



Clarkston High School agriculture teacher Cami Browne and her children, from left, Cady, 12, Caylie, 14 and Carly, 9, live on the family farm near Anatone.

# Not Your Average Agriculture Teacher

*Clarkston High School graduate returns to teach the next generation in agriculture*

By Lori Mai

It's the first lab of the school year in Cami Browne's animal and plant biotechnology class at Clarkston High School. The students are scraping their cheek cells for DNA. They will separate the strands through a process called gel electrophoresis to analyze them for all kinds of agricultural applications.

This is not your parents' agriculture education.

"Some kids think ag is all about farming, but it's not," Cami says. "There's so much science and technology involved. What I love about teaching ag is that it's always changing to meet new demands."

In the late 1990s, as a CHS student in Steve Smith's agriculture classes and FFA, Cami never dreamed that one day

she would be at the helm of the program. That's exactly what happened. Sixteen years ago, at age 22, fresh out of college with a degree in ag education and a minor in ag business from Washington State University, Cami was hired to replace her mentor at CHS following his retirement.

Newly married, Cami and her husband, Dustin, had just settled in as the fourth generation on the Browne family farm near Anatone. Cami was looking for a job in her field that was close to home. The CHS position was the only opening of its kind in the area.

"I was super fortunate to get this job and go back to my own high school program," she says.

Although Cami says it was stressful being only a few years older than her

students at the time, she says it was also a benefit to draw upon her recent education at CHS from a teacher she greatly admired.

Through the years, Cami has continued to hone Steve's legacy. She now boasts one of the most successful and popular ag and FFA programs in the region.

She has about 120 students in five ag classes at CHS. Some earn college credits.

Freshmen begin with agriculture foods and natural resources, which covers a broad scope of food, earth, animal and plant sciences.

If students enjoy learning about plants, they can take horticulture as a sophomore. CHS has a 20-foot-by-60-foot greenhouse where students grow plants and get hands-on experience.

"Every spring we have a plant sale with



**Cami cares for eight sows and two boars at the Clarkston FFA barn as part of the rotational sow program, which is a breeding program involving rotating sows amongst the boars to achieve desired genetic results.**

all of the plants the kids raise, and they enter them in the Asotin County Fair as well,” Cami says. “They’re always winning the top of class and best horticulture display for the plants they enter.”

Another option for sophomores is animal science, which is a lab-intensive class that involves dissections.

For upperclassmen, in addition to animal and plant biotechnology, Cami teaches an ag business class that covers the practical side of agriculture, such as the types of jobs available, sales and service, taxes and life skills.

“Less than 2 percent of the population actually farms and ranches, so there are a lot of other ag-related jobs that support this industry,” Cami says.

Floral design—a non-traditional ag class Cami teaches—qualifies for an art credit. Students learn about the floral industry and how to grow and care for flowers. They create and sell arrangements for the holidays, flowers for homecoming royalty, boutonnieres and corsages for dances, and Christmas wreaths.

Students enrolled in Cami’s agriculture classes complete a supervised agriculture

experience, such as caring for a livestock animal. They also have the opportunity to be involved in FFA, which is the national extracurricular agricultural student leadership organization founded in Kansas City in 1928. Approximately half of Cami’s students chose to participate.

Cami says Clarkston is fortunate because it has a school-owned barn off campus, as well as its own hog barn, grain bins and grinder, shaving storage, tractor, livestock trailer and school-owned herd of pigs.

Built by students in 1980, the FFA barn has 16 pig pens, clipping pens and birthing stalls.

Eight sows and two boars reside at the barn year-round. As part of their supervised agriculture experience, students can care for them, farrow out the sows—assist birthing—and follow the process from start to finish.

Sows average five to 12 babies per litter. Once the babies are born, students can choose a piglet to raise as their own during the school year. They have the option to keep it at the barn, since most don’t have a suitable place at home.

In the process, they learn how to care for the piglets, including weaning, feeding and grooming. They show and sell their pigs at the Asotin County Fair in the spring.

In addition to pigs, there are steers, sheep, goats and a chapter cow/calf project at the barn.

Students are assigned facility maintenance duties throughout the school year and summer.

“The community is very supportive of the kids with those livestock projects,” Cami says. “It’s such a good experience. It teaches them responsibility, time and money management, and that if you put in hard work, you get rewarded in the end.”

Though as many as 60 kids show livestock as part of FFA, it is not required by the program. Other students choose to participate in leadership contests, such as public speaking. This past year, the Conduct of Chapter Meetings team placed in the top 16 in Washington state.

Cami’s FFA students are also asked to participate in community service activities. At Thanksgiving, they “Stock the Trailer” with food donations for the food bank. They host a toy drive for foster children at Christmastime. This year, they held the first Dodging for MS Dodgeball Tournament to raise money for multiple sclerosis—a disease that greatly affected Steve.

Cami says the goal is to create a well-rounded student, so even if they don’t choose a career or hobby in agriculture, they learn why it is important.

“Many people take ag for granted and don’t realize how important and necessary it truly is,” she says.

Spending so much time inside and outside of the classroom with her students has allowed Cami to create close bonds with them, too.

“They’re such good kids,” she says. “They’re fun to be around, and it makes you want to be around them. By the time they graduate, you feel like they’re part of your family.” ■



Long days and hard work are the norm at the Norris Blueberry Farms packing and shipping barn. Many high school and college students covet the jobs.

# A Berry Good Job

*Blueberry producer hires high school and college kids for seasonal work*

**By Craig Reed**

Hiring high school- and college-aged people is now a 20-year tradition at Norris Blueberry Farms.

Paul and Sandy Norris started the farm for several reasons, one of them being to give their own teenage daughters—Amy, Carrie and Ellie—summer work and to expose them to agriculture and different aspects of farming.

The girls, and the friends they could recruit, helped harvest, pack and ship the berries.

The farm has grown to 550 acres of mature blueberry bushes. Putting young people from the area to work has continued through the years. Hundreds have earned paychecks there, working in the fields and in the packing and shipping facility.

This year, 180 seasonal

employees worked during the busiest of weeks from mid-June through July. While some had to leave for school or sports commitments, others remained through August and into September.

“We enjoy working with the youth,” Paul says. “It is what we want to do. We wouldn’t want it any other way. Someday we may have to change it, but it’s working very well right now.”

Unlike when he was young, Paul, 72, says there aren’t many opportunities for today’s youth to experience agriculture and to learn how to work hard. He is pleased his farm can continue to offer such an opportunity and is pleased with the response of the young workers and their commitment.

“The youth who work here are absolutely amazing and resourceful,” Paul says. “They



**Paul and Sandy Norris in the farm's blueberry fields.**

stay with the job until it is done. They learn responsibility. We have orders and we have to get them out. They have to stay with the job until it is done. The young adults know that and they respond very well.”

During the busiest time of harvest from mid-June and into July, the workers put in 10- to 16-hour days.

The young people can be found out in the hot sun weighing, recording and stacking blueberries as pickers bring in the fruit. The packing and shipping barn is full of youth working on the inspection lines where blueberries are sorted, packaged, labeled and stacked on pallets for shipping. On the other side of a wall, workers feed flat cardboard into machines that turn out finished boxes.

Members of the pallet jack crew use manual and electric jacks to bring stacks of empty boxes to the inspection lines and to move pallets of boxed berries into nearby coolers.

A handful of the young workers are certified in forklift

use, operating those machines at one end of the barn to unload pallets of fruit coming from the field and using them at the other end of the barn to load orders into the refrigerated trailers of semitrucks.

The workers begin by earning minimum wage—\$10.50 an hour—their first summer at the farm. They can earn a raise retroactive to their first day on the job if they show energy and enthusiasm in getting their jobs done. The pay for most workers climbs as high as \$16 an hour, based on specific job duties, performance and number of summers worked at the farm.

Paul and daughters Carrie and Ellie, who are now in their late 30s, work in the field and in the barn, guiding the young workforce.

“It’s really been a good place to work,” says Beth Patt, a recent college graduate in her eighth harvest season at the farm. She worked her way up to being a barn manager. “You can make so much money in a short amount of time because

of the hours. If you have a willingness to work, if you work hard for them, they compensate you for that.”

Other than “bucking hay for one day,” Zack Moffitt says he had held no paying job until starting at the Norris farm seven summers ago. He kept returning. This summer, he was the shipping/receiving manager, responsible for working with the fruit broker, truck carriers and drivers, and loading pallets of berries into semitrailers from the seat of a forklift.

“This job will help me with my future,” says Zack, who is a student at Oregon State University. “It will show potential future employers that I’m not against hard work and long hours. I’ve learned a hard work ethic and to get what needs to be done done.”

“It says a lot about the Norrises. They are teaching young kids the value of hard work and what hard work brings them.”

Sterling Colley, a recent Oakland High School graduate, says the farm draws a lot of workers from that school.

“It’s known as a place to make money during the summer,” Sterling says. “They’re good at offering employment to high school kids, and at a relatively high pay compared to fast food work. You have the chance to work hard, develop a work ethic and become a crew leader if you put in the time and energy.”

Braden Kline started working at the farm several years ago while a student at Oakland High.

“The Norrises give us the opportunity to work as much as we can,” he says. “Where else as a young person without any skills can you work, on average, above minimum wage for so many hours a week.”

Braden says his pay from one summer at the farm paid for almost all of his housing for one year while a student at Oregon State University.

Andrew Munsey of Sutherlin worked his first season at the farm this summer. He says this was his first exposure to agriculture. He discovered the process of sorting and packing blueberries was “more sophisticated than people would think.” He says he was thankful for the opportunity to earn some money and would consider returning next summer.

Ellie, now a co-owner and the farm manager, says she wants the farm to continue to hire a young local workforce during harvest.

“It started small with us as kids, but has become a tradition,” she says. “I wouldn’t want it any other way, to see kids in their first adult jobs, to help them with their skills, to watch them evolve into adults.”

“Working with the young people does require so much more attention and assistance, more coaching, how to show up to work on time, how to communicate, how to be a reliable worker. We definitely want to continue this tradition with young people, to help shape the lives of kids in the county. We want to see these kids succeed and to go on to great things.” ■



# A Record-Breaking Birder

*In 2015, Noah Strycker set out to spot more birds in one year than ever done before*

**By Craig Reed**

Noah Strycker had a record year in 2015, spotting 6,042 different bird sightings in one calendar year.

Noah started his record year on a Russian ship in Antarctica, where penguins are plentiful and 24 hours of light in January allow for long hours of viewing.

He then flew 100,514 miles and traveled uncounted miles by car, bus, truck, taxi, motorcycle, bicycle, boat, canoe and raft, visiting 41 countries on all seven continents.

He visited South America, Central America, Mexico, the U.S., Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia and then back to northeastern India, where there is an extremely diverse

population of birds.

Noah's 1,000th sighting was a pied-crested tit-tyrant in Peru in February. Number 2,000 was a shiny honey-creeper in Panama in April, and 3,000 was a tawny pipit in Turkey in June. In August in Tanzania, a mountain gray woodpecker was his 4,000th sighting, and in October in The Philippines he saw a

flame-crowned flowerpecker for number 5,000.

On December 29, a yellow-rumped honeyguide was Noah's 6,000th bird. He saw several other species in that region before the year ended two days later, completing his big year by seeing a silver-breasted broadbill during the afternoon of December 31 and an oriental bay-owl that night.



**Top, a crowned woodnymph Noah spotted in Ecuador in 2015 during his world tour spotting birds. Above, gentoo penguins in Antarctica.**

The American Birding Association tracks of viewing records. Noah's sightings crushed the previous record by about 1,700 bird species.

"For me, birds are fascinating, with beautiful songs, gorgeous colors and interesting behaviors," Noah says. "When you study them, they take you to surprising places, both literally and figuratively. Birding is a journey not just around the world, but through life itself. If that sounds odd, then you can just say I'm a hopeless bird addict."

Noah packed a lifetime of

birding into one intense year. He wrote a daily blog about his trip, describing what he saw and introducing readers to other birders who helped him along the way. After completing his trip, he wrote "Birding Without Borders," a book that detailed his quest.

Noah used eBird, a public-driven bird sighting database, to help him determine in advance where and when to find the most species. He used BirdingPal, a website that connects birders and local birding guides around the world.

In his final blog of 2015, he

writes that there was more to the trip than the birds.

"Of course, it's not all about the numbers," he writes. "The people I met and the landscapes, cultures and communications along the way made this project memorable. I knew I'd see a lot of birds in 2015, but the quest transcended any list of species. Thanks to everyone—in the field and at home—who helped out."

When Noah wasn't traveling between areas, he was up before dawn to be outdoors at daybreak. He was also up many nights, looking for nocturnal birds and writing his blog, which got more than 10,000 visits a day by the end of the year.

"I literally birded every day, all day," Noah says. "I met and birded with hundreds of local birders all around the world. For the most part, birders love to show other birders their home turf. People were very friendly and very helpful. It became a grassroots effort, networking with the local birders."

Noah, 32, who lives east of Creswell in the forested foothills of the Cascade Mountains, has made being a bird addict his livelihood. He is author of three bird books and associate editor for *Birding Magazine*. He has written articles for numerous birding publications, and has been the bird expert and guest speaker on board ship and on shore tours for several small cruises and National Geographic expeditions.

"I never would have predicted making a living from

## 2018—Year of the Bird

This year marks the centennial of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act—an important bird protection law. To recognize and celebrate that act, the National Audubon Society and National Geographic declared 2018 as the "Year of the Bird."

watching birds," Noah says. "It's not really a job. It's a lifestyle. I feel very fortunate to be able to do this. I love it. I never get tired of birds."

Noah first became attracted to birds when he was a fifth-grade student in Eugene. His classroom teacher put a bird feeder with a suction cup on the outside of a window and would stop class every time a new bird came to the feeder.

"I thought that was pretty cool, that there were details to tell these birds apart," says Noah, who soon began to take note of birds around his home.

He was interested enough his parents, Bob Keefer and Lisa Strycker, drove him to the monthly meetings of the Southern Willamette Ornithology Club.

"They were delighted to have a 12-year-old show up," Noah says. "They took me on some field trips. I became a full-on bird nerd."

Bob says Noah has had this single focus for 20 years.

*Continues on page 8*

## Record-Breaking Birder

*Continues from page 5*

“He’s happy to be birding every day,” Bob says.

Noah graduated from South Eugene High School in 2003. For the next year, he volunteered and worked on bird research projects, including helping at the visitor center at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge south of Burns.

In 2004, he enrolled at Oregon State University in Corvallis. Four years later, he graduated with a degree in fisheries and wildlife science and a minor in fine art.

Despite his degree, he admits with a laugh he doesn’t know much about fish because his specialty is birds.

After graduation, Noah worked as a seasonal field biologist, mostly in remote places. He spent three months as an intern with two researchers camped out in Antarctica with about 300,000 adelic penguins. Researchers put GPS tags on the penguins and studied their movements.

He blogged about that experience and was encouraged to write a book about the trip by Oregon State University Press editor Mary Braun who read the blogs. Noah wrote “Among Penguins,” a narrative-style book with color photos that detailed his adventure and experiences of a summer in Antarctica.

That book was well enough received that Noah began work on another book. “The Things With Feathers” detailed his experiences from



**Above, Noah near Denpasar, Bali, with his spotting scope in search of birds. Left, Noah on the unique transportation system in La Brujita, Colombia.**

other research projects and travels. Released in 2014, it was on the New York Times Best Seller list in the Animal Division, was a New York Times Editor’s Choice, and was translated into several languages and distributed internationally.

The success of those two books led to Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing

Co. offering Noah an advance to make a year-long global birding trip and writing a book about it. The concept was approved and agreed upon in August 2014. After a lot of research, making travel plans and networking with birders around the world, Noah was back in Antarctica to start viewing and counting at 12:01 a.m. January 1, 2015.

Each of his eventual 6,042 bird sightings was witnessed by at least one other birder.

“Birding Without Borders” was released in 2017. A paperback version was recently released.

Noah’s one-year birding record did not last long. A birder from The Netherlands toured the world in 2016 and had 6,833 sightings.

Noah says records are made to be broken, and he may give it a try in a coming year.

“I missed 4,000 species of birds on my trip because there are well over 10,000 species,” he says. “I may just have to go back and look for the rest—although I don’t think it is possible to see them all.” ■

# Warmed With Wild Rags

*Young entrepreneur sells scarves, skulls and photos*

By Dianna Troyer

Brainstorming about a donation for a church charity, Bonnie Boden unknowingly launched her part-time business two years ago.

"I remembered the wild rag I wore growing up, so I sewed three for a youth auction," says Bonnie, 19.

Nicknamed a wild rag, her large square neckerchief banished the cold while she worked on the family ranch near Elba.

"If your neck is warm in winter when you're doing chores, it feels like your whole body is warm," Bonnie says. "My mom had an old serger and showed me how to use it. People bought the three I made and started ordering more."

Her mom, Lorelee, says Bonnie does a better job than she ever did with the machine, which stitches a secure edge while simultaneously trimming excess cloth.

"She's a perfectionist and somehow uses just a yardstick and a marker to cut a perfect square," Lorelee says. "She has a knack for picking fabric people will like, too."

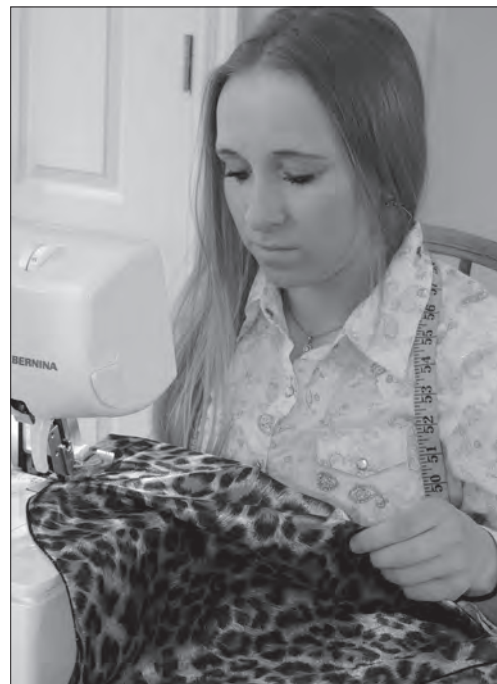
Instead of traditional plain-colored cloth, Bonnie picks washable silk, rayon and polyester blends in flamboyant prints: leopard, baseball-sized polka dots, paisley and floral.

"People like the wild colors and unusual prints," Bonnie says. "I never thought some cowboys would love polka dots, but they do. I've done custom orders with certain fabrics, too."

Since her donation, Bonnie has made hundreds of wild rags and sold them at county fairs, rodeos, holiday craft shows, and through Facebook and Instagram at Bonnie's Wild Rags.

"Cowboys like the larger sizes, 45 or 60 inches," she says. "Women tend to buy the 36-inch ones. I've sewn smaller ones for children, too."

Bonnie's wild rags soon led her to making home decor. To spruce up her booth with a touch of the Old West, Bonnie displayed a bleached cow skull she decorated. She also hung large photos of her cowboy neighbors wearing her wild rags while riding the range to check on cattle.



**Bonnie Boden sews a leopard print wild rag. Customers prefer vibrant colors and patterns. Bonnie accepts customer orders for scarves and decorated animal skulls.**

"I never thought of selling the skulls and photos, but people started buying them, too," Bonnie says. "For their yards or flower gardens, they like skulls with a light brown, antique stain and barbed wire around the horns. For inside, they like ones that are painted or have turquoise or other gems glued on."

Sun-bleached cattle and wildlife skulls were popularized as home décor in the 1930s when Southwest artist Georgia O'Keeffe saw their intrinsic beauty and began painting them.

To learn to process and decorate the skulls, Bonnie watched YouTube videos. Then she converted her childhood playhouse into her studio.

"When I need a break from sewing and being indoors, I'll come out here and work with the skulls," says Bonnie, who devotes time to her business in the afternoon or evening after her chores are done.

Bonnie sewed her wild rags while earning her veterinary technician certification during



**To Bonnie's surprise, customers were interested in buying photos used to promote her wild rags.**



a year-long program at Utah State University in Logan.

“When I was done with classes and studying, I’d sew in the evenings to relax,” she says. “I’ve always liked working with my hands and making things.”

In a town near Logan, Bonnie found a meat processing plant and bought skulls.

“They still call me when they have ones with the horns still on,” she says.

Bonnie browsed fabric stores in northern Utah for unique cloth.

She says the scarves and skulls have kept her too busy to look for work as a vet technician, but she applies her coursework to care for the family’s cattle, horses and dogs.

“When I do chores, I wear some of my favorite wild rags,” Bonnie says. “I saved some, too, for dressy occasions.”

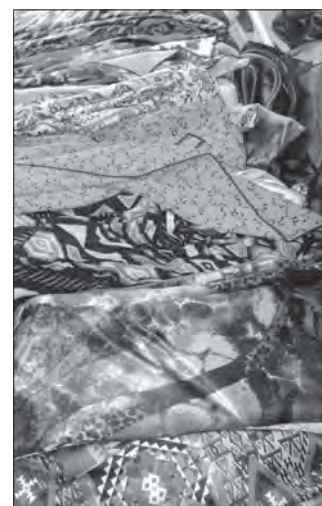
Although busy with a holiday craft show season this fall, Bonnie says she plans to finish



a family project in her spare time.

“My brother bought me a longhorn skull, so I’ll decorate that for inside the house and paint our family brand on it,” she says. “I’ve been blessed to do what I enjoy and see others appreciate what I make.” ■

**Bonnie wears one of her wild rags as she holds a longhorn skull she plans to decorate for her family. At left, a skull Bonnie decorated in a geometric pattern. Below, wild rags come in all sorts of colors and prints.**





Above, Gary and Sylvia Groce stand in the front yard with their fully restored 26-ton caboose. "It's just fun, a piece of history," Gary says.

Above right, long before the caboose was restored to an artful piece of the past, it was a junkyard mess of graffiti and trash.

Photo courtesy of the Groces

# All Aboard!

*A piece of the past finds a new home*

By Drew Myron

Some take pride in their manicured yard, others in a bountiful garden. Gary and Sylvia Groce enjoy a massive lawn ornament: a 26-ton red caboose.

Blending family history with quirky novelty, their Pine Grove home boasts a fully restored caboose parked on railroad track.

For Gary, the caboose is a reminder of his heritage and a wistful nod to the past.

"It's just fun, a piece of history," he says. "When you're a kid you count the train cars, and you always look for the red caboose."

Gary's grandfather, George Long, was an engineer for Southern Pacific Railroad Co. He worked in Portland for 47 years, with his last run in 1958. George's daughter—Gary's mother—adored trains.

"Her fondest memories were being around trains," Gary says. "She dreamed of putting her own caboose on their land."

Gary inherited his mother's love of trains.

"I would tell Sylvia this story all the time, of the caboose that never happened," he says.

In 2010, Sylvia—a phlebotomist and part-time real estate agent who has a knack for finding unique houses and cars—was glancing through the classified ads when she spotted a doozy: "For sale, railroad caboose, \$8,500."

The Burlington Northern car was in Monroe and in bad shape. Tagged with graffiti inside and out, it was full of trash, reeked of creosote and diesel, and the toilet was full of waste.

Sylvia and Gary were grateful that many of the original





**The caboose is now a blend of vintage charm and lodging comfort.**

components remained intact: a conductor's desk, overhead grab bars, hardwood floors and lights. The possibilities were clear.

"We were used to restoring houses that were really trashed," says Gary, who works as office coordinator for nuclear medicine at Providence Hospital. He was undaunted by the challenge.

Invigorated with a dream come true, the couple bought the massive caboose and arranged for delivery.

The road home, however, was pocked with pitfalls. The Groces' train car endured a tough journey before making its way to its new home in the Hood River Valley.

Drivers removed the caboose body from the wheels, and transported the heavy load across the state with semi-trucks. Overpass and clearance issues went smoothly, and all was well until they arrived at the couple's long, steep, winding, gravel driveway.

"At the bottom of the hill they got stumped," Gary says. "They were out there for over an hour figuring it out."

Soon it was pitch dark. Critical to the mission was Dave Couch, a local excavator who talked the reluctant drivers into the move and navigated transport up the hill.

"It was tough and go," Gary says of the long haul up the quarter-mile driveway with a 10 percent grade. "The caboose leaned over, wheels were on edge."

"You heard a lot of screeching," Sylvia says.

When the crew finally made it to the flat landing, a crane was used to lift and set 33 feet of railroad track bought from Mount Hood Railroad that the caboose was set upon.

"It's precise work," Gary says.

"You've got one chance to get it right," Sylvia adds.

Getting the train home was the first step. Restoration took a crew of men nearly one year to complete. Today, the renovated



**A caboose historically served as an office for the conductor.**

caboose gleams as both art and artifact.

Historically, a caboose provided shelter at the rear of the train where the crew could exit to inspect the train for shifting loads, broken equipment or hot boxes—overheating that can lead to derailment. The caboose also served as an office for the conductor, with the cupola as a lookout. Conductors typically personalized their cars with curtains, family photos and posters.

Caboose were first used in the 1830s. They were part of every freight train until the 1980s when safety and monitoring technology improved, and fewer crew and cabooses were needed. Now, cabooses are used only on rail maintenance, hazardous materials trains or tourist railroads.

Gary and Sylvia are not certain of their caboose's heritage, but estimate it hails from the late 1960s.

The Groces repainted the car to reflect railroad history. The caboose was originally a yellow and green Burlington Northern Railroad car. BN merged with Great Northern Railway, and later merged again to become Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway.

The couple recreated a classic caboose's vintage charm, keeping the conductor's desk, turning the cupola into sleeping bunks, and adding decorative touches with curtains, blankets, and black-and-white photos of Gary's family and their train life.

Fresh and bright, the red caboose now serves as a comfy getaway for friends and family—and for Gary, who often snuggles into the comfy caboose and listens to the original two-way radio as it broadcasts train activity.

"I love to go out in the winter, fire up the wood stove, hear the rain on the roof and listen to the dispatcher talking to the engineers," Gary says. "It's a lot of chatter and joking. I get a kick out of listening to people work a job that my grandfather used to do." ■

## Hangin' on for a Wild Ride

*Mutton busting is one of the most popular events during the Harney County Fair*

By Lauren Brown

In some communities, putting a young child on the back of a sheep to see how long they can stay on would be the definition of insanity. In Harney County, it's a rite of passage.

Mutton busting takes place before the rodeo events begin at the Harney County Fair, held the first week in September. Each year, 40 to 60 kids who weigh less than 50 pounds are scored as they attempt to hang on to the back of a sheep doing its darnedest to shake the load.

Mutton busting is run by volunteers Sharla and Dave Calkins. Jim Shepherd provides the sheep.

Sharla takes signups while Dave helps kids get on the ewe before they are released into the arena. He runs alongside the smallest kids.

"There are lots of tears and lots of laughter," Sharla says.

The process starts the Friday of fair week when Sharla, Dave and Jim select the sheep to be used. They choose bigger sheep weighing 150 to 180 pounds apiece and have a little wool on them so the kids have something to hang on to.

After the Saturday parade, the sheep are taken to the fairgrounds and placed in the pen behind the bucking chutes.

Sharla asks that parents sign up their kids beforehand, although there are usually

some last-minute signups, too. The fun starts each day after the opening ceremonies.

"It's the best event of the entire rodeo," Jim says.

Kids are called up in the order they signed up. Some kids opt out as soon as their name is called. Sometimes Sharla shifts the order so an older child with some experience goes first, giving the younger kids a chance to see how it's done.

The kids are scored on a scale of 0 to 100 by the rodeo announcer, who takes into account the age of the child, the length of the ride, and the grit and determination exhibited. The child with the highest score wins a prize, usually a belt buckle.

Sometimes, Sharla allows kids to come back the next day to ride again, but only the first score counts in the competition.

"A lot of the kids really want to go again," she says. "Some of them don't ever want to go again."

Years ago, Charley Otley started a tradition of giving each child a dollar bill—regardless of how well they did—as they walked out of the arena. The thought is that no matter how badly it goes, if the youngster gets a dollar on the way out, things end on a positive note.

In Charley's memory, Beau Carlin has continued the tradition.



**Dave and Sharla Calkins have helped organize mutton busting at the Harney County Fair for several years.**

Photo courtesy of Sharla Calkins

"They stand out in the arena when the kid starts walking back with their parents, and sometimes the kids are crying," Jim says. "Beau gives them a dollar and they feel better right away."

In general, Jim thinks girls are the best riders.

"They have less fear," he says. "The boys are scared."

Jim says the best ride he ever saw was years ago when mutton busting took place at night. The rider was a member of the McKay family.

"She rode that thing backwards, and I can clearly remember her disappearing into a dark corner of the arena," Jim says. "Pretty soon she comes back out of the dark, still stuck on that lamb. That was the best ride."

Sharla and Dave's grown daughter, Whitney Garo, was 10 or 11 years old when she first started helping her folks with mutton busting. The sheep often need a push to get out of the chute. That was one of Whitney's jobs.



**Left, riders often come with their own helmets to protect their heads.**

Photo courtesy of the Burns Times-Herald

**Below left, Levi Gregg gets a face full of arena dirt as he falls off his sheep during the mutton-busting event.**

Photo courtesy of the Burns Times-Herald

**Bottom right, children cheer each other on at the Harney County Fair.**

Photo courtesy of Sharla Calkins



“They are stubborn,” she says.

Asked if she ever did mutton busting as a child, Whitney nods.

“I think I remember being traumatized,” she says with a laugh. “It’s a blocked memory.”

Whitney says it is fun to watch the kids strategize how to stay on. Some who grow up on ranches take it seriously. They wear chaps and cowboy

hats and come with a plan as to how they will hang on—perhaps by riding backwards or by hanging on a certain way.

Dave and Sharla note that while no one has ever been seriously hurt, more and more kids bring helmets to wear for the event.

“They might get a bruise or a cut,” Jim says. “There might be a little blood once in a while, but not any more

than they would just playing outside normally.”

As for the sheep, Jim says participating in mutton busting is a break from their routine.

“Sheep are pretty smart,” he says, “but it takes them four or five days to get their brain straightened out after mutton busting.”

To make sure the sheep don’t get too strained from the event, they try to use a

different set of sheep each year.

Jim says while parents are in the rodeo arena among the dust and dirt stressing about their child’s ride, grandparents are often in the stands enjoying the process.

“We just make a lot of grandmas and grandpas happy,” he says. “It’s a fun thing to do for the community because it makes everybody smile.” ■

# Following the Samaritan's Lead

*Church members put faith in action, helping rebuild homes in Houston*

By Dianna Troyer

Despite having no experience applying perfatape to sheetrock or laying tile, Tracy Haskin and Pam Trost were qualified to help repair homes ravaged during Hurricane Harvey a year ago.

“The only requirement is that you’re in good health and are a follower of Jesus Christ,” says Tracy, 57, who helped perfatape a home with her husband, Mike, 59.

Pam laid tile with her husband, Ken.

“Whatever assignment you were given, you learned fast,” she says.

Supervisors teach volunteers how to use nail guns, different types of saws and other tools needed to get the job done.

Tracy and Pam were among 13 parishioners from Hope Community Church in Paul who volunteered for a week in January to rebuild homes



**A Houston homeowner, George, wades through floodwaters in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey.**

for four hurricane survivors in the Houston area. Other local volunteers were Rob and Cindy Danielson, Jeff and Helen McClure, Ron and Pat Stiles, Marcella Bean, Jennifer Simcoe and Tom Boes.

“This was such a step of faith for our small congregation of about 50 people, to send 13 of its members to serve in Jesus’ name,” Tracy says. “The average age was probably around 63 or so, and many endured illness while on the mission, but they didn’t let it slow them down. This was no small feat.”

Tracy, Pam and other volunteers hope to return soon.

Work was organized through Samaritan’s Purse—a nondenominational, nonprofit evangelical Christian organization that provides spiritual and physical aid to victims of natural disaster, war and poverty worldwide. Volunteers

pay for transportation to reach a worksite, but are provided food and lodging.

The organization is named after the Samaritan lauded by Jesus in the Bible.

“Jesus told hearers to ‘go and do likewise,’” according to the organization’s website.

Samaritan’s Purse President Franklin Graham, son of the late evangelist Billy Graham, encourages volunteers to help people like the Samaritan did in the Bible.

“For us, the work was about the homeowner, not the home,” says Tracy. “We were there to work in the name of Jesus.”

When they arrived, volunteers were told it would take about another year to repair or rebuild homes and other buildings. Hurricane Harvey devastated southeastern Texas in August 2017, leaving behind a \$125 billion swath of damage.

Listening to residents’ stories of devastation was emotionally exhausting for volunteers, who found the reconstruction work rewarding.

“We heard sad stories about what they endured with the flooding,” Tracy says. “Some were told to evacuate at 2 a.m. Their homes became filled with snakes, rats and turtles.”

Dishonest contractors took homeowners’ money and never returned to do work, while others charged exorbitant prices.

With private donations, Samaritan’s Purse charged nothing for materials and labor needed to repair or



**Jennifer Simcoe and Pat Stiles lay tile during a disaster recovery trip to Houston. They were among 13 parishioners from the small church in Paul to volunteer through Samaritan’s Purse.**

Photos courtesy of Hope Community Church



**Tracy and Mike Haskin have lunch with Miss Pearl, whose house they repaired.**

replace homes.

Tracy says she will never forget the gratitude and hospitality of Miss Pearl, a homeowner she helped.

"She and her family lived in a 500-square-foot house she called her baby house because she had been born there," Tracy says. "She'd lived there 56 years, and all she asked for was some nails and paint. She received a completely rebuilt home for free.

For the first time in her life, the house was fitted with ductwork so she could have heating and air conditioning. She fed us every day."

At Pam's worksite, the homeowner, George, inspired volunteers.

"He was filled with God's love and optimism despite what happened to him and his family," Pam says.

In one photo shortly after Harvey hit, water lapped

halfway up George's living room windows as he waded knee-deep in floodwaters.

Pam says she and her husband wondered if they were physically fit enough to lay tile, working on their hands and knees for a week.

"I'm 69 and my husband is 73, and by the grace of God we helped tile a four-bedroom, two-bathroom house," Pam says, grinning.

Before local volunteers

arrived in January, others had removed mud and debris from structures.

"Samaritan's Purse is awesome and organizes volunteers efficiently," Tracy says. "They stay for the long term, until the work is done."

Before volunteering in Texas, Tracy worked with Samaritan's Purse helping tornado victims in Oklahoma and removing debris after flooding in Colorado.

She heard about the organization because her church participates in Operation Christmas Child, a Samaritan's Purse project. Items are placed in shoeboxes and shipped to needy children during the holidays.

"I was reading their website and realized they provided natural disaster relief, too," she says. "I'd been feeling a prompting from God to help people who were being affected by natural disasters and to serve him more. When I told my husband and employer, they were supportive."

In 2012, she quit her job at the accounting firm of Condie-Stoker in Rupert and has been volunteering with Samaritan's Purse and local organizations.

At disaster sites, volunteers come from diverse careers and range in age from teens to retirees.

"Whatever our backgrounds, we're all there because we want to follow Jesus' example and be his hands and feet in our world," Tracy says. ■



American Legion Post Commander Campbell Gardett, right, and Rick Hanni, 1st vice commander, identify soldiers in a World War II parade.

# Honoring the Valley's Veterans

*American Legion members dedicate honor roll and rename hall as a community center*

By Dianna Troyer

A century after his death, Pvt. Joe Nowacki's legacy stretches 5,000 miles from his grave in France to the Lost River Valley where he was born.

As a tribute to Joe—the valley's first veteran war casualty—and other local veterans, their names are being listed on an honor roll wall at the Joe Nowacki American Legion Post No. 16 in Mackay.

"We're listing the names of all veterans with a Mackay-area connection, living as well as deceased," says Campbell Gardett, 71, post commander. "The honor roll isn't just for those who died in service,

although those will be specially noted."

The wall will be dedicated during a ceremony Saturday, October 13.

"The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C., is the inspiration for our wall," Campbell says. "People relate to it so much. The wall is a silent and powerful testament to veterans."

Campbell visited the wall numerous times while working in D.C. as news director of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. After retiring and moving to Chilly Buttes in 2008, he envisioned a similar wall at the local post.

"In the end, it's the people who count," Campbell says. "It's important to formally

recognize their service in the armed forces."

Campbell served in the U.S. Army from 1970 to 1972. He was assigned to start and edit a newspaper attached to the Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas.

To create the wall, Campbell relied on lists from Sharron Larter Akers and the late Judy Malkiewicz. He also asked local residents to provide names with veterans' branch and time of service.

"We started with about 500 names," he says. "By late August, we had about 600. We're including those who have lived here, plus members of Post 16 from Arco



**Clockwise from above, Lost River Valley soldiers march in a parade before being deployed during World War I. Joe Nowacki was Lost River Valley's first service member killed in action during WWI. Campbell updates the honor roll list of veterans from the valley.**

*Top and right photos courtesy of South Custer Historical Society*

They will commemorate the centennial of the Armistice on November 11, when World War I ended. Members will celebrate the American Legion's establishment in Paris on March 15, 1919.

"Those centennials are a time for us to look forward and back," Campbell says.

Mackay resident and World War II veteran Hershel Ivie, 94, served from 1943 to 1945 in Europe as a paratrooper and sergeant over a machine gun crew with the 507th Regiment attached to the 82nd Airborne Division.

He recalls the gratitude he felt while celebrating his first Thanksgiving meal after returning home.

Wanting to make his family understand the trauma of war, he placed five kernels of corn on his family members' plates before they ate.

"I told them this was what you would have eaten if you were in a war-torn nation," Hershel says.

He says the local Legion post is vital to veterans.

"At veterans' funerals, members pay their respects during graveside services with the flag ceremony, playing taps and a gun salute," he says. "It's an important and appreciated service." ■

*To provide information about a veteran for the honor roll, send an email to [mackaylegionpost@gmail.com](mailto:mackaylegionpost@gmail.com) or call (208) 721-7900.*

and beyond."

The list's timeline ranges from the Civil War to recent wars in the Middle East. Among the post's 56 members are three World War II veterans: Hershel Ivie, Richard Dean and Gordon Harris.

Along with dedicating the honor roll wall, ceremony participants will re-name the post the Joe Nowacki Memorial Hall and Community Center.

"We want to recognize the hall's importance as our town's de facto community center," Campbell says. "The post building is not just for veterans, but for the whole community."

The hall already hosts a quilting club, Girl Scout troop, a monthly community dinner, family reunions, funeral dinners, civic events during elections and informational meetings.

"We'd like to see people use the hall even more," Campbell says.

When 22 members established the

Legion post May 5, 1927, they chose to name it for Joe Nowacki, whose parents had emigrated from Poland and settled in Houston in 1886.

Joe, 24, died October 16, 1918, in France, less than a month before World War I ended. He was defending a hospital from German artillery.

"Joe received a shell shock," John Lehman recalled in a newspaper article written after John returned home to Barton Flat. "We were together during the fighting. He and another man were carrying their wounded lieutenant to the hospital when Joe suddenly fell from the shock he had received and was paralyzed. We carried him to the field hospital where he died."

Joe is buried in the St. Mihiel American Cemetery in Thiaucourt, France. The anniversary of his death is a precursor to other centennial ceremonies for Legion members.



John Tenny finds giving away his homemade bread makes him happy.

# Warm Bread, Warm Heart

*The Renegade Baker mixes up batches of love and kindness, and gives it away*

**By Denise Porter**

Since 2016, John Tenny has made and given away more than 900 loaves of bread in honor of his late wife.

“I’m the Renegade Baker,” he tells people, “and you are a good person and you deserve a loaf of bread.”

Often his kindness startles people. At times, it moves them to tears, John says.

When Sue Tenny was diagnosed with an aggressive form of lung cancer in December 2015, after being sick for more than a year, John was determined her last days would be as she wished them to be: at

their Pacific City home being cared for by him.

To the end, Sue was as she had always been: cheerful and uncomplaining, John says.

“She gave no mention of pain,” he says.

Sue died holding John’s hand. He told her he loved her. Her last words to him were simply, “I love you, too.”

Sue was known for her giving heart. One time, while she and John were stuck in construction traffic, he recalls Sue rolling down the window and offering one of the workers a piece of chocolate.

“The man got tears in his eyes,” John recalls. “He

said, ‘People never notice me. They don’t see me as a person.’”

From time to time Sue began to hand chocolates to strangers. John says he watched and realized, “It really did make people feel better—to be recognized, stranger to stranger like that.”

After Sue’s death, John began to sort through his grief. He wondered how he could pay tribute to his wife in a meaningful way. John determined it was her giving heart he wished to commemorate.

John had dabbled at times in making beer and wines at

home, and had become quite adept at making bread.

In the summer of 2018, he began giving loaves of bread to strangers. He says he knew this was the right fit for honoring Sue because he could see the impact it had on people.

John calls himself the Renegade Baker because he tends to question tried-and-true practices in nearly every aspect of his life.

For example, he learned late in life he was dyslexic. He had always done poorly in high school. In fact, he had flunked out of college when he met Sue.



Above, a batch of finished bread ready to be given away. Right, John keeps homemade starter in his refrigerator and replenishes it as needed.



After the couple's two daughters were born and he was volunteering in their school, he felt called to become a teacher. He re-enrolled in college and met a woman at the student assistance classroom at Illinois State University who showed him "how to properly study for my brain to learn."

He began questioning how to help people with similar learning struggles.

John earned two master's degrees and eventually became director of the Graduate School of Education at Willamette University in Salem.

His professional career became centered on questioning tried-and-true learning styles, developing curriculum practices that deviated from the status quo to teach others how to learn.

In his kitchen, John questions practices that seem to be handed down through generations. Why does yeast bread

have to be kneaded? He found it doesn't. Why does bread need to bake in an already hot oven? Again, he found it wasn't necessary.

"I don't like, 'Here's the rule, follow it,'" John says. "I don't want to just accept. I have to test things for myself."

He says bread making can be easy. He has developed a simple recipe he happily shares with others.

"I only ask that they share a loaf of bread," John says.

John teaches classes and workshops on bread making.

He says he has no criteria for his beneficiaries. Every loaf he gives away is in a white paper bag, and includes a story about Sue.

He gives loaves to pedestrians, friends and sometimes homeless people.—"not because they are homeless, to be clear," John says, "but because they are human and

## The Renegade Baker's No-Knead Bread

### Starter

1 cup water

1 cup flour

1 teaspoon yeast

Mix and leave on the counter for two hours, then store, covered, in the refrigerator for months at a time. To refill, add equal parts flour and water and leave on the counter for an hour after replenishing. Then put back in the refrigerator.

### Ingredients

½ teaspoon rapid rise yeast or ¼ cup starter, or both

3 cups white flour (regular or bread flour)

1.5 cups water (if using bread flour, add additional 2 tablespoons)

1.5 teaspoon salt

In a big bowl, mix flour, yeast and/or starter and salt. Add cold water. Stir with a spatula or spoon until flour is moist. Results should be sticky, wet dough and the flour moistened. Add a touch of water if too dry. The wetter the mix, the bigger the holes in the bread.

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap or a shower cap. Leave at room temperature 8 to 18 hours. It is best to mix late afternoon/early evening to bake the next morning. Longer is better. After rising, the mixture will be near the top of the bowl and full of bubbles. It is very sticky.

Spray a bread pan with nonstick spray. Using a spatula, scrape and pour the mixture into the baking pan.

Put into a cold oven and bake at 375 degrees for approximately 55 minutes. Your oven may be slightly different. Adjust cooking time depending on outcome.

Remove from baking pan and put on cooling rack. Wait 15 minutes, then slice and enjoy.

everyone deserves fresh bread."

John says one of the most surprising benefits he is discovered in giving to others in Sue's name has been the warmth he receives back as a result of seeing happy faces.

"People ask, 'Why do you do this?'" he says.

First, he is honoring Sue.

Second, "I get everything I need by giving," John says. "I'm in a spot that I don't need money. I give bread, I have time and it makes people happy. That makes me happy." ■

Find John on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/BakerManJohn](http://www.facebook.com/BakerManJohn), or email him at [john10ey@me.com](mailto:john10ey@me.com).

**Mt. Wheeler Power Cooperative's crew works hard to provide members/consumers with affordable, reliable electricity—and to respond quickly to any interruptions in service.**

Photo by IBEW Local 1245



## Why Question 3 is Bad for Mt. Wheeler Power Members

By Christina Sawyer

If Question 3 passes during the general election on November 6, Mt. Wheeler Power Cooperative, as you know it, will cease to exist. This constitutional amendment has the power to change everything.

Question 3 is intended to enable consumers to choose their electricity provider, giving them “a meaningful choice” of electricity providers. As an amendment to the Nevada Constitution, it will require Nevada Legislature to enact the laws to protect consumers by July 1, 2023.

Question 3 has been wrongly labeled as deregulation. Creating a competitive retail electric market is not deregulation.

More accurately, it is reregulation. New regulations to protect consumers in this competitive market, to ensure generating capacity to meet consumer needs, will fall to the Nevada Bureau of Consumer

### Please Exercise Your Right and Responsibility to Vote

Question 3 has given Nevada voters a tremendous responsibility. Regardless of your stand on the issue, we encourage you to take advantage of your right to vote. Early voting begins October 20, with the general election on Tuesday, November 6.

Protection and the Public Utilities Commission. The PUCN reports it will incur \$4.4 million in new costs to regulate the new retail market.

Question 3 comes at a high cost—more than \$100 million in new startup costs and \$45 million in new annual operation and maintenance costs. Proponents claim your power cost will

go down, but that's not likely. More accurately, your power rates will rise in this competitive, profit-motivated culture.

“Mt. Wheeler Power's cooperative business model will change, likely becoming a poles-and-wires company,” says Kevin Robison, Mt. Wheeler Power CEO. “This will likely come at a cost of \$56 per month.”

This cost for residential service will be billed to member/consumers in addition to the cost for their use of electricity.

While competitive retail markets are intended to increase possibilities and lower costs, it won't work for Mt. Wheeler Power members or other rural communities such as ours because it is unlikely open-for-profit electric energy providers will be interested in serving our members/consumers.

Remember, the primary reason Mt. Wheeler Power was formed was because

# NO on 3

## RISKY & COSTLY

private, investor-owned utilities were not interested in serving so few consumers across such a large service area because it wasn't profitable. Rural Nevada is difficult to reach and expensive to serve.

In addition, it has been proven certain populations—including the elderly and low-income households—are incredibly vulnerable in an open-for-profit market.

"For our members, the cooperative is choice," Kevin says.

No other attempt to establish a competitive retail electric market has ever used a constitutional amendment to terminate the current system of energy supply. If Nevadans want to make changes to the amendment, it could take up to six years. If Question 3 passes, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to return to the way things are today.

Your cooperative is governed by board members elected by you and others living in the district. Mt. Wheeler Power members/consumers will lose democratic control. The PUCN will

become the jurisdictional authority.

Your board members work hard to establish contracts to ensure power delivery to members at cost. Private corporations owned by shareholders operate with the intent to return profits to shareholders.

If Question 3 passes, it will be the responsibility of the PUCN to set rates, determine service coverages and work to resolve customers complaints—essentially taking on the role of your board of directors. You can expect the speed and responsiveness in addressing members' concerns to diminish.

Mt. Wheeler Power has earned a reputation for providing affordable, reliable electricity to its members/consumers, all of which is at risk if Question 3 passes.

The PUCN report determined the Energy Choice Initiative will cost Nevada billions and could cost the state many good-paying jobs and ultimately eliminate what Mt. Wheeler Power cooperative has built and provided to our rural community.

Mt. Wheeler Power's rural area has

come a long way in the past 50 years. Question 3 would set Nevada back in advancements made in rural areas.

The potential for serious member/consumer health and safety concerns is high due to the probability of rolling blackouts, extended weather-related outages and unreliable service.

It will be left up to the voters to say No on Question 3 to preserve one of the most reliable and affordable electricity systems in the nation.

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world," Nelson Mandela said.

When contemplating your vote this fall, consider that implementation of this constitutional change will be left to the state legislature and the courts, resulting in years of complicated lawsuits, yielding unpredictable results and costs. Question 3's wording is vague and provides no clear plan or details on how the "new" system would function. ■

*For more information, visit the Coalition to Defeat Question 3 at [www.NoOn3.com](http://www.NoOn3.com).*

## Mizpah Hotel Evokes Memories of Silver Rush

*Tonopah landmark source of eerie stories*

By Vern Hee

Chris McCormick was sound asleep at the Mizpah Hotel in Tonopah. He was awakened by laughter and giggling in the hallway at 3:30 a.m. He got up quickly and ran to the door, but before he could open it, the noise stopped as suddenly as it began. He got back under the covers, and he heard kids playing again. Angry, he ran to the door again and out into the hall, hoping to catch them in the act. The hall was empty and quiet.

Mizpah Hotel Marketing and Sales Manager Tracy McCormick insists her son's experience is not uncommon.

Chris wasn't a believer when he checked in but then called his mother the next day and says, "One, I am now a believer and two, if you get any complaints about a man running around the hallway in his boxers, that was me."

Tracy can't guarantee an experience like her son had, but guests flock to the hotel to hear the stories.

"I love to share the hotel, and I love sharing the historical facts along with experiences that I have had

or guests have had," Tracy says. "I love it, and I love the guests, and you can't help but love this hotel."

The people that go on her tour don't necessarily believe in spirits but take the tour looking for adventure or an experience to write home about. The idea of "ghosties" running around in a hotel may be unsettling to some, but the Mizpah tries to make it fun for believers and non-believers.

Tracy is a believer in spirits, but she has fun with it. The hotel is haunted, she says, with "good-natured" spirits.

Tracy recalls a time when the spirits seemed highly active. The hotel was full of guests from the Daughters of the American Revolution. Almost everyone had signed up for the ghost walk. The tour had gone well as it traveled through the fifth floor where the hotel's most famous ghost, The Lady in Red, was killed by her jealous boyfriend in 1914.

When the tour reached the basement, Tracy told the story about the three miners. She explained, that these miners had tried to rob the bank



**The Mizpah was built in 1907 in Tonopah during the silver rush.**

Photos by Jeff Scheid

vault in the basement of the hotel. One miner wanted all the money for himself, and he killed his fellow conspirators, who are said to haunt the hotel basement.

After Tracy finished her story, everyone on the tour started taking photos. Then people just stopped, and a man said his camera was still taking pictures by itself. In all, 10 others said the same thing. But the photos were white.

Tracy's husband, John McCormick, General Manager of the Mizpah, has a different perspective. To him, the property is a beautifully restored 111-year-old

hotel with old-world charm, but with all the modern amenities.

"He thinks I'm a whacka-doo," Tracy says. "Of course he says this lovingly. John has been in the hotel business for more than 38 years and has worked all across the United States. He views the Mizpah as a perfect combination of hotel and history and leaves the spirits to me."

According to John, the Mizpah was built by four businessmen in 1907 as the town's population increased dramatically during the silver rush. Its population grew



**Joe Sidman, Mizpah Maintenance Manager, shares a ghost story while on the fifth floor of the Mizpah Hotel.**

to 10,000 at one point, four times what it is today, and the Mizpah was the center of activity.

Named after the Mizpah Mine, construction on the hotel was supposed to begin in 1906, but it was delayed because of the earthquake in San Francisco. Construction crews were pulled off to rebuild that city. Finally, the cornerstone was laid in 1907 and the hotel was finished in 1908.

The hotel has had its ups and downs over the years, changing hands numerous times. The hotel actually closed from 1999 until 2011. That's when Californians Fred and Nancy Cline bought the hotel, and it has been operated ever since as an independent hotel.

The couple had all the rooms refurbished with new beds, and modern

conveniences. The Clines tried to keep as much of the period furnishings and the hotel as original as possible.

"The bar is actually from the 1950s," he says. "The furniture is not 1907, but 1970s."

The hotel struggled with sub-par wifi service until Valley Communications installed fiber-optic service a few months ago, exorcising any ghosts on the Internet.

John knows that regardless of what he thinks, he can't overlook the intense interest in the hotel's paranormal history. Even some businessmen enjoy its history. The hotel front desk even has a binder filled with photos and ghost stories from guests that experienced something during their stay.

"We definitely do emphasize the ghost hunting," he says. "It is not our only thing, but it is history. There are a



**Owners Fred and Nancy Cline tried to keep as much of the period furnishings and the hotel as original as possible.**



**While ghost stories draw some visitors, most guests take advantage of Tonopah being the halfway point between Reno and Las Vegas, says John McCormick, General Manager.**

lot of ghost stories here, and there is a niche market for it, and people are still interested in it."

The market for the Mizpah is "very eclectic." It's not all ghost hunters. It is mostly comprised of people traveling north from Las Vegas and south from Reno and San Francisco. The hotel just happens to be midway for many tourists. The hotel also still draws corporate

guests involved in the mining industry.

In the end, Tracy and John urge people to visit the hotel to experience it for themselves. If Tracy has the time, she is willing to give an entertaining tour.

The Hotel is having a Halloween costume party beginning at 9 p.m., Oct. 31 at the Mizpah Club Casino. For more information, contact the Mizpah at 775-482-3030. ■



Margo Ramirez



Emil Sorensen

## Experience is Key at Nushagak

*Pair of 30-year employees keeps the co-op running smoothly*

One definition of experience is “practical knowledge, skill or practice derived from direct observation of or participation in events or in a particular activity.” The practicality of this definition can be applied to the two supervisors—both with more than 30 years of experience—who oversee the key technology teams at Nushagak Cooperative: Margo Ramirez and Emil Sorensen. They are the longest-serving employees at Nushagak.

Margo leads the CATV and internet team, overseeing construction of the coaxial network, while maintaining trouble tickets and service orders for all internet issues. She also supports the internal IT infrastructure. Margo has helped customers, working in accounting and finally moving to the technology area, earning several certifications and applying that training to support the cooperative. Her breadth of experience gives Margo a unique perspective when it comes to supporting and

managing her division.

Emil manages the telephone division. He is one of the most well-known faces in the community. Emil has witnessed three generations of technologies in voice switching alone. He serves as division head and is the cooperative’s unofficial fiber, voice switching and DSL engineer. He not only has supported the communities in the Nushagak serving area through the years, but has been a resource for other phone companies across Alaska, who rely on him as a trusted adviser.

Another, maybe more meaningful definition Webster gives for experience is “the events that make up the conscious past of a community.”

Margo and Emil only have seen the cooperative grow and change as technology moved, but have seen the community grow and move with the times.

As valuable as their combined 60-plus years are to the cooperative, it is their knowledge of the



Come by Nushagak Cooperative's Customer Service Office to get your Trick -r-Treat bags and Safety Bracelets on Wednesday, October 31, 2018.

Happy Halloween

community and the people who make up that community that stand out. It is impossible to put a value on that type of experience when it comes to building and maintaining a cooperative spirit.

There is a comfort level in knowing when it comes to improving your broadband speed, making sure your cable television is functioning or confirming your phone has a dial tone, you can be certain the people overseeing them know and understand the community in which we live.

Both are talented and well respected individuals in the technology field, not only in Alaska, but across the U.S. It is nice to know they have dedicated their talents to our cooperative and decided to spend the entirety of their careers here in the Nushagak area.

If experience is the best teacher, as Julius Caesar said, we have two great professors to teach and guide the next generation of technicians and engineers in the oncoming tsunamis of communications technology waves. We couldn't be in safer, more experienced hands. ■

It is beyond a doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience.

—Immanuel Kant



The Tacoma Chapter of the Harley Owners Group includes more than 1,000 Harley enthusiasts from the Pierce County area.

Photos by Alma Greb

## Tacoma Riders Go HOG Wild

*James Tucker, manager of the Tacoma Chapter of the Harley Owners Group, enjoys easy-going rides on his Harley*

**By Caleb Flowers**

James Tucker's motto when it comes to riding motorcycles is to ride and have fun. James manages the Tacoma Chapter of the Harley Owners Group—HOG as they call it.

With more than 1,000 members from the greater Pierce County area, Tacoma HOG is the second largest chapter on the West Coast. These motorcycle fans get together regularly for rides, activities and to celebrate one particular common interest: Harley-Davidson.

Prior to his role as chapter manager, James spent four years as the director, which meant organizing all activities of the group. As a road captain, he leads rides, plans routes, assists new riders

and trains chapter members.

"It's an opportunity to come together and focus on something we all love rather than staying apart," James says.

The group is nonpolitical and nonreligious, and seeks to be a place where individuals from all backgrounds and walks of life can engage in good, quality fun and interaction.

James recently led a group from the Tacoma Chapter on a ride to Harley-Davidson's 115th anniversary celebration in Milwaukee, Wisconsin—a 4,500-mile roundtrip excursion. He serves as a contractor with the national HOG organization, and was involved in much of the celebration's activities.

James sang the national anthem at the opening ceremonies in front of thousands



**Clockwise from above, James Tucker manages the Tacoma Chapter of the Harley Owners Group. The Tacoma HOG board is comprised of Harley enthusiasts. James rides with the Tacoma chapter near Redmond.**

Photo at right courtesy of Tacoma HOG

of attendees. He has sung the anthem at prior HOG gatherings, but this was his largest audience. James, a combat veteran, was joined on stage by the Wisconsin ROTC Color Guard as he performed.

He started riding dirt bikes and ATVs at age 12, and owned his first street bike at 15. James says he enjoyed the thrill of his Kawasaki Ninja and other sport bikes when he was younger, but things changed when he became a father.

“I gave up riding for 10 or 12 years and sold my bikes when we had kids,” James says.

Once his two daughters were teenagers, family and friends persuaded him to get back into riding. He opted for a different style.

The easy-going type of riding on his Harley allows him to clear his head and relax. James says it is even therapeutic in a way—a kind of wind therapy.

James describes touring the countryside and enjoying the Northwest as a great discovery. From coastal rides to mountain and desert journeys, James says he gets to see the state and parts of the country in a way he never imagined possible.

Some of his favorite rides are local. He has led chapter rides around Ohop Lake and other scenic spots in the Kapowsin area. He says it is hard to beat some of the great riding nearby.

James bought his first of five Harleys in 2008. In 2012, he bought a one-way ticket to Fort Smith, Arkansas. He flew down with a check in hand to buy and drive back a particularly good find.

James says most HOG members, including himself, do not fit the “out-law biker” stereotype. Those who fit the description are what they refer to as the “one-percenters” because they are so uncommon.

“We are a Harley enthusiasts group, and it’s just that—a bunch of everyday people that love Harleys,” he says.

James, a senior compliance consultant at a CPA firm, uses his motorcycle adventures to get in some quality family time. In the past year, James has taken his wife, Theresa, and his two daughters, Corinne and Savanna, on long-distance



rides as a family bonding experience. With other bikers in the family, the Tuckers take annual trips to places such as Sturgis, South Dakota, to combine riding with reunions.

James says he wants to alleviate the worries that some have about the dangers of motorcycle riding.

“Of course there’s always going to be some risk involved,” he says. “You just have to determine what level of risk you are comfortable with and stay within that limit. It’s not meant to be an adrenaline rush at this stage. We ride for freedom and relaxation.

“It starts with respect for the machine and respect for those you share the road with. As long as you ride within your ability, you should be just fine.” ■

# A Summer of Fire

*The worst fire season in Wasco County history takes a financial and emotional toll*

By Drew Myron

Wildfire made history this summer, though it's a record no one wants to celebrate or repeat.

One after another, fires raced across Wasco and Sherman counties, burning hot and fast, moving miles in minutes with a force that consumed wheat fields in their prime, turned houses to ash and took the life of a farmer as he tried to save his neighbor's land.

"This is the worst in Wasco Electric Co-op history," says General Manager Jeff Davis, who has been with the cooperative for more than 36 years. "To see the damage and devastation is disheartening."

Unusually hot weather, driving wind and dry land helped fuel multiple fires in Wasco and Sherman counties in just two months, burning nearly 250,000 acres—about 390 square miles—and taking a huge economic and emotional toll.

The worst of these, in terms of financial and heartbreaking loss, was the Substation Fire in July that started on private land southeast of The Dalles, immediately south of the Celilo

Converter Station—a Bonneville Power Administration substation known as Big Eddy—before racing out of control through grass, brush and wheat fields.

With 100-degree days and winds up to 35 mph, the Substation Fire moved swiftly, spreading 18 miles in just one day. Of more than 200 wildfires across Oregon, it was the largest. Four homes and 48 outbuildings were destroyed. The cause of the fire remains under investigation.

The Substation Fire was just the beginning, as one fire after another consumed the vast and rolling landscape.

The Substation Fire spread south toward Grass Valley and east toward Moro. A week later, the Long Hollow Fire broke out southeast of Dufur abutting the Substation Fire. Just days later, the South Valley Fire erupted southwest of Dufur.



**A plane drops fire retardant on the Substation Fire.**

Photos courtesy of Wasco Electric Cooperative



### **Protecting our System**

As help arrived from across the state, farmers and utility personnel worked around the clock to control the blazes. Farmers are used to fighting their own small fires. Many say the quick, hard work of farmers helped manage the crisis.

Wasco Electric linemen focus on protecting the system when firefighting. The crew is outfitted with two water-pumper rigs, three four-wheeler vehicles with firefighter tanks, and fire-resistant shirts as they help stop power poles from burning.

Crews are trained to save a pole from fire, fix the line, safely restore power and stay out of harm's way, says Operations Manager Casey McCleary.

For many farmers, the immensity of the blaze was a shock.

"I've seen fires, but nothing like this," says Charlie Remington, who lost 500 acres of wheat near Emerson Loop. "It got so big so fast and burned right up to the house."

The house was saved, but power was lost when utility poles toppled across the road.

"Wasco Electric was out there replacing poles as they burned," Charlie says.

### **Keeping the Power On**

Wasco Electric Cooperative crews replaced nearly 200 power poles and miles of line burned and damaged in the multiple blazes throughout the cooperative's service territory. It was a big mission for the co-op's five linemen.

To tackle the task, everyone worked together—from linemen fighting fires to office staff answering calls from concerned members and making meal deliveries to crews in the field. In addition to Wasco Electric crews, Hood River Electric Cooperative and Northern Wasco County PUD pitched in, along with crews from Magnum Power, Sturgeon Electric Co. and Trees LLC, to help replace poles and restore power.

"We take it to heart, keeping the power on, keeping the lines up," says Casey, who has worked at WEC for 35 years. "Everyone works with a sense of service and duty."

For nearly a month, Wasco Electric Co-op linemen fought fires, dug holes, and set power poles and line for 18 hours straight, then went home for a quick rest and returned.

"This is the worst year we've ever had, consistently back to back, just not letting up," lineman Bo Gridley says.

*Continues on page 8*



## A Summer of Fire

*Continued from page 5*

By late August, the crews were long past firefighting. They were instead battling bees and rattlesnakes as they dug into a routine of pole replacement. It's a slow and long process, affected by soil, location and weather.

The upside? Many of the new poles and lines have been repositioned closer to roads, providing easier access for future maintenance.

## A Record Year for Wheat Erased

There's never a good time for a fire, but there is certainly a worse time.

Just as the Substation Fire broke, farmers were preparing to harvest what was expected to be the best wheat crop in decades, and anticipating higher-than-average yields and trading at nearly \$6 per bushel. Fields that normally would have cut 60 bushels per acre may have yielded upwards of 80 to 90 bushels per acre, according to Oregon State University Extension agents.

About 100 farms in Wasco County grow soft white wheat, the area's primary crop. The wheat crop value in Wasco and Sherman counties is about \$46 million a year, according to the Wasco County Farm Bureau.

Nearly half of the Wasco County crop may have been lost to the fire, according to reports in Capital Press.

While most crops were insured, farmers say the reimbursement will likely pale compared to what they would have earned. A crop takes two years to grow because farmers leave the land fallow to improve soil and reduce erosion.

"Our biggest concern is winter erosion taking the top soil," notes Ryan Bessette, technician for Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District. "The chance for soil erosion followed by wind erosion is high."

**Farmers and firefighters help battle the Substation Fire.**

## Fires in Wasco and Sherman Counties, Summer 2018

Total estimated acres burned: 249,112

- ▶ Substation: 78,425 acres
- ▶ Long Hollow: 33,451 acres
- ▶ South Valley: 20,026 acres
- ▶ Box Car: 100,207 acres
- ▶ Jack Knife: 15,676 acres
- ▶ Fossil: 486 acres
- ▶ Rufus: 400 acres
- ▶ Cow Canyon: 200 acres
- ▶ Memaloose 2: 167 acres
- ▶ Memaloose: 74 acres

## What's Next?

Looking ahead, farmers are moving forward, picking up the pieces, rebuilding, stringing new fence and planting the next crop. It will all take time, but this community is built with resilient farmers who will continue to do what they do and work on getting back to what is consider normal.

Wasco Electric will continue to focus on restoration of the distribution system: replacing additional burnt power poles, stringing new line and picking up damaged equipment before winter comes.

Still, in this scorched landscape, small signs of normalcy appear. Deer nibble along charred fields, a buck darts across a blackened hill, a litter of cougar kittens tumble through the torched terrain.

In a few months—maybe more—spots of green may emerge in the folds of this scarred but still promising land. ■

