide wine stains, bloodstains, bruising, scars and all manner of skin disease and ensuing discoloration. Just imagine — turning the ragged masses into sumptuously draped kings, queens and regal progeny of Burnside. Silent, beautiful ghosts, weaving a virtual lattice throughout the City of Roses, muffled in luxury, warmer in winter than they've ever been.

Since there's no possibility that the

fabric would be returned, you wouldn't have to pay the price of recycling at all. And since we would act as human hangers, there would be no need to spring for 60 miles of orange vinyl poles.

"The Gates" took 26 years to accomplish, and at \$26 million that's a cool million per annum. This project would take less than a year, cost pennies per person and, for once, no one would complain.

As for the material, you decide: Utilitarian corduroy or plush velvet? Lined or unlined? S-M-L-X and child sizes, or One Size Fits Most? Scotchgarding, of course, and you might want to consider spraying it with some sort of Vermin-Off! product.

If you care about improving the environment, then turn to the city that's always been tops in this field. Enlighten others by example. Forget about draping the Arkansas River in Colorado, or whatever cockamamie project you're working on next. Do something worthwhile for a change. Clothe the poor.

Regards from a well-wisher who's anything but a material guy,  
**Burt**

*Kimberly Gadette is a writer living in Portland.*