



Members of the Wasco County Crisis Team meet monthly at Columbia Gorge Community College to develop and fine-tune protocols to be used in the event of a wide range of potential school crises.

# Planning for the Worst

*Wasco County Crisis Team prepares for school emergencies*

**By Kathy Ursprung**

Flip books hang by the doors of school rooms in Wasco County—a physical reminder of the partnership between emergency response and education organizations designed to keep school children and employees safe in a crisis.

The flip book doesn't include a tab for oil train derailment, but when Mosier Community School was in the zone of just such an event in 2016, Crisis Team protocols played a vital role. Crisis Team organizations had to react fast.

"We had the Center for Living Crisis Response Team ready to move on that one," says Candy Armstrong, superintendent of North Wasco County School District. "We had law enforcement. We had a plan for parent reunification.

"It happened very quickly, and I really believe it went as well as it went because of all the work we've been doing the last

couple of years getting to know each other."

Other than trains, the books list protocols for just about any emergency imaginable, from fires and earthquakes to reporting child abuse and fights, to every community's worst nightmares: bombs and active shootings.

These efforts have been underway for years, yet few people know much about them. When Wasco County Sheriff Lane Magill attended local town hall meetings after the Parkland, Florida, mass casualties, he was surprised to learn almost no one knew anything about these efforts.

"We just want people to know that there is an active group—a proactive, interagency group—doing things to make sure school safety is one of our top priorities," Lane says.

In one form or another, these efforts stretch back to at least 2010 for North

Wasco, when Trudy Townsend worked on the Safe Schools Healthy Students initiative with the district.

"What really was a watershed moment was December 2012," Candy says.

That's when the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Connecticut and the Clackamas Town Center shooting in Oregon happened within days of each other.

"All of a sudden, everything ramped up," Candy says.

The current Wasco County Crisis Team started to take shape around 2014 under the coordination of Kristy Beachamp, former Wasco County Emergency Services director.

"We started out with law enforcement response," Lane says. "We needed a common protocol in all schools throughout the county."

Today, the team includes representatives from all Wasco County

public schools, St. Mary's Academy and Columbia Gorge Community College; city, county and state police; Wasco County Emergency Management; Mid-Columbia Fire & Rescue; Mid-Columbia Medical Center; North Central Public Health; and Mid-Columbia Center for Living. All of these groups work to coordinate activities so when a crisis hits, they know immediately what to do and the role their group plays in response.

Knowing and trusting the other Crisis Team members is also important, says Rachel Crowder of Mid-Columbia Medical Center.

"If we have an incident, we all know each other and we're not exchanging cards the day of the event," Rachel says.

The group also reaches out to surrounding counties where jurisdictions often overlap.

"We needed a common language and that came from this group," says Cindy Miller of North Wasco, who provides group coordination and documentation.

In developing that common language and the protocols for various incidents, the crisis team reached out to a variety of experts. For example, they drew from the resources of the I Love U Guys Foundation—an organization named after the last text message of a victim in Colorado's 2006 Platte Canyon High School hostage crisis.

"They have tons of free material to help us build our standard response protocols," Lane says.

That is particularly true for the vital plan to ensure students are reunited with their parents or guardians after a crisis.

The team also looked to schools involved in shootings, including Reynolds School District in Gresham. The Douglas County sheriff also gave a presentation on the Umpqua Community College shooting.

Once the common language and protocols were figured out, law enforcement and fire personnel went around to all the schools and gave presentations.

## A Firsthand Perspective on Crisis

When Patrick Ashmore left a career at the Oregon State Police to become The Dalles' police chief, he brought with him a lot of firsthand knowledge about mass casualty incidents.

He was on hand in the aftermath of both the Reynolds High School shooting in 2014 and the Umpqua Community College shooting in 2015.

"It only takes five minutes, give or take, and it's usually over," Patrick says.

Emergency responders usually only become involved in the aftermath.

"What was really apparent to me was how critical it is to have plans so teachers, administrators and all the agencies know what to expect, know who to answer to," Patrick says.

In that regard, Wasco County schools are in good shape, he says.

"We're way ahead of the average community," Patrick says. "Not just by size, just in general. Any time we have an active shooter incident, it amplifies concerns that much more. Here, we're way ahead of the game and on track with the issues and challenges."

Crisis team training exercises help prepare the responders.

"By the time they're trained up, everybody knows exactly what their role is," Patrick says.

The aftermath of a mass casualty can be a frustrating time for family and friends, Patrick says, because state law often slows the flow of information.

A tabletop exercise held at the Fort Dalles Readiness Center helped the group walk through the procedures. It drew local participation and FBI involvement.

Schools are now required to have regular drills. When they do, law enforcement agencies are on hand as they would be in a real crisis.

"For my school, as small as we are, I need every person at this table," says Kim



**Police Chief Patrick Ashmore responded in the aftermath of multiple mass casualty events during his time with the Oregon State Police. He says Wasco County is "way ahead of the average community" in its preparedness efforts.**

It is vital to have school personnel prepared not only for the incident but for the aftermath.

"Those parents are going to come to the teacher, the administrator," he says. "They're not going to come to me."

Patrick expresses confidence in the abilities of educators in crisis situations.

"The common thread with educators is they step up when they need to step up," he says. "There will be a lot of unsung heroes in the midst of a mass casualty. We won't know who they are until the day it comes, heaven forbid."

Koch, principal at St. Mary's Academy. "I don't have enough people at my facility to take care of all that. I think we've worked very hard in being able to work through the steps to keep students and schools safe." ■

*Anyone who may have information about a school safety threat or potential act of violence is encouraged to report it anonymously to the SafeOregon tip line at (844) 472-3367, or go to [safeoregon.com](http://safeoregon.com) for more ways to report.*



Kenley Guthrie cautiously pets a bunny at the Umpqua Community Center Easter Egg Hunt.

## Cute and Easter Go Together

*Umpqua Community Center combines Easter egg hunt with cuddly animals*

**By Craig Reed**

There was plenty of cuteness of the two- and four-legged kind at the 20th annual Umpqua Community Center Easter Egg Hunt.

About 50 kids shared the spotlight at the March 31 event with bunny rabbits, dwarf goats, miniature donkeys and Australian shepherds. There was an Easter egg hunt, but for almost an hour before the kids looked for the hidden plastic eggs

and candy and for another hour afterwards, there were many smiles as the kids petted, held and even sat on animals.

“We want this to be a nostalgic Norman Rockwell type of event,” says Linda Tipton, the instigator behind bringing the animals to the Easter event. “We wanted to create one of those fun things Norman Rockwell would have created in the Saturday Evening Post: children having fun.”

Smiles were abundant, but

there was also apprehension from some of the youngest children before they followed the lead of the older children and reached out to touch a bunny or a goat.

One little girl, Kenley Guthrie, was hesitant, but continued to suck her thumb while reaching out with her other hand to pet Truffles the rabbit.

“We want it to be a very joyful event in our quiet little community,” says Linda. “We hope our children will

remember this for a long time.”

Linda is a Douglas Electric Cooperative member. Other co-op members who helped organize the event are Peggy and Alton Clark, Kathy Worth, Pat Dinsmore and Mady DeWeese, who is president of the Umpqua Community Center.

As a project for their members, the Umpqua 4-H Dairy Club and the Tyee Mountain 4-H Club brought their young animals to the event. The Clarks lead the Umpqua club.



**Above, Aaliyah Keplinger, left, and Cheyenne Beam pet a baby goat held by Addyson Clark.**

**Left, Gracie Banducci, left, holds Elvis, Ea Watkins-Mock, center, holds Vinny, and Dakota Banducci holds Tillie.**

“There are a lot of city kids who haven’t had the opportunity to see real live animals up close, to actually touch them,” Peggy Clark says. Some kids whose families have moved from the city to rural areas still don’t have animals, she says.

“It’s important to give kids that opportunity, and it gives our 4-H kids the opportunity to talk about their projects and to share time with their

animals,” Peggy adds.

Becky Beam says her 10-year-old daughter Cheyenne and 4-year-old son Austin were excited to see the animals.

“The animals connect the kids with nature,” Becky says. “It’s an opportunity for them to be up close and personal with the animals. It’s fun for them to see all the small animals.”

Cheyenne says she likes

is wonderful,” Carolyn says. “And for the kids who are 14 and 15 and are too old for an Easter egg hunt, this gives them the chance to share their animals. It makes them the teacher. It gives them something to be proud of.”

At one point, Ea Watkins-Mock, 7, and sisters Dakota, 7, and Gracie, 6, Banducci were in the goat pen, each holding a baby for a photo shoot.

“They’re pretty cute,” Dakota says. “The animals are more fun than the Easter eggs.”

Elizabeth Banducci, the sisters’ mother, says it is important that kids learn early in life about animals and what is involved in having them.

“Some kids don’t get this type of exposure to animals, and it’s important that they do,” Elizabeth says. “Animals can teach kids responsibility, stewardship of the land, where their food comes from. There are too many kids who don’t know where their food comes from. It is important they learn that.”

As the kids, their parents and grandparents slowly bid the animals goodbye, they had chocolate in their Easter baskets and, Linda hoped, long-lasting memories.

“With all the negative issues going on in the world today, we want to have a very fun event here in surroundings that are beautiful and calm,” says Linda. “As my mother used to say, ‘I’m listening to the happy sounds of children.’”

“We want this to be a happy place for kids. It is.” ■

seeing the animals because they have different personalities and can sometimes be funny. Austin says he likes to pet them. That his favorite are the baby goats.

Theresa Villalvazo brought her 17-month-old son, Adrian, to the event. She says it was his first time to see these animals.

“Kids need to grow to respect animals, not only as companions and as life-time love, but also as a food source,” says Theresa.

Carolyn Crane brought her 1-year-old son, Colson, to the event. With his mother’s help, he sat for a minute or so on a donkey.

“For kids who don’t have sheep in their backyard, this

CEC Annual Meeting

# Members Learn of Growth's Opportunities and Challenges

By Jeff Beaman

It has been apparent for some time: The Great Recession is over in Central Oregon. By one account, the region tied for the top spot in the country for economic expansion in 2017, and its gross domestic product's growth rate was more than triple the nation's rate. This wave of expansion has been notable at Central Electric as well, with 2017 being the sixth straight year new service connections increased over the previous year.

"Growth at this pace creates considerable opportunity in terms of economic health," President and CEO Dave Markham told members, employees and guests attending Central Electric's 77th annual meeting. "But this is also a time when challenges present themselves."

Dave explained to those at the April 13 gathering at the Deschutes County Fairgrounds that operating the cooperative does not simply become easy

because times are good. Rather there is work involved to capture those benefits and extend them into the future while also taking on challenges those good times can create.

Dave explained that the foundation is built on efficiency. The cornerstone was set when the co-op avoided expansion of its workforce in response to a growing workload. CEC actually has fewer employees today than in 2011 when the growth in new accounts began. But holding that line at the expense of safety, service and reliability is not acceptable. This is where innovation comes in.

"Our employees continually find ways to leverage technology and improve work processes, which in turn increases efficiency," Dave told the member/owners. "This efficiency holds down costs, which has a direct effect on our ability to manage electric rates."

A prime benefit of this approach was affirmed by CEC's ability to hold



President and CEO Dave Markham spoke of past accomplishments and challenging issues on the horizon.

rates stable last fall despite the Bonneville Power Administration's increase to its utility customers' wholesale rates by an average of 5.4 percent, the fifth BPA increase since 2009. CEC achieved this through efficiency improvements and belt tightening, including wage increase restrictions. But with BPA planning to increase its wholesale electricity rates every two years for the foreseeable future, Dave said keeping CEC rates stable will be an ongoing challenge.

His review of other achievements included:

- Record member participation in CEC's

energy-efficiency and conservation programs.

- Consistently ranking in the top 10 to 15 percent for service reliability among electric co-ops nationwide due to wise investment in system improvements.

- Issuance of a record \$2.1 million in capital credits, now paid out to members in 33 of the past 36 years.

One effect of the region's economic boom is mounting pressure on natural resources management. This feeds a stream of new rules and regulations—many with an unbalanced approach—and poorly thought-out public policies. Among them:



Above, prior to the meeting, members checked out what 20 CEC vendors donated for the prize drawings. Top, Ridgeview High School's premier singing group, RavenSong opened the meeting with the national anthem and "God Bless America."

• The state of Oregon and others continue to pursue an experiment using more Columbia River flows to help move salmon and steelhead through the federal hydroelectric system, thus leaving less water for power production. This experiment may actually harm fish. The state takes this stance despite agreements on fish-flow levels reached collaboratively among many Northwest Native American tribes and Washington, Idaho and Montana.

• The cost of replacing the lost hydropower is an

estimated \$40 million annually—nearly \$500,000 a year for CEC—due to purchases from natural gas-fired power plants. Replacing carbon-free electricity with that produced by fossil-fueled power plants contradicts other state of Oregon policies striving to reduce those same emissions.

• The Trump administration continues to pursue the sale of BPA's transmission system, a change that would catapult rates upward for the agency's utility customers, including Central Electric.

Dave said managing these



Delegate Heather Davenport from Mountain View High School shared her gratitude for the experience of last year's Washington, D.C., Youth Tour.

risks is in the forefront of the cooperative's strategic thinking. With the help of co-op members' participation in the cooperative's political grassroots network, ORECA-Action, the risks can be minimized.

"We have all the ingredients in place to continue reaching new heights," he assured the audience.

### Directors' Elections

With the CEC board of directors members up for re-election this year facing no opposition, the membership unanimously re-elected by voice vote directors William Rainey of Sisters, Dan Steelhammer of Bend, and Ken Miltenberger of Alfalfa. ■

Search and rescue volunteers bring Carol Dark up from the ravine where she spent the night after getting lost while out for a walk.



## Search and Rescue Finds Missing Woman

*CCEC employees part of SAR team called in to look for Carol Dark, 70*

A recent evening walk took a scary turn and could have turned out tragically if not for a dedicated group of volunteers.

Carol Dark, 70, and her dog went for an early evening stroll April 8. When the light faded, Carol got turned around and had to spend the night in the woods near her home.

Carol's husband, Bob, called Curry County Sheriff's Search and Rescue member Larry Prestininzi when he noticed she had not returned. That call set in motion the Curry County Sheriff's Department and search and rescue volunteers.

Larry told the sheriff's office that Carol and her dog had not been seen since about 5 p.m. and that Carol's car, cellphone, wallet and coat were still at the residence.

Curry County sheriff's deputies and SAR members responded to the secluded residence and, along with family friends, began searching the area until about 2 a.m., finding no trace of Carol.

Resuming their search at about 7 a.m., SAR members, Coos-Curry Electric Cooperative staff and family friends searched the area again. The U.S. Coast Guard sent a helicopter and searched a 2-mile radius around the residence.

At about 8:45 a.m., two CCEC employees who are volunteer SAR members—Ryan McGinnis

and Ken Smith—found Carol in steep terrain and heavy brush about a mile from her home. Other than being cold, and having a few bumps, cuts and bruises, she appeared to be fine. It took rescuers about 1½ hours to get Carol back to an old power line roadway due to the rugged terrain. At one point, SAR members used a stretcher to carry Carol out of the area.

Carol's dog helped keep her warm on her overnight stay in the woods, but when the Coast Guard helicopter flew overhead in the morning, the dog spooked and ran off. The dog was found about an hour later and returned home.

The Curry County Sheriff's Search and Rescue team was formed in 1972 as an all-volunteer group.

"I am honored to be a part of the Curry County Sheriff's Search and Rescue," says Curry County Sheriff John Ward.

"We are glad to give back to our community when and where we can, thanks to several of our employees in Gold Beach who volunteer with Curry County SAR," says Roger Meader, general manager and CEO of Coos-Curry Electric Cooperative. ■

*If you are interested in joining or would like more information on how you can support Curry County Sheriff's Search and Rescue, call (541) 247-3242 or (800) 543-8471.*

# Why a Rate Increase is Necessary

*WOEC management says rising labor costs and other increased expenses require a rate increase this year*

By Scott Laird

Last month, West Oregon Electric Cooperative management announced it would be asking the board of directors to approve a small rate increase to cover rising costs and expenses.

Members may ask themselves, “What is driving this operating rate increase?”

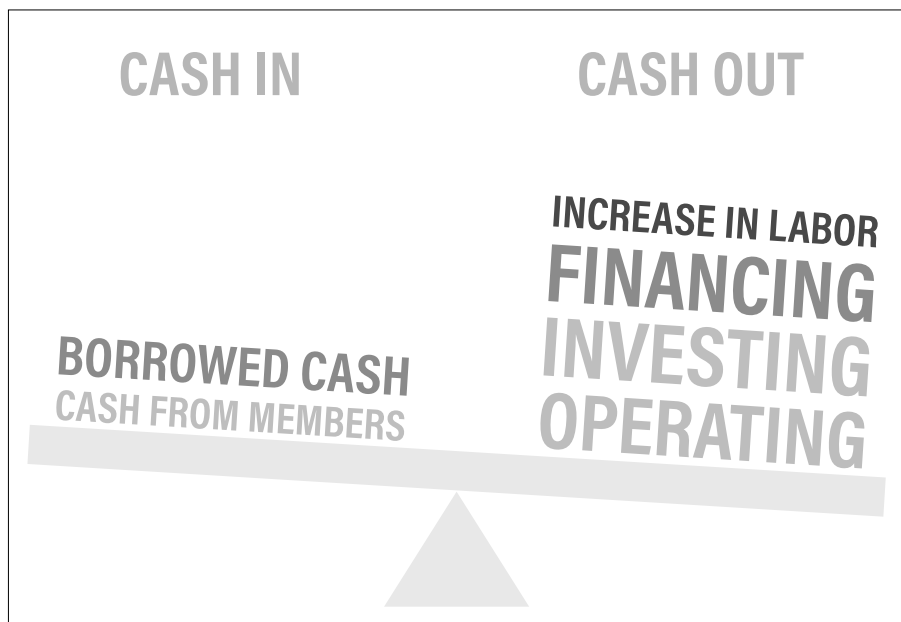
Last fall, WOEC increased rates slightly—about a quarter of 1 cent per kilowatt-hour—due to a biennial increase in wholesale power costs from its power supplier, the Bonneville Power Administration. While WOEC directly passed this wholesale cost increase along to members, the board and management chose to postpone any increase in operating costs until after the winter months, when members use the most power.

The rate increase most likely will take the form of both an increase to the base rate and a small increase to the per-kilowatt-hour charge to more evenly and fairly distribute costs across all users in the system.

The final decision on what form the rate increase will take—and if there will be an increase at all—will be decided by the board of directors after reviewing options presented by the management team.

WOEC is a nonprofit member cooperative, but it must operate as a business. All businesses operate on a fairly simple concept: When the cost of doing business increases, prices need to increase.

“Our job is to provide our members with reliable power at the lowest possible



cost,” says WOEC General Manager Bob Perry. “The problem is that when our costs continue to go up, our rates also need to go up.”

While inflation in the Pacific Northwest has remained fairly stagnant the past six years, according to the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Portland area saw an increase to the consumer price index in 2017 of 3.9 percent. That increase was driven mostly by rising costs in housing, an increase in gasoline costs and rising costs in medical care.

The CPI measures average changes to prices of goods and services over time in a fixed market, and includes—in addition to costs for housing, medical care and gasoline—costs for food, household furnishings and operations, utilities, transportation, recreation, education, communication, and other durable and nondurable commodities.

Bob and WOEC Finance Manager Dan Huggett say that in addition to the general rise in costs in the region, there are really two main issues driving

WOEC’s cost increases, as well as the proposed rate increase. One is the continuing increase in the cost of labor to operate the co-op. The second is monthly mortgage payments on the infrastructure at WOEC.

## The Cost of Labor

Dan says electric distribution is an extremely labor-intensive business, with more than 50 percent of all the co-op’s annual expenses attributed to labor. WOEC’s 26 non-management employees are members of a labor union and are employed under a union contract.

“Our labor contract has been increasing between 2 percent and 3 percent annually,” Dan says. “We need an additional \$350,000 this year just to keep up with our union contracts, and we’ll need that much again next year.”

Members may wonder if WOEC employs the right number of workers for its size.

Bob says more than half of WOEC’s employees are older than 55, meaning they are at the top of the pay scale.

“We are starting to plan for retirements across our workforce,” Bob says.

That means hiring newer apprentice linemen so they have a chance to be fully trained to fill those soon-to-be vacated spots.

“It can take several years to train our employees,” Bob says. “We are a little heavy on labor right now, but we are anticipating some transitioning in our personnel in the upcoming years.”

“We have a small staff and we don’t have a lot of redundancy,” Dan adds. “We only have four staff members in our office who handle payroll, customer billing, bills payable and customer service. When we have people who need to take time off for things like vacations, sick days, jury duty or even to have a baby, the work still needs to get done.”

Finding qualified labor can be a challenge for WOEC. While housing costs continue to rise in the Portland area, unemployment has slowly declined. From a high of almost 11 percent in 2010, Portland’s unemployment rate had fallen to 3.4 percent at the end of 2017.

Attracting qualified linemen and offering competitive wages and benefits can be especially difficult since WOEC is surrounded by numerous other larger power utilities, including Portland General Electric; Forest Grove Light & Power; Columbia River, Clatskanie and Tillamook PUDs; and Pacific Power.

“It takes a certain number of employees to run this co-op every day,” Bob says. “It’s just a very labor-intensive business.”

### Long-Term Debt

Payments on long-term debt is the second driver of the rate increase. Utilities have a large investment in the physical plant, which requires improvements, upgrades, rebuilding and replacement. The best way to fund this is to borrow the money.

“WOEC’s system is mortgaged, including the poles, the lines, transformers, substations, as well as the headquarters building and land,” Dan says.

## “We can’t just absorb all the various annual increases in costs.”

—General Manager Bob Perry

Aalong with other rural electric utilities, WOEC accesses funding through the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation or through the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Rural Utilities Service.

“Just like most people’s houses are mortgaged through a bank, we utilize funds from these two agencies to finance our system and then pay those loans off over 30 or 35 years,” Dan says. “So each month we have a mortgage payment we need to make, just like our members have to pay their mortgage on their home, to pay for the principal, the interest, the taxes and the insurance on those loans. We need an increase to ensure that we have enough to make the principal payment.”

WOEC has increased spending the past several years to improve reliability of the system by putting more lines underground in highly forested areas that are more susceptible to winter storm damage. The co-op also has been replacing aging poles and lines across the system, and increasing tree-trimming crews to help keep right-of-ways for lines clear. Those projects take funding and increase costs.

“We really don’t have the option of paying for millions of dollars in improvements upfront, nor can we ask each of the members to pony up their share of the cost for those improvements each year,” Dan says. “And we also can’t not keep our system in working order and up to a certain standard.”

Dan says WOEC has looked at ways to reduce costs by improving efficiency, upgrading technology and through various cash management processes,

including paying down loans to reduce interest charges. But the reality is, as a business, certain costs just can’t be cut.

### Operating Costs

In addition to the costs of labor and mortgage payments, Dan says WOEC has little to no control over operating costs such as the wholesale cost of power, insurance costs, taxes, and postage to mail bills. Most of those costs continue to increase.

“We can’t just absorb all the various annual increases in costs,” he says. “We do absorb some of the small ones. We can manage the fluctuations in income that we experience throughout the year, because that does change due to changes in energy use from winter to summer. We have to pay our taxes and we have to pay insurance premiums. And summer is our construction season, so our costs go up during those months.”

Cash reserves of working capital—a sort of rainy-day fund for tough times—can be used to help deal with income fluctuations throughout the year. That fund can be increased during good months and years when the co-op does not experience damaging storms and long-term outages due to weather-related events such as wind and heavy snow.

Last winter was rather mild and allowed the co-op to set aside some extra funds. But everyone knows the weather in the Northwest is unpredictable. Just one good storm can cost the co-op hundreds of thousands—and even millions—of dollars in extra crews and overtime to restore power to everyone on the system.

Bob says his basic job is to manage the co-op and do the best he can to keep the lights on for the members at the lowest possible price. He points out that WOEC has not had a rate increase—beyond the cost of wholesale power increase from BPA—since October 2015.

“Now we need a general rate increase to cover these cost increases that we’ve been able to manage for the last three years,” he says. ■



Rolon Williams, left, was inspired to help start the High Desert Rangeland Fire Protection Association after he nearly lost his home in the Ana Fire. At 14 years old, his daughter, Bridget, is too young to operate a vehicle, but she can operate the radio.

# Volunteers Take On Wildfires

*High Desert Rangeland Fire Protection Association volunteers keep a vigilant watch*

**By Toni Baillie**

When the Ana Fire burned 5,800 acres and threatened homes near Summer Lake, Rolon Williams and Kevin Leehman recruited local residents to form the High Desert Rangeland Fire Protection Association.

The wildfire began in the afternoon on July 8, 2017. By 9:30 p.m., it roared down Winter Rim, threatening homes near the

Summer Lake store.

“Flames were shooting 30 feet high, lighting up the whole valley,” Rolon says. “I just had time to grab my dog and some flashlights before I left my house.”

Two engines from the Silver Lake Fire Department arrived in time to save his home. Meanwhile, Rolon helped evacuate nearby structures. Summer Lake Lodge opened its rooms for those evacuating.

Kevin works on a family ranch near

Summer Lake and serves as a paramedic and firefighter in La Pine.

Rolon, a transportation maintenance manager for the Oregon Department of Transportation, has directed traffic during wildfires. After last summer’s fire, the two men summoned local residents to a community meeting.

“Smoke was still in the air,” Rolon says. “That evening a thunderstorm rolled in, and lightning was striking behind the

High Desert RFPA volunteers respond to a fire at the Summer Lake Wildlife Area on April 9.

Photo by Edward Schmidt



Summer Lake Lodge. We had people eager to become members of a rangeland fire protection association.”

They formed a board of directors and filed application papers with the state by September.

The High Desert RFPA covers territory from Valley Falls to Christmas Valley—an area with 4,500 landowners. The group operates under the concept of neighbors helping neighbors. Volunteers receive training and equipment to protect their property and their neighbors’ property when no other fire protection services are available. They can respond quickly so fires don’t cause widespread damage.

“When something bad happens, we put down our differences and work together,” Rolon says. “We’re trying to keep that spirit going to protect property.”

Volunteers receive two days of training from members of the Oregon Department of Forestry and Bureau of Land Management. They learn fire suppression techniques and safety procedures, training with proper tools and equipment.

Rolon’s daughter, Bridget, 14, attended the first training in February. There is no age limit to be trained as a firefighter, but young people cannot operate the vehicles.

“I learned safety precautions,” she says. “If a fire starts, I now can help work the radio, and I know techniques they are using.”

The association is approved by the state fire board and has letters of agreement with surrounding RFPAs to provide mutual aid in case of fire. Most of Eastern Oregon is covered by active RFPAs. The first was formed in Ironside in 1964. In forming the new group,



**Above, High Desert RFPA volunteers respond to fires of all sizes and help contain controlled brush fires.**

Photo courtesy of Rolon Williams

Rolon received guidance from Bing Bingham, director of the Ashwood-Antelope RFPA.

Since it is not a tax district, the RFPA is funded by membership dues, donations and grants. Equipment is provided through the Federal Excess Personal Property program. The association has nine vehicles, with 14 more ordered. They include a bulldozer, Humvees and large military trucks outfitted with 200-gallon water tanks and hoses designed to fight wildland fires.

All volunteers are furnished with fire protection clothing. Vehicles are equipped with radios and firefighting tools. The vehicles are stationed on members’ property in Fort Rock, Christmas Valley, Silver Lake, Summer Lake, Paisley and Valley Falls. There is a fire manager for each site and a unit lead who agrees to maintain the equipment.

Chuck Messner of Adel helped form the Warner Valley RFPA, which has been in place for 10 years. Its association has

four type-six engines, five tenders and two tractors.

“A couple of years ago, a fire started at the mouth of the canyon in Adel,” Chuck says. “With the help of the BLM, we got a line around the fire and knocked it down.”

They also helped extinguish a fire in the Warner Valley wetlands. In the spring, the Warner Valley RFPA conducts prescribed field and ditch burns.

The High Desert RFPA has been recruiting and training members since February. It has a texting system and telephone tree in place to mobilize volunteers in case of fire.

“We want to stop wildland fires before they spread and become an item on the evening news,” Rolon says. ■

*Annual cost to become a member is \$50 for individuals, \$100 for landowners with less than 160 acres and \$200 for large landowners and corporations. The RFPA will conduct fundraisers and apply for grants. For more information, contact Rolon at (541) 280-8920 or at (541) 408-0919.*





As a child, Bill Booth didn't like to eat vegetables, but now he grows them and is a vegetarian.

# From Farm to Table

*Lane County Farmers Market paves the way for fresh, local food*

**By Craig Reed**

If you want to visit a couple dozen farms all in one day and shop a wide selection of fruits and vegetables harvested in the previous 24 hours, visit the weekly Lane County Farmers Market.

Located at 8th and Oak streets in Eugene, the market averages 55 to 65 vendors during its main season from April through mid-November. There are Tuesday and

Saturday markets from May through the summer.

Many of the vendors are small, family-owned and operated farms, most of them from Lane County, but there are a few from up north toward Portland and a few from down south toward Roseburg.

While visitors can mosey from one booth to the next, finding numerous fruits and vegetables, there are plenty of other homegrown products to buy: meats, bread, honey,

grains, mushrooms and goat cheese. Food artisans are ready to serve tamales, pasta, popcorn, juices and other prepared goodies.

Many of the growers, or their employees, are at the booths and ready to discuss their farm operations, giving details on their products and how they are grown or raised.

"I just want to express my gratitude to our local farmers who have made the decision to not just feed their own families

but to also feed mine," says Angela Norman, the market's director. "The Lane County Farmers Market provides a vibrant market place for our local farmers to sell directly to the community, and it is a place where the community can get to know their farmers."

Two of the vendors are Deck Family Farm and Horton Road Organics. Both are members of Blachly-Lane Electric Cooperative, which is also a sponsor.



Christine and John Deck raise a variety of animals organically in open pastures.

### Deck Family Farm

John and Christine Deck moved from the San Francisco Bay area to their country farm in 2004. They both worked in the animal science department at the University of California-Davis.

The couple wanted to own their own farm, but couldn't afford what was available in California. They looked north to Oregon and found their new home off High Pass Road west of Junction City.

The property was previously a cattle ranch, but the Decks have turned it into a certified organic business. They started small with 40 Hereford cows. Since then they have expanded to 100 ewes, 300 pigs and 3,000 chickens.

The Decks have been members of the Lane County Farmers Market since 2006. They have also sold at Portland farmers markets since 2008.

The farm provides beef, pork, lamb, chicken, turkey and eggs to customers at the farmers market and to its Community Supported

Agriculture members.

"We raise cows, sheep, pigs, chickens and turkeys on grass pastures, providing a natural habitat that mimics what their wild ancestors lived in," according to the farm's website. "Pasture-raised animals not only live a more stress-free life than their confinement-fed counterparts, but they also grow to provide a tastier and healthier meat."

John and Christine also raised their five children—Alex, Ella, Maria, Brigid and Shanti—on the farm. They were all involved on the farm in their younger years and some have developed their own niches in the business as adults. Alex is the lead carpenter, Ella likes making cheese and working at the farmers market where she connects with customers, Shanti looks after the farm's 20 dairy cows and Maria likes the horses.

"We feel like the farm has given the kids good experience and confidence working with animals," John says. "They've had a lot of responsibilities—doing chores, being

### Lane County Farmers Market

- 8th and Oak streets, Eugene
- 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturdays, April to November
- 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesdays, May to October

responsible for the upkeep of animals. It's been a family enterprise."

In addition to visiting the Deck Family Farm booth at the market, John says people also can visit the farm "to see where their food comes from."

John says the farm experience has been rewarding.

"I feel like I learn something every day," he says. "I'm continually humbled by the experiences and what the land has to teach us. There's a lot to know and a lot to learn."

### Horton Road Organics

Bill Booth and Debra Martin are also transplants from California who moved north because they wanted a farm and land in Oregon that was more affordable.

"There was the real possibility of owning land here versus leasing or trying to buy some very expensive land in California," Bill says.

The couple moved in 1992 from Santa Cruz, where they were partners in a small farm. They found a new home along Horton Road on property that had previously been a mother cow/calf operation. They turned 6 acres into a certified organic farm that

grows 25 different vegetables.

"We're challenged all the time because being organic limits you in dealing with diseases, but we pride ourselves on our quality and the consistency of the produce we grow," Bill says. "The job of the organic farmer is to take care of the soil. If you have healthy soil, you'll have healthy crops and you'll have healthy people."

The farm's crops range from beets and carrots to salad greens and zucchini. In addition to being a Lane County Farmers Market vendor since 1992, the farm has a Community Supported Agriculture program and sells produce to local restaurants and natural food stores.

Bill says the farmers market is one of the best ways to connect people with their food.

"I know people appreciate getting good local food, and I always feel good helping make that connection happen," he says.

Bill says it is somewhat surprising that he got into the farming business as an adult because he didn't like to eat vegetables as a kid. He admits he put his vegetables into his pocket or fed them under the table to the dog. He has been a vegetarian since 1974.

"Surprisingly, I think I do have a green thumb," the 67-year-old says. "I have been blessed, although at the end of the day now, my back is sore. In August, I wake up not quite as replenished as I'd like to be, but I like to work outside and I like the activity of growing things. It's still fun to farm, and I want to do it until I can't." ■

# Pies, Prizes and Profits

## HREC's annual meeting celebrates success

By Drew Myron

From pies to prizes to profit, the news was good at Hood River Electric Cooperative's 72nd annual meeting March 15. The yearly gathering is a family-friendly event that provides members with a state-of-the-cooperative report and an opportunity to elect directors to the board.

Addressing a crowd of more than 125 people in the community room at the Hood River County Fairgrounds, Auditor Nate Reagan delivered an encouraging financial report.

"This is the biggest margin ever for Hood River Electric Co-op," he said, noting a net margin of \$1.1 million.

An unusual year of severe winter storms followed by a dry, hot summer created demand for power in 2017.

"It was a unique year," Reagan explained. "There was more power consumed, which means more to the co-op. Your financials indicate strong growth. Most importantly, this cooperative is continuing to build equity. Everything looks great at the co-op from a financial perspective."

HREC Manager John Gerstenberger agreed.

"The year-end margin is exceptional in its size," he said. "Unusually persistent cold temperatures early in 2017—plus impact of the retail rate increase—combined to generate a \$1.1 million margin. As a result, more than \$900,000 of past margins were retired and returned to members who purchased energy in 2004, 2005 and 2006."

This is good news for members, who are entitled to a share of the cooperative's margins, defined as income in excess of expenses. The margins are allocated to each member based on their electric energy purchases for the year.

While profits are up, growth is slow.

"Not as much materialized as we expected," Gerstenberger said, noting that new electrical load requests are on the horizon, though not at the magnitude anticipated.

However, the Communications Access Cooperative Holding Enterprise and LS Networks, "continue their



HREC Manager John Gerstenberger chats with a co-op member after the annual meeting's financial report.

tradition of success," he noted.

CACHE, a not-for-profit service providing enhanced internet and connectivity, has 2,089 subscribers, an increase of 149 from the previous year.

"It's steady but modest growth, and that's a good thing," Gerstenberger said.

The hour-long business meeting was peppered with breaks for drawings and prizes. More than 25 prizes were awarded, including cookbooks, gift cards and \$100 bills.

Three incumbent board members were uncontested in their bid for another term. Gary Bloom, Roger Nelson and Dick Sohler were re-elected. Bloom has already served 15 years, Nelson 17 years and Sohler three years.

Gerstenberger took a moment to recognize Butch Gehrig, Patrick Moore and Bernie Wells for each serving on the board of directors for 20 years, and Bloom for 15 years. He also noted Office Manager Brenda Lewis has worked at HREC for 32 years. Lineman Doug Balzer has worked at HREC for 15 years.

The gathering was Gerstenberger's final annual meeting presentation. After 32 years, he is scheduled to retire this summer.

"It was a tough decision," he said. "This is an awesome place to be."

Gerstenberger joined HREC in 1986, working as an engineer before moving into the role of manager. He noted



**Left, members of the Parkdale Grange baked 50 pies to feed the crowd.**

**Below, Marla Magana, right, with daughter Yocelyn, won a crisp \$100 bill in the drawing that took place during the business meeting.**

many changes in his long career.

“When I came to the co-op in early 1986, the first in-house billing computer system had just been installed,” he recalled. “It was a multi-user system with a single CPU, several ‘dumb’ terminals and a massive printer. There were no PCs on-site at that time.”

An early adopter, Gerstenberger brought his own PC.

There was no internet or email, and everything was paper. Now, he said, a smartphone that fits in the palm of a hand has more computing power than HREC’s first monster-sized computer.

In contrast, aside from meter reading, the co-op’s distribution system has seen little change.

“Much technology has been developed to create automated operation and visibility but is more applicable to much larger systems,” Gerstenberger said.

HREC serves 2,798 members, all easily accessed within 30 minutes.

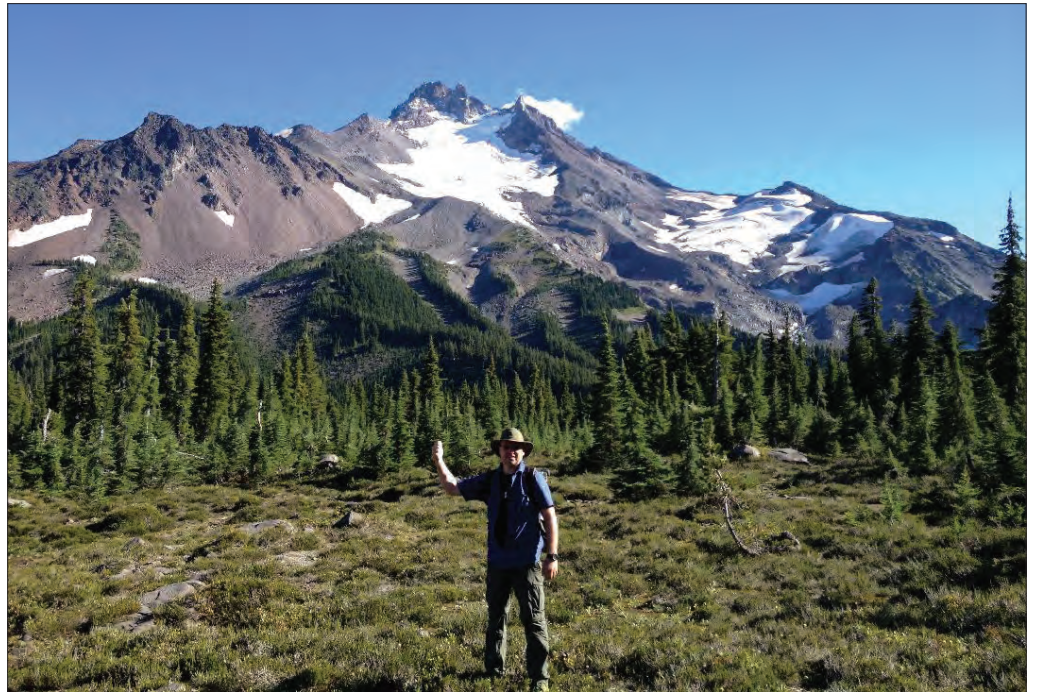
“Though faces have changed, the dedication and commitment of your board and employees has not diminished,” Gerstenberger said. “They understand the trust being extended by the membership. They know the services provided are essential and must be available at all times. They understand they are stewards of valuable infrastructure that must endure harsh conditions at times. It has been my goal that these responsibilities are pursued in a quiet and competent manner.”

Gerstenberger’s words were met with a standing ovation.



Following the presentation, members of the Parkdale Grange plated up 300 slices of pie. A team of eight bakers prepared 50 pies in a range of flavors. The grange has provided pies for decades.

“This is the social event of Odell,” Jim Hammermeister said of the evening that brought together all ages, from toddlers to retirees, in a spirit of community and cooperation. “And everyone likes the pie.” ■



## ‘Doug-Fir’s Like My Hike’ Author Finds Inspiration Along the Pacific Crest Trail

*Fanciful tale tells story of living an active life with diabetes*

By Dan Haag

They say write what you know. For Tillamook author Doug Carlson-Swanson—also known as Doug Fir—that means two things: hiking the miles of trails along the North Coast and managing Type 1 diabetes.

The two experiences come together in Doug’s first graphic novel, “Like My Hike”—a fun, imaginative tale that follows an adventurous tree, Doug-Fir, along sections of the Pacific Crest Trail.

The conifer Doug-Fir is frustrated. He is tired of being stuck in a rut, and

especially tired of being stuck by multiple insulin shots day after day.

Seeking an adventure—and better health—Doug-Fir decides to explore the Oregon Pacific wonderland that is the Pacific Crest Trail.

Along the way, he learns the important role that regular exercise plays in managing his diabetes. He also bumps into fellow hikers, talking mountains and a big foot-type beast named Stomper. He also meets his true love, a beaver named Miss Beaver Tale.

Filled with puns and innuendo, “Doug-Fir’s Like My Hike” tilts slightly more in

the adult reading direction. Author Doug calls it “PG-13 reading.”

“When I first started selling my stuff on eBay, someone told me it looked like Robert Crumb’s,” Doug says. “I didn’t know who he was at the time so I looked it up, but his stuff is definitely more adult than mine.”

Many of Doug’s own experiences are mirrored in the book’s fantastical artwork and story line: chiefly his struggle with Type 1 diabetes—something he calls “a life-changing illness.”

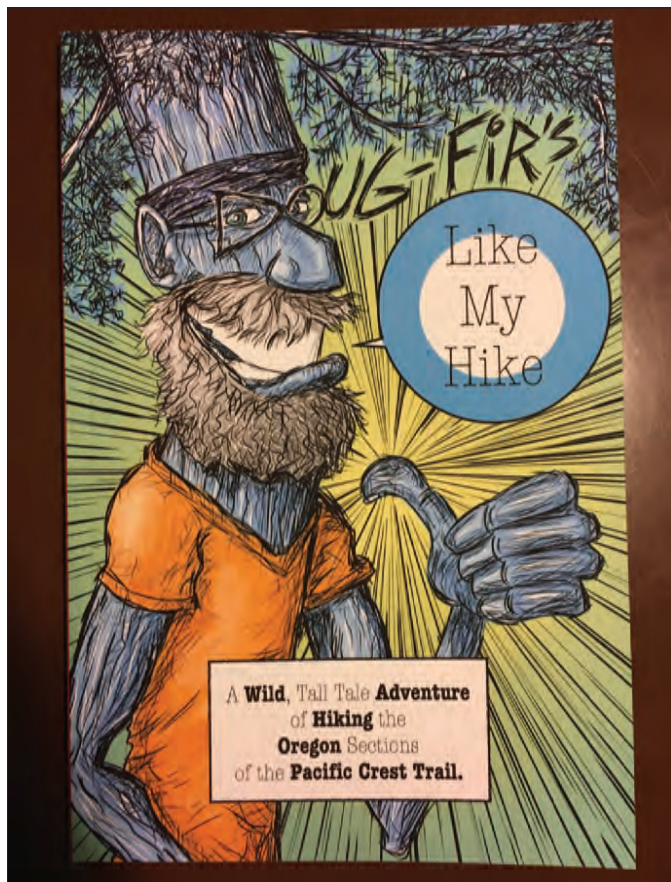
Doug, who grew up in Wisconsin, has been drawing since he can remember.

“I really got into drawing cars as a teenager,” he says. “It was how I taught myself to draw in 3-D.”

He also spent hours roaming woods and trails, building forts and having all manner of outdoor adventures.

Diabetes often slowed him down and even once put him on the brink of death. He quickly learned the necessity of managing a disease that currently has no cure.

A big part of that management came when Doug moved to the Oregon Coast. An avid hiker, he began to notice a correlation between extended hiking and lulls in his diabetes.



Above, Doug Carlson-Swanson's book was recently updated with a color cover thanks to its success. Right, Doug was inspired to write his novel while hiking sections of the Pacific Crest Trail.

"Continuously hiking, I started noticing I'm having to take less shots," Doug says. While on the trail, he focuses on a low-carb, high-protein diet to keep his blood sugars balanced.

The struggle of being diabetic is something Doug hopes readers will recognize even if they don't suffer from the disease.

He also hopes they realize independence is possible.

"Being a diabetic and a hiker, you need to think for yourself and look out for yourself," says Doug.

He also packs as little as possible.

"I just like moving fast and enjoying the hike, not really worrying about extra stuff," he says.

Independence has always been an important element of Doug's life and work. He created his own comic book in the early 1990s and has had his car drawings published in "CARtoons" magazine.

"Doug Fir's Like My Hike" was a labor of love. Doug wrote, designed, illustrated and self-published the book. His wife, Mis, served as editor.

The process took two years.

Doug has been busy promoting the book and has attended several book fairs



and signing events around Tillamook County.

As the book gains attention, Doug has been able to give it some colorful tweaks. Covers were recently updated from black-and-white.

As he builds inventory, Doug has branched out to book sellers up and down the Oregon Coast and inland. The book is available at Cloud & Leaf Bookstore and News & Espresso in Manzanita, Tillamook Pioneer Museum in Tillamook, Seaworthy Coffee and Gifts in Netarts and Powell's City of Books in Portland. It also can be

purchased online at Amazon.

Doug is looking ahead for ideas for his next tale—perhaps in coloring book form—featuring monsters, creatures and "Rat-Fink"-styled CAR-toons.

In the meantime, he intends to keep hiking. His favorite trails are the Wilson River Trail in the Tillamook State Forest and the Oregon Coast Trail between Seaside and Manzanita.

Whatever he writes next, Doug knows where to look for inspiration.

"I just love Oregon, and I've always loved trees," he says. ■

# Ely to Make History with Air Races/Show



An air racer passes a pylon marker.

Adobe Stock Photo

## By Christina Sawyer

Ely, Nevada, will soon make history.

The inaugural Ely Air Races/Show will bring “the world’s fastest motor sport” to Ely June 13-16 when Yelland Field hosts the first new air races in the Western U.S. in 34 years.

The event will feature a stacked lineup of aviation-related entertainment and attractions and is expected to provide a huge economic

benefit to the community, according to Lance Gale, who was appointed by the White Pine County Commission to coordinate the event.

As White Pine County Airport Manager, Lance leads a committee of roughly 10 volunteers from the Ely community who have worked for months to bring the historic event to Ely. He says one of the big attractions he’s excited to bring to Ely is Formula One Air Racing.

First proposed in 1936 as

“midget racing,” Formula One involves small aircraft that use engines no bigger than 200 cubic inches and reach speeds over 200 mph. Sanctioned by the International Aeronautics Federation, Formula One Air Racing held its first competition in 1947.

Lance says the committee hopes the T-6 Racing Association will also be part of the event. T-6 racers fly North American Aviation T-6 Texan aircraft. The planes were used during World War

II to train Allied pilots during the war.

The Commemorative Air Force—an organization that restores and preserves combat aircraft from the U.S. and other nations—will feature aircraft at the event. According to its website, the CAF has collected aircraft for nearly a half a century and ranks as one of the largest air forces in the world, with approximately 13,000 members and a fleet of more than 165 aircraft, dating back to

World War II.

The CAF's fleet of historic aircraft is known as the CAF Ghost Squadron and exists to "recreate, remind and reinforce the lessons learned from the defining moments in American military aviation history," according to the CAF website.

Another attraction Lance says the committee is excited to have at the event is the widely recognizable RE/MAX hot air balloon, which will provide tethered rides for attendees.

The Ely Air Races/Show, which Lance expects to draw aviation enthusiasts far and wide, was initiated as a means of promoting Ely's local airport, Yelland Field. Lance says it is the only airport in the world without obstacles or structures within miles of the airport, and its location makes it the highest altitude air-race venue.

These conditions create a unique opportunity for pilots to test their skills and could result in some of the fastest times ever recorded, he added.

The only other pylon race in the U.S. is also held in Nevada and has been making history for more than 53 years. In 1964, Bill Stead organized an air race near Reno, Nevada, and Reno's National Championship Air Races were born. The event he started in the Nevada desert more than 53 years ago is still going strong.

There are only five FAA-sanctioned pylon races in the world. Organizers of the Ely Races expect their event to



**A yellow SNJ-5C variant and a SNJ-7 variant of the T-6 Texan in flight. Ely officials hope to bring T-6 racing to Ely for the first-ever Ely Air Races/Show June 13-16.**

Photo by Chris A. Neill

be the second in the U.S. and sixth worldwide. The county is currently awaiting final FAA sanction.

Given the roster of attractions and historic nature of the event, organizers expect more than 2,000 visitors in Ely for the four-day event.

Lance says the only thing more impressive than the event itself is how its conception and planning came together.

Last August, local racing enthusiast John Fitzgerald reached out to Elaine Blackham of Ely's Economic Development Coalition, asking if anyone had ever considered hosting an air race in the area. Elaine was intrigued and reached out to Lance, who took the idea to his bosses at the White Pine County Commission.

The commission approved

the idea of an air race/show and asked Lance to gather interested community members to serve on a committee. After hosting an informational event that drew widespread support, Lance selected a roughly 10-member committee, which the commission approved to take the lead in coordinating the event. All committee members are volunteers who have come together to bring the historic event to Ely.

Lance says the can-do attitude of Ely's citizens has been invaluable. While some racing officials expressed concern about the planning timeline, the committee has persevered and overcome all obstacles.

"They thought it was impossible to pull off such an event in such a short time," he says. "But they're not from Ely, and they have no idea

what we are capable of."

The committee has worked closely with the FAA and experienced racing committees to ensure safety and security for the event, address lodging needs and accommodations, and identify other entertainment opportunities.

As the event date draws near, committee members are already looking to the future with high hopes for growth.

"The unlimited airspace conditions allow for event growth over the years," Lance says. "New race classes and word-of-mouth will likely cause the attendance to grow, bringing in 10,000 to 12,000 visitors to future events." ■

*Those interested in attending should check [www.elynevada.net](http://www.elynevada.net) or call (800) 496-9350 for the most current information and event updates. Those interested in volunteering can sign up at [www.justerserve.org](http://www.justerserve.org).*

# Community Support and a Fighting Spirit

*Carlin community rallies behind administrator and former coach Myron Branning as he confronts Lou Gehrig's disease*

By Dianna Troyer

Myron Branning is checking items off his bucket list as Carlin residents cheer for him. A beloved administrator and former coach at Carlin Combined School, Myron was diagnosed in early August with Lou Gehrig's disease, also called amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, which attacks motor neurons—cells that control the muscles. He plans to retire at the end of the school year.

The progressive neurodegenerative disease affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord.

"Doctors told us patients live two to five years after their diagnosis," says Myron, 45.

He, his wife, JoLynn, 47, and their son, Dennis, 21, a student at nearby Great Basin College, hope for more time. They remember hearing an encouraging speaker at an ALS support group in Salt Lake City.

"The man said he was diagnosed 15 years ago," says JoLynn. "It affects people differently."

Fulfilling one of his goals, Myron went on a wild hog hunt in Texas during spring break in March. This month,



During spring break, Myron Branning used a tracked wheelchair during a wild hog hunt in Texas. With Myron are, from left, Michael Alexander, Doug Hutchison and Jeff Alexander.

Photos courtesy of Myron Branning

he hopes to watch the NCAA Division III Softball Championship in Oklahoma. During summer, he will go fishing along the Oregon Coast.

To celebrate their 23rd wedding anniversary May 26, Myron and JoLynn plan to spend the day in the hills or go fishing.

His retirement this month coincides with May being ALS Awareness Month. Myron says he will not allow the disease to define who he is.

"I want people to treat me the way they always have," says Myron. "I'm the same guy. I just can't do as much or I have to do things differently."

Even after his diagnosis, he continued to work as athletic director and vice principal, relying on an electric wheelchair to help prevent fatigue.

"Myron shows up to work with a smile," says Principal Thomas Cunningham. "He's a great role model and example of how we should deal with adversity in our lives. He's an amazing person who has many amazing accomplishments as a coach and vice principal. People listen when he speaks because they know he is right."

The Brannings say they have been impressed with fundraisers that have helped pay for medical expenses.



**Left, Myron with his son, Dennis, and his wife, JoLynn. They plan to make the most of summer. Above, Myron makes sure he still has time to meet with students, such as Andrew Dodd.**

Above photo by Lonny Brown

“The communities of Carlin and Wells are amazing,” JoLynn says. “It’s been overwhelming to see how many people want to show they care. Business owners donated prizes, and community members bought raffle tickets.”

“We couldn’t have asked for a better community of caring people to call home,” Myron adds.

Myron began his teaching career in Carlin in 1999, the year he graduated from Mayville State University in North Dakota. A Wells native, he earned a football scholarship to pay for college. He and JoLynn, also an education major, met at the university.

They both found jobs in Carlin. JoLynn teaches kindergarten. Myron was hired to teach physical education.

“Instead of P.E., I always called it M.S.A.—making students athletes,” he says. “I taught a fit-for-life mentality and encouraged students to exercise all their lives.”

Whenever coaches were needed, Myron volunteered. He led the softball,

basketball, wrestling and football teams until he became an administrator. The Nevada High School Athletic Directors Association named Myron the 1A Athletic Director of the Year for 2018.

“At first, I thought I’d stay in Carlin a few years and eventually leave to coach at a college,” says Myron.

After his teams won state championships, he was offered coaching jobs at other high schools but turned them down.

“Coaches tend to move around a lot if they want to advance,” says JoLynn. “We didn’t want that kind of lifestyle for our son.”

Content in Carlin, Myron was surprised when his health began to deteriorate. In January 2017, he suspected he had multiple sclerosis or ALS because his left leg suddenly weakened. Last May, his speech became slurred.

Seeking a diagnosis, he went to the University of Utah.

“There isn’t a test for ALS, but there are tests for the diseases that mimic it, like MS or muscular dystrophy,” he says. “Other diseases were ruled out, so doctors knew it was ALS.”

After he was diagnosed, Myron says he said, “Well, that sucks doesn’t it?”

JoLynn joked with him and said, “Why do you always have to be right?”

To slow the disease’s progression, he is taking pills and is waiting for his insurance company to approve payment for infusions.

Every three months, Myron and JoLynn go to the University of Utah Hospital, where he undergoes an individualized treatment plan. From about 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., he meets with his doctor, a social worker, and physical, respiratory, occupational and speech therapists. Their exercises help him maintain his mobility.

JoLynn says Myron wants to be independent as long as possible.

“He asked me to wait for him to ask for help,” she says.

During spring break, Myron borrowed a tracked wheelchair to go on his wild hog hunt.

“It has a gun rest and worked great,” says Myron, who grew up hunting elk and deer in northern Nevada. “It’s something I’ve always wanted to do. We hunted two days, and I got a hog each day.”

Anticipating the end of the school year, the Brannings are looking at the start of a new chapter.

“We take one day at a time,” JoLynn says. ■

## Pahrump 'Welcomes Home' Vietnam Veterans

*Recognition and thanks offered at PBS-VEA event*

By Vern Hee

Hands were shaken, memories were shared and tears were shed as Vietnam Vets gathered March 29 during a Vietnam Veteran Welcome Home event sponsored by Vegas PBS and hosted by Valley Electric Association and Kiwanis International at the Valley Conference Center.

The ceremony attracted nearly 200 Vietnam veterans and more than 100 family members and friends as Pahrump officially welcomed home Vietnam Veterans on National Vietnam War Veterans Day. During the ceremony, VEA passed out Vietnam ball caps and Vietnam War pins to every Vietnam veteran, and their spouses received a rose. In addition, Vegas PBS gave the veterans Vietnam War



Veteran Anthony Falcone, left, is greeted by Reggie Knight.



More than 200 Vietnam vets turned out on National Vietnam War Veterans Day at the Valley Conference Center.

Photos by Jeff Scheid

commemorative coins, and the spouses received a pin.

Similar events were conducted throughout Southern Nevada, but the Pahrump welcome home stood out among all. "This was the biggest ceremony we have ever done," said Tom Axtell, Vegas PBS General Manager. "Valley Electric made it really special by the size of the hall, by the food, the ambiance of the event, and we made some very important memories for veterans today who are reflecting on the war they served in. I am confident they left here knowing they are honored and appreciated."

Veterans returning from other overseas conflicts received challenge coins bearing their branch's insignia, said Tom. Not those returning from Vietnam in the 1960s and '70s. They returned to a polarized country, and so they didn't get recognition, let alone a coin.

Vegas PBS designed coins with the shape of Nevada and an American flag on one side and the Vegas PBS emblem

and a soldier saluting on the other. The coins were sponsored by the Veterans United Foundation.

Dave Dawson, a member of VEA's Board of Directors – himself a veteran of the Vietnam War – offered opening remarks to the veterans and their families.

"I really don't think or can ever imagine what it was like to come back from a war and to be treated like Vietnam Vets were treated," said Dave. "I was fortunate. And so from the bottom of my heart and as a Vet who served ... I am glad that we can welcome home all the Vietnam vets and thank them for a job well done."

While eating lunch provided by Valley Electric, the vets shared their stories, and some used the time to check out veterans' resources.

The vets were able to catch up with old friends.

Russell Avirett, whose unit did aerial reconnaissance, was a crew chief in Vietnam on a plane. He did two tours

in Vietnam.

"I was shot down twice," Russell said. "We got mortared and bombed a couple of times, too. I had both knees wiped out. And another time I got the windshield blown out once on my jeep, while taking out the garbage after the Tet Offensive."

Hank Centuolo, a Navy Seabee, talked about not having running water and taking salt water showers during his first year in Vietnam while constructing roads for the Army. In addition to that, he had to worry about land mines while working.

"The Army used to yell at us for getting ahead of their security," Hank said. "They had to sweep the highway for mines, but we were always ahead of the Army because we liked to work early before the heat. It was hot over there during the day."

Not all Vietnam era veterans had tours of duty in Southeast Asia. "I served on a destroyer during the Vietnam War," said Ron Trummell, a Navy Vietnam vet. "I ended up in England on one tour. We were the official representatives for the Royal Regatta in England."

Ron told a story about how he convinced the sailors of the Queen of England's personal launch to take them back to his ship.

While some of the stories the Veterans shared were light hearted, others revolved around hardships they endured. Still others talked about their homecoming. Freddie Gaines, a Marine veteran, remembered being hassled at the airport when he came home.



Spouses of Vietnam Vets, like Suzanne Schneider, received a single, red rose.



Vietnam Vets were presented with commemorative medallions and hats in honor of their service.

"I came home and didn't get any recognition," he said. "I remember coming home through Oakland Airport in California. They called me all sorts of names, and I remember saying, 'Hey man I didn't want to go. I didn't want to fight nobody. My country called me and they said let's go. And so I went.' I didn't go up to Canada."

The ceremony was also important to the spouses of the veterans. For many they said it was a long time coming, and they felt the ceremony was done respectfully.

"They spit on them and called them baby killers when they came home," said Linda Hix, wife of Vietnam vet John Hix, who served on a minesweeper. "I was so happy to be

a part of this ceremony. You all did a wonderful job honoring those Vietnam veterans who served."

Linda said seeing the empty table was so well done that it brought tears to her eyes.

"The entire ceremony was so thoughtful," she said.

A longtime spokesman in Pahrump for Vietnam Veterans and a Vietnam veteran himself, Dr. Tom Waters also said the ceremony hit the mark and was a great way to honor Vietnam Veterans.

"As I have said to others it is a long time coming," he said. "We have had several other ceremonies but I think this one was done right. And I am very proud to have been a part of this."

Other organizations involved included VETrans, Disabled American Veterans and Vetrans of Foreign Wars. ■

## Volunteers Pitch in to Build Amargosa Senior Center

*Resourcefulness, ingenuity were the keys*

By John M. Glionna

AMARGOSA VALLEY – Jack Sypolt is just the kind of off-beat character to take seed and flourish here in the lonely windswept scrublands of the Amargosa Valley.

Now a spritely 79 years old, the one-time electrical contractor and furniture builder has run off-road racing teams and once bought a 10-acre property here with enough space to build a runway for his own private plane.

He's originally from Southern California and gets itchy around too many rules and too many people. "I like the desert – I'm a desert guy," he says. "I drove a dune buggy in '56 when nobody knew what it was. I don't like hustle-bustle. I just want to shoot my guns and ride my dirt bike. ..."

But sometimes, living out here in all these wide-open spaces gives a fella an urge



Jack Sypolt and Dave Hall were among those who got things going for the Amargosa Senior Center.

John M. Glionna

to, you know, fix things up. Like that decrepit old senior center.

The place was really just a double-wide trailer with a sorry little kitchen (a closet-sized with a sink and coffee-maker) that didn't even meet local health department codes. So, a bunch of locals, including Sypolt's wife, Diane, who was then the senior center site manager, got together to do something about it.

In time, Sypolt would be the lynch-pin in a collection of nearly two dozen community volunteers – anchored by a core group of retirees all in their 70s and 80s – who patched together their wits, knowhow and sheer

chutzpah to complete a new 3,600-square-foot senior center that's just the pride of this valley.

The core foursome of hammer-wielding old-timers included a retired machinist, aerospace engineer and Las Vegas Metropolitan Police motorcycle cop. During the project, one had a heart attack, another survived the discovery of a benign brain tumor.

But they pressed on, in 2015 finishing a building project and land acquisition that would have cost nearly a million dollars to complete on the open market, but just cost them \$190,000 from a government grant.

Nothing was easy; not one step, starting with the original architect whose drawings put the total cost at \$1.5 million. (That was the end of him.) Sypolt knew they barely had enough money to fund a 5,000-square-foot slab of concrete and metal without inner walls, electricity, plumbing – none of that stuff.

Then they got lucky.

One day, Sypolt got a call from then Nye County manager Pam Webster.

"Jack," she began, "have I got a deal for you."

"Well, then, let me sit down," he responded.

The county had an unused modular building at the Yucca Mountain waste site



The center was built mostly with volunteer labor, much of it from retirees.



Enjoying an afternoon dinner are Rexine Reeves (holding coffee cup), Prudy Stengel, Curt Stengel, Jim Rook, and wife Nora Rook.

they were willing to let go for \$3,200 – if Sybolt and his crew moved it themselves, of course.

Deal.

That's when the network of Amargosa Valley volunteers, rounded up by word of mouth, descended like rural bees on a hive. They salvaged what they could from the old building, including bathroom and light fixtures; that is, after each and every one of them passed a rigorous background check to even set foot on the restricted-area Nevada test site. They loaded the materials into a tractor-trailer donated by the local Ponderosa dairy.

Then they had to move the building itself to its new home – just 15 miles as the crow flies, but a 90-minute drive along meandering and restricted government roads.

They got a bid to move the building, really a series of patched-together modular units. The cost: \$30,000.

“We took a deep breath and said, ‘OK,’” Sybolt recalls. “Then the contractor said ‘Oh, you want it put back together again and put the roof on? That's gonna cost another \$15,000.’”

Once the building was on site, the crews went to work. Those who had jobs came when they could. But the retired core members showed up for a few hours every day – until they ran out of steam or their wives ordered them to come home.

Always the wheeler-dealer, Sybolt scrounged around for the best deals. He called his old contacts in the electrical contracting business. “I'd say ‘Can you do this for us for a good price?’ We scrounged a lot.”

Everyone wanted to do their part. One night, as he sat in the old senior center having dinner, one center regular who lived nearby stuffed a wad of \$100 bills into his pocket. People donated

everything from refrigerators to coffeemakers.

The dairy provided heavy equipment; Valley Electric donated and installed a solar hot-water system; a Vegas casino worker volunteered to provide ongoing repairs on the refrigeration system; and the list goes on.

There were naysayers, of course – that's all part of small town politics – people who said the community didn't need a new senior center. But in the end, the volunteers got what they wanted: a combination library-cozy diner, not any soulless military barracks or mess hall. There's an industrial kitchen, pool table, TV and library.

One night, a dozen people came for the daily 4 p.m. low-cost dinner, including many of those who worked on the project. There was Jim Rook, who showed up to do minor tasks even after he'd had a brain tumor removed during construction.

“It got me out of the house,” he said. “It was part of my therapy. But they wouldn't let me get up on the ladder.”

At another table was Paul Burton, who suffered a heart attack during construction. “Oh, hell yes. They all did their fair share from day one. We wouldn't let Paul quit over a little thing like a heart attack,” Sybolt joked. “We'd say ‘Here's a shot of whisky. Let's get back at it.’”

The volunteer builders all have an enduring sense of satisfaction over what they've accomplished. “You can just smile when you go down the road,” said Dave Hall, a retired dairy manager, and VEA Board Director. “Sure, we had our critics, but now we have a huge beautiful center for the community.”

And old Jack Sybolt is happy, too.

“Nobody's prouder than me,” he said. “Everybody came together on this, like a community should.” ■



The full cast and crew of "Peter Pan," produced by Dillingham City Schools.

## School Performs 'Peter Pan' Musical

*Second star to the right and straight on till morning*

In April, Dillingham City Schools students transported the audience to a magical land where kids never grow up by performing "Peter Pan."

Students of all ages brought to life an enjoyable adventure about the Darling children, who leave their home to visit the magical island, Neverland with guidance from the soaring Peter Pan and fairy Tinker Bell, bringing Wendy to share wonderful stories with the lost children.

The Darlings' spirited journey brought fun and laughter to the stage, where scurvy pirates and noble Indians fought and lovely

mermaids swam. A hungry crocodile selectively bit the despicable Captain Hook, and precious fairies danced for children who don't want to grow up.

Although Peter Pan tries to convince Wendy to stay on this enchanting island forever, she discovers she misses her real mother, and the Darling children are forgetting about home. Wendy chooses to return home to London, bringing with her the lost children who are ready to follow their dreams.

The show was directed by Sharon Clavette and LeeAnn Andrew. Props were made by the cast and crew.

### Cast

**Peter Pan:** Sadie Sands and Hilde Ball

**Tinker Bell:** Katelyn Kolbe

**Wendy Darling:** Lotus Becker

**John Darling:** Jacob Belleque

**Rachel Darling:** Robin Savo

**Michael Darling:** Seth Clavette

**Mrs. Darling:** Angelica Marx

**Mr. Darling's voice:** Preston Woods

**Nana:** Jessica Noden-Bocatch

**Liza:** Shayla Fuller

**Fairies:** Aurora Kregar, Katie Hulett, Leah Mincher, Layla Gross, Harper Henderson, Grace Swift

and Aliya Davenport  
**Mermaids:** Katie Hulett, Layla Gross, Harper Henderson and Grace Swift

### Pirates

**Captain Hook:** Draven Clavette

**Smee:** Preston Woods

**Starkey:** Rocinda Nielson

**Cookie:** Angelica Marx

**Skylight:** Faith Clavette

**Noodles:** Oakley Brito

**Billy:** Jessica Noden-Bocatch

**Willy:** Kaylonia Shoults

### Lost Children

**Tootles:** Kahlen Savo

**Nibs:** Liam Gross

**Pots:** Ann Tucker

**Pans:** Aspen Miller



Top, the fairies. Above, the Indian princesses.

**Plates:** Cara Tilden  
**Slightly:** Madison Davenport  
**Curley:** Coral Woods  
**Tic:** Celia Munster  
**Tac:** Marion Coupchiak  
**Toe:** Lauren Elliott  
**Jumpy:** Elijah Davenport  
**Slinky:** Katiana Bond  
**Crocodile:** Baker Hulett

**Indians**

**Pirate Chief:** Aimee Belleque and Nicky Johnson  
**Tiger Lily:** Elayne Woods  
**Wild Flower:** Izabelle Savo  
**Chattering Chipmunk:** Autumn Johnson

**Two Moons:** Jake Neketa  
**Raging Waters:** James Olson  
**Back Stage Crew:**  
**Scenery/Script Supervisor:** Logan Ball  
**Lights/Sound:** Sawyer Sands and Logan Ito  
**Stage Hands:** Eko Johnson, Ashton Cavanaugh, Natalie Romo, Hilde Ball, Sadie Sands and Caleb Kapotak  
**Makeup:** Dakota McDowell, Alethia Belleque and Logan Ball ■

*Special thanks to Bob Burns and students Misty Savo, Jill Elliott,*

*Anita Fuller, Laurel Sands, Leslie Thuerer, Brandon Smith, Nicholas Shollmeier, Nicole Ito, Cathy Hindman, Brooke Spurlock and the countless parents and community volunteers.*

Top, the Indians. Middle, the lost children. Bottom, the pirates.



Abby Whitcomb practices the seal hop in the Dillingham school gym.

# Native Youth Olympics

## Students Thrive on Traditional Sports

By Misty Savo

Balance, strength, coordination and pain tolerance are traits Alaska's indigenous people needed to live a subsistence life. The Native Youth Olympic Games embody those traits in its 10 events (See sidebar for event descriptions).

Dillingham City School District middle and high school students begin practicing these difficult skills in the spring as they learn about the difficulties of subsistence life.

While the events are competitive, the cooperative spirit pushes the athletes along. When an athlete struggles to master a skill, students and coaches from other teams point out areas of improvement and give encouragement during events. The main

focus is helping each other do their personal best.

Spectators are drawn in by the sight of these athletes jumping and kicking a ball the size of a grapefruit that sometimes hangs more than 9 feet in the air. What keeps them watching is the visible cooperation and camaraderie.

Junior Native Youth Olympics allows students in first through sixth grade to compete in events specific to their age groups. This year, Amanda Luiten, JNYO and NYO coach, says the team brought six students in fifth and sixth grade to the JNYO state event in Anchorage on February 23. The team competed in the Alaskan high kick, one-foot high kick and Eskimo stick pull.

Other NYO coaches include Karl Clark and Kristin Smeaton.



Thomas Tinker, left, and David Wetter are the carriers for Thresa Savo while she practices the wrist carry.

At a recent practice, the team started by warming up. They practiced the seal hop, kneel jump, scissor broad jump, Eskimo stick pull and wrist carry. During practice, there was a lot of encouragement and peer teaching. Prizes were offered to those who did the best in each event.

### Upcoming Competitions

Bethel and Dillingham planned a virtual NYO meet in April. Karl, a long time Dillingham NYO coach, had an opportunity to try this new technology against Nome. He was excited to stage competitions with students from across the state using today's technology.

The South West Districts and Dillingham Invite was in the Dillingham High School gym in April. All 10 events were contested. There was also an exhibition of other events no longer used in competition due to their dangerous nature.

A statewide Native Youth Olympics event hosted by Cook Inlet Tribal Council was in Anchorage in April at the Alaska Airlines Center in the UAA Complex. Students from seventh through 12th grade could participate, although each school could only send one participant per event. The Cook Inlet Tribal Council expected more than 2,000 students to participate in NYO this year. ■

## The 10 Native Youth Olympic Events

- **Kneel Jump:** Jump up and forward from a kneeling position, land both feet simultaneously and remain in that position without moving and/or otherwise touching the floor.
- **Wrist Carry:** Suspend entire body from a pole using just one wrist while two people carry the pole.
- **Alaskan High Kick:** Sit on the floor balanced on one foot while holding other foot, then thrust balancing foot straight up to kick a suspended ball, then land on the kicking foot while keeping balance.
- **Eskimo Stick Pull:** Two opponents sit facing each other gripping a stick, the winner pulls up their opponent or causes them to lose balance.
- **Scissor Broad Jump:** Make four continuous hops/steps without losing balance.
- **One-Hand Reach:** Balance body weight on palm or knuckles of one hand, then touch a suspended ball with free hand, then place the free hand on the floor.
- **Two-Foot High Kick:** Jump with both feet simultaneously and kick a suspended ball, then land back on both feet.
- **Indian Stick Pull:** With feet planted on marked positions and arms held down, two opponents must attempt to pull a tapered and greased wooden dowel from the other's hand.
- **One-Foot High Kick:** Take a standing or running start and jump with both feet, kick a suspended ball with one foot, then land on the kicking foot.
- **Seal Hop:** From a pushup position, contestants must hop—seal-like—across the floor on their hands and toes while maintaining the pushup position.



Competitors practice the stick pull while classmates cheer them on.

# Authoring a Path to Success

*Jay Dilger enters the publishing world at only 12 years old*

By Anne Herman

Many authors spend several years of their lives researching, writing and pitching ideas before they are published. Twelve-year-old Jay Dilger is on the fast track.

She recently published her first book, "Rebel: A War of Justice." Although the story is fantasy, it incorporates many elements of truth about cheetahs, leopards and lions. Jay also illustrated the book.

"I've been writing ever since I was aware that a pencil could make marks on paper," says Jay, the daughter of Tanner Electric Cooperative Board Member Mark Dilger and his wife, Amy.

Jay wrote her first book in second grade and has produced more handmade books than she can count.

Jay's earlier works don't meet her current standards.

"They are cringy," she says, explaining that she cringes to see them again.

Her parents have managed to preserve a number of Jay's earlier efforts, which they pull out of various drawers and cupboards.

"Oh, no ..." Jay says as Amy and Mark proudly display their treasure.

Jay started with fan fiction, elaborating on books and characters by other authors. Then she got the urge to be more independent.

That is when Jay embarked on "Rebel." Its characters are lions, leopards, and cheetahs, all engaged in a complex struggle for power and justice.

According to Jay, lions really are cruel and lazy. The males sometimes eat their own cubs. Rather than hunt for themselves, they often live off prey brought home by female lions or steal carcasses from cheetahs or leopards.



Jay Dilger wrote and illustrated several stories before publishing "Rebel: A War of Justice."

Jay says the cats' territory does overlap.

Leopards try to protect their food by climbing trees, while cheetahs must outrun the lions.

"Cheetahs have basically dog claws," Jay says. "They are meant for traction when they run, not for climbing."

The novel diverges from fact in some areas. In the story, the animals live in family groups—or clans—which is not common among leopards. The plot is a complex intrigue of opposing factions and surprising alliances, leading to a war of rebellion among the cats.

Jay wrote it as a present for her father, staying up until 5:40 a.m. Christmas morning to finish it.

To her dismay, the printer jammed and she had to ask for help.

The first copy was produced by emailing the book as a PDF, which she and her father eventually were able to print. They bound the first copies by hand, holding them together with wood glue and clamps until the glue dried.

They graduated to an online

publishing service, and the book is now available on Amazon.

Jay illustrated the book, too, drawing with her finger on an iPad.

Her parents have turned a hallway in their house into a gallery of Jay's art, which includes work in watercolor, colored pencil and paper mache.

Jay's creativity does not stop there. She makes T-shirts and made her favorite necklace. She also enjoys product design, which includes rabbit beds and diapers for her rabbit, Sadie, and for koi. Jay also made an ice vest for her mother when the weather was hot.

"It didn't exactly go well," she says. "The bags broke and it leaked."

Last summer, Jay's artwork was featured in a show at ArtEast Gallery. She recently donated copies of "Rebel: A War of Justice" to Twin Falls Middle School and Opstad Elementary School. Her third-grade teacher, Miss Bradburn, attended the ceremony at Opstad, which Jay says meant a lot to her.

Jay started work on a new book with the working title "Sign of the Fire." ■

Before using an online publishing company, 12-year-old Jay Dilger handbound copies of her book, "Rebel: A War of Justice," using glue and clamps. It is now available on Amazon.





Retired KEA CEO Brad Reeve, left, was presented a plaque by Board President Craig McConnell at the KEA Annual Meeting for his years of service to the co-op.

# KEA's 67th Annual Meeting

The 67th Kotzebue Electric Association Membership Annual Meeting was held in Kotzebue Middle High School's cafeteria. A quorum was established, with 68 members attending the meeting.

President Craig McConnell called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m. He welcomed everyone to the meeting. Lorena Williams gave the invocation.

Craig presented the 2017 KEA Annual Meeting minutes to the members for approval. Queen Davis motioned to approve. It was seconded by Maryann Wilson.

Craig introduced guests attending the meeting:

Joy Merriner from BDO and attorney Paul Jones of Kempel, Huffman & Ellis.

He thanked George Francis and the nominating committee for their work, then introduced and thanked the election committee for counting the ballots. The meeting continued with the closing of the polls.

KEA then had the first session of door-prize drawings.

Craig introduced the other members of the board: Harold Lambert, vice president; Charlie Gregg, secretary; Allen Jessup Sr., treasurer; Tom Atkinson; Wally Carter Sr.; Dominic Ivanoff; John Rae Sr.; and Herman Reich Sr.

Craig reported on the highlights for the last year, which covered the retirement of Brad Reeve and hiring a new general manager. He also talked about the new streetlights installed by request of the city of Kotzebue. He also mentioned many other things done by KEA and what is planned for the future.

Craig thanked the KEA staff for their hard work keeping the power supplied to Kotzebue and for the community events they take part in.

John, who decided not to run for re-election this year, was recognized for his time on the board. Craig presented

him with a certificate of appreciation for his six years of service.

A plaque was given to former manager Brad Reeve for his years of service at KEA. Craig introduced new general manager Martin Shroyer for his report.

Martin introduced the staff and spoke briefly about each (see box). Martin gave a brief report. At the end of his report Martin said 2017 was an exciting and challenging year as the new general manager. He thanked the KEA Board of Directors and the great staff for their support and help.

The 2nd session of door



From left, Irene Stalker, Beulah Commack and Rachel Adams.

Easter Henry being help by Ada Cleveland signing in to the meeting

Photos by Claude Wilson Jr.



Above, Craig presents outgoing board member John Rae Sr. with a certificate of appercciation. Top, from left, board members Tom Atkinson, Wally Carter Sr. and Charlie Gregg during the annual meeting.

prizes was given out.

Joy Merriner, the audit manager from BDO, was introduced. She went over the audit report and financials for the year ending 2017. She said the audit provided a clean opinion of the financial records. She mentioned the cooperative has a good staff

and how it is good to work with them on the audit.

Paul Jones of Kempel, Huffman & Ellis gave a brief report. There are no lawsuits or regulatory issues. He discussed the fuel contract with Vitus and PCE. He also talked about how KEA is working with NANA



to install a solar project in Kotzebue. He talked about the refined fuel surcharge the state of Alaska imposed in 2015 to KEA and other cooperatives.

KEA and the other cooperatives fought against this and successfully received refunds and will have to pay the surcharge going forward.

Craig asked the election committee to report results.

Three directors are elected every year. This year, Harold Lambert was re-elected. Two new directors were elected: Pierre Lonewolf and Chad Nordlum. Craig's seat was up for election, but he was not re-elected. Craig thanked the membership for voting and that it was a pleasure to serve the community on the KEA board for the last nine years.

After the last door prize drawings, and with no other business to conduct, the meeting was adjourned. ■

### Office Staff

- Matt Bergan, project engineer
- Denise Toshavik, office manager
- Sandra Moto, accountant

### Line Crew

- Steve Smith Jr., line foreman
- Gary Howarth, lineman
- Glenn Conwell, apprentice

### Plant Staff

- Claude Wilson Jr., supervisor
- Johnnie (Rocky) Jones, supervisor
- John Schaeffer III, plant operator
- Abe Ito, plant operator
- Floyd Crumbley Jr., plant operator
- Doug O'Hara, plant operator

## Pioche-Based Angler Among Best in World

By Dianna Troyer

Internationally ranked tournament fisherman Mike Rennie describes his lifestyle and occupation as controlled chaos.

“My wife, Donna, keeps my head above water with scheduling and itineraries,” says the Pioche resident. “She’s the backbone of this whole adventure and helps me do what I love.”

Since 2002, Mike has competed professionally in fresh and saltwater tournaments nationally and abroad.

Along with tournament fishing, he handles social media postings for his corporate sponsors’ websites, hosts televised fishing shows, writes articles and teaches seminars for Bass Pro Shops.

“There’s nothing I’d rather do,” Mike says. “It’s an exciting sport, and I get to see different places in the U.S. and the world. I feel fortunate to be able to do this for a living. It’s definitely not a 9-to-5 job or a way to become a millionaire.”

It has taken nearly two decades for the 44-year-old to earn his recent world-class ranking.

Last year, Mike was ranked first in Nevada Bass Anglers Sportsman Society Federation Nation Inc. standings. That earned him a berth to the Academy Sports + Outdoors B.A.S.S. Nation Championship in October 2017 at Lake Hartwell in South Carolina.

“There are 155,000 people



**Mike Rennie shows a wahoo he caught to win fourth place in the first 2017 Gold Cup Wahoo Tournament in the East Cape, Baja, Mexico.**

Photos courtesy of Mike Rennie

competing to get into nationals,” he says. “At B.A.S.S. Nation, there’s a winner from every state, plus 12 countries. By the time it was done, I was 31st out of 62 in the world.”

Generally, Mike travels

to two or three contests a month, fishing as an individual or part of a team. This year, he is paired with Steve Pike for the Bassmaster Team Championship circuit.

“Steve’s great,” Mike says.

“He has a lot of experience since fishing his first tournament in 1973.”

Mike competed in his first tournament in 1989 at age 16.

“I fished for fun with family and friends as a member

of the Las Vegas Bass Club,” Mike says. “I did tournament fishing every year and finally had the opportunity to start fishing professionally in 2002 when I landed my first sponsor, Keeper Custom Worms.”

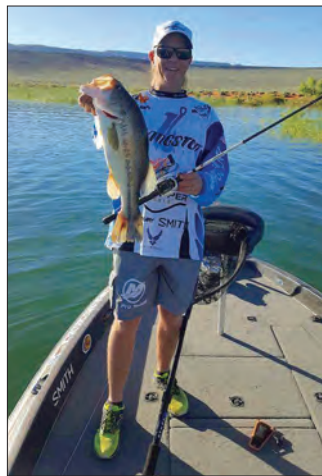
In 2010, Mike obtained his first big corporate sponsorship with Scent Blazer Lures—a saltwater fishing company based in Australia.

“I met the owner at a trade show, and he gave me some lures to try,” Mike says. “They have a small chamber for live bait, so it leaves a scent trail that attracts fish as you’re trolling. I used them at a tournament and won. After that, he put me on his pro staff.”

Along with corporations, the U.S. Air Force sponsors Mike because he is an Air Force veteran.

“I worked four years in law enforcement at Hill Air Force Base in northern Utah,” he says. “I help promote the United States Air Force, and it’s an honor to wear their insignia on my jersey, truck and boat.”

Mike now has more than 20 sponsors, including Livingston Lures, Mercury Marine, Bass Pro Shops,



**Mike holds a bass, the reward of his patience and skill.**

Phenix Rods, Coolbaits Lure Co., Boomerang Tool Co., HI-SEAS Fishing Line and Leader, and Smith Optics.

“Without the help from sponsors, this job would be impossible to do,” Mike says. “Great companies and product keep a fisherman on the water.”

Mike says it costs about \$1,500 to enter freshwater tournaments and up to \$18,000 for saltwater competitions. Corporate sponsors help pay tournament entry fees and travel costs. Competitors also rely on sponsors to help them at tournaments.

“Reps are on the boat ramp in case something goes wrong with your motor or your gear needs repairs,” Mike says.

Tournament days can be intense. Competitors fish at least eight hours, and winners are determined by the total weight of fish they catch.

Mike says filming to produce promotional videos for sponsors or to test equipment prototypes is often more physically demanding than a tournament.

“For Blazer Scents, sometimes I’ll be fishing 17 days straight from 5 a.m. to 6 p.m.,” he says.

When Mike is home in Pioche, his favorite places to fish are Eagle Valley Reservoir and Echo Canyon Reservoir.

“They’re both great for trout, crappie and bass,” he says. “At Echo, I’ve caught some 5- to 8-pound largemouth bass.”

Mike says he releases what he catches because he wants to preserve fish populations for future generations.

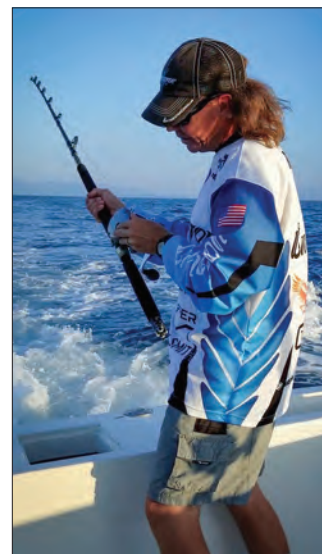
“I especially support not keeping the females when they’re spawning,” he says.

Mike began calling Pioche home in 2008. A native of Las

Vegas, he moved his family to town to enable their children to get a quality education. His daughter, Carissa, is 16, and his son, Austin, is 22.

“We picked Pioche because my dad always brought us here to fish and hunt when I was young,” Mike says.

As for his future, Mike says he plans to continue competing “as long as I’m physically able to, whatever age that might be. There are some guys in their 70s still tournament fishing.” ■



**Mike checks his reel during a saltwater tournament. He competes all over the world.**

**Chloe Barnes of Caliente shows a pre-tagged fish she caught that was worth a \$5,000 college scholarship. Ben Johnson, back, organizes the annual event.**

Photo by Dawn Andone



## Department of Wildlife Hooks Kids with Free Fishing, Prizes

Anglers up to age 18 can reel in valuable fish at the Nevada Department of Wildlife’s Free Fishing Day June 9.

The annual event is hosted at Echo Canyon State Park from 8 a.m. to noon.

“We provide all the gear and offer all kinds of prizes,” says Ben Johnson, Spring Valley State Park ranger.

A tag, corresponding with a prize, is

placed on certain fish before they are released.

In 2011, Chloe Barnes of Caliente caught a fish tagged with a \$5,000 scholarship. In 2014, Armando Garcia from Las Vegas reeled in a fish worth a \$10,000 scholarship.

The event’s motto is “Get hooked on fishing, not drugs.” ■