

Someone You Know is Hungry

Columbia Gorge Food Bank works to meet widespread food insecurity in Wasco County

By Kathy Ursprung

Your child's playground friend, the elderly person sitting next to you in church, the clerk at your favorite store. Someone you know is affected by food insecurity.

"We serve about 3,500 people a month through the various pantry sites," says Sharon Thornberry, director of the Columbia Gorge Food Bank.

Sharon, food bank employees and their community support team are expanding the capacity of local programs to help people in Wasco, Sherman and Hood River counties.

Over time, they hope to establish the Columbia Gorge Food Bank as its own non-profit organization. Right now, they operate under the Oregon Food Bank.

"The Oregon Food Bank feels like it can support the building of a local warehouse and get the infrastructure put in place, then work with a local group to form a nonprofit to take this on long term," Sharon says.

She says there was no program growth for 30 years.

"We needed to be able to increase capacity of the regional food bank to really serve all

three counties and provide adequate opportunity for people in the rural communities to be food secure," Sharon says.

There are many reasons people in the area have faced food insecurity during those 30 years. One was closure of the aluminum plant.

"I think the big reason today for programs to grow is because the cost of living does not match the salaries that people are getting," Sharon says. "For example, Wasco County's median cost of living is over \$53,000 per year."

A household of two people working minimum wage jobs falls short of that by about \$10,000. A shortage of housing units for incoming population drives the cost of housing higher.

"You have both young workers and an increasing amount of dependence on tourism," Sharon says. "That's great for the community, but those are not living-wage jobs."

People often assume the people who need food assistance are irresponsible, Sharon says, noting that's not true.

"Do the math," she says. "The math shows people are not making enough to get by."

Sharon uses herself as an example.

"I'm not going to be the poorest senior around here," she says. "I'd like to stay here and retire here, but I don't know if I'm going to be able to."

Sharon says the food bank is an essential place to bring donations. Because it is connected with local pantries, the food bank can direct donations where they are most needed.

Donations don't have to be food.

"Cash is great," Sharon says. "Right now, the Oregon Food Bank and statewide donations are carrying most of the load for costs here. We need to build a base of local donors that will support this local food bank."

The Columbia Gorge Food Bank is housed in a 2,000-square-foot warehouse at the Port of The Dalles. It is the smallest food bank warehouse in the state. Sharon hopes to change that within the next two to three years.

"We easily could use 6,000 to 9,000 square feet, especially to be able to take in local donations of produce that can be shared, first



Members of the junior board of the Reser Foundation assembled 200 homeless outreach bags for the Columbia Gorge Food Bank.

Photo courtesy of Sharon Thornberry



Sharon Thornberry, rural communities liaison for the Oregon Food Bank, is director of the Columbia Gorge Food Bank.

locally, then sometimes statewide and nationally across the region,” she says.

For example, surplus local pears beyond what folks in the Gorge can eat can be shared elsewhere in Oregon, or even in other states, such as Arizona. In return, folks in Arizona can share produce in non-growing seasons in the Gorge.

The food that comes to the Columbia Gorge Food Bank is distributed through a network of food pantries. New pantries have been established in Rufus, Cascade Locks, Parkdale and at the Wahtonka School in The Dalles.

“We’re also hoping to have a pantry in Maupin,” Sharon says.

The Food Bank’s one direct-service program is the Gorge Homeless Outreach, which works with volunteers to provide bags of nonperishable food to people on the streets. The same group takes produce, bread, water and other essentials to the Lone Pine Native American fishing site.

In addition to daily needs, the Columbia Gorge Food Bank also responds to disasters. In the three years Sharon has served, the region has experienced an immobilizing winter storm and the massive Eagle Creek Fire. In both cases, people were cut off from their food sources. The Food Bank supported food pantries by delivering food to affected people. This past summer,

they supported the Salvation Army with food and snacks for firefighters.

“That’s another reason the community needs a sizable warehouse in the right place,” Sharon says. “Then we can act as a disaster depot with the right equipment and staff to move food in those situations. Food bankers are trained to do that.”

The Everyone Loves a Firefighter Drive is the largest food drive this season. It benefits the Salvation Army and St. Vincent de Paul. Other upcoming drives—most notably, one at Safeway—will benefit the food bank. The food bank’s new Americorps volunteer will help coordinate those and similar efforts.

Food banks also support community-building around food systems and help people develop their own solutions. In late September, for example, the food bank distributed a pallet of seeds to encourage people to grow their own food.

“We’re hoping to start a program called Seed to Supper to teach low-income people how to raise and utilize their own produce,” Sharon says. ■

For more information about the Columbia Gorge Food Bank or how to donate, contact Sharon Thornberry at sthornberry@oregonfoodbank.org or call (541) 609-8903.



Donations to the Columbia Gorge Food Bank typically end up at food pantries in Wasco, Sherman and Hood River counties.

Photo courtesy of Sharon Thornberry

Our Youth: Powering Our Future

By Jonathan Farmer

While most of today's youth spend their summers away from school doing anything but learning, a select few just can't seem to shake the habit. Such is the case with CPI's Isabella Ayala of Lebanon High School, who was selected to represent our cooperative in Washington D.C., at the 2018 National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour.

Each summer since the late 1950s, electric cooperatives from around the country have sent students to Washington, D.C., to learn about everything from the co-op business model to civic engagement while touring our nation's capital. In 1957, then Sen. Lyndon B. Johnson urged national electric cooperative leaders to bring young people to Washington to get a first-hand look at how government works.

"If one thing goes out of this meeting, it will be sending youngsters to the national capital where they can actually see what the flag stands for and represents," the future president said at the NRECA annual meeting.

Nearly 50,000 students from rural areas and small towns across America have participated in this program since its inception. Students gain a personal understanding of American history and their role as a citizen by meeting their representatives and



Isabella Ayala pauses at the World War II memorial marker in Washington, D.C., honoring Oregon's participation in the war.

senators.

"We believe that students should see their nation's capital up close, learn about the political process and hold their elected officials accountable to the needs of the communities they come from," says NRECA CEO Jim Matheson.

Through the years, we

have received numerous letters and visits from parents who remark how the trip went above and beyond their expectations for what they thought was merely going to be a sightseeing trip. They often share how their child returned noticeably different—more mature, more

confident, with bigger goals and aspirations. Students learn that being a part of a cooperative makes them a part of something bigger than themselves and empowers them to take action.

NRECA also provides an immediate leadership opportunity as one student from



Clockwise from above, Isabella with her new friends out enjoying the Capital. Youth Tour members from Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington cooperatives at George Washington's Mount Vernon. Several war memorials were visited during the trip, including the Air Force Memorial.

Left, Isabella speaks at CPI's September annual meeting reporting on her trip.

each state is chosen at the weeklong event to serve on the NRECA Youth Leadership Council. These students receive additional leadership training, and assist at the NRECA annual meeting the

following spring. More than 1,800 students and chaperones attended Youth Tour last year, setting a new record.

"I feel like I have never seen so many people in one spot," says Isabella. "At one point we were visiting some of the Smithsonians on

the National Mall and the Washington, D.C., Capitals hockey team had just won the Stanley Cup. There was a huge celebration parade in their honor and over 800,000 people rode the Metro that day for it. It was crazy. You never know what or who you are going to see next while in Washington."

She notes you never know who you are going to meet as a fellow attendee of the conference. Apple CEO Tim Cook was a Youth Tour participant, as were many students who went on to serve at the highest levels of our nation's government.

Isabella plans to attend a four-year university and pursue a degree in chemical engineering, perhaps giving back

to her community as a science teacher.

"The whole trip is incredibly inspiring, but it's the relationships you make that will last the longest," Isabella says.

Her new Youth Tour friends elected her to represent Oregon on the NRECA Youth Leadership Council. She returned to Washington, D.C., in July for more leadership training and will assist with the NRECA annual meeting in March in Orlando.

Isabella spoke at the CPI annual meeting in September and offered her deepest gratitude to the co-op for "the experience of a lifetime.

"Meeting with veterans that served in the wars the memorials represented and asking questions directly to our elected representatives certainly made the biggest impact on me," says Isabella. ■

If you know any high school juniors who are part of a CPI member family and would benefit from such an experience, please encourage them to apply now for the 2019 Washington, D.C., trip. More information can be found on page 8.

A View From the Cockpit

Groundbreaking retired female pilot Captain Kathy advocates for change

By Drew Myron

Kathy McCullough is not one in a million. She is one in 2,376.

In an industry dominated by men, Kathy worked 26 years as a commercial airline pilot—one of 2,376 female airline captains in the world.

It has been 45 years since the first female was hired to pilot a commercial flight—Emily Howell Warner in 1973—yet women comprise just 5 percent of pilots in

North America, according to the International Society of Women Airline Pilots.

Hired in 1981 by Northwest Airlines, Kathy was the airline's fourth female pilot and an aviation leader. But groundbreaking didn't come easy, and Captain Kathy—now retired and living on a wheat ranch near Wasco—has lived through personal challenges and professional triumphs.

Kathy was just 16 years old when she earned her pilot's license. A few years later, she bought her first plane, a Cessna 140.

Flying requires a rigorous and costly series of classes, testing and flight time to achieve various levels and licenses. Kathy's middle class family did not have deep pockets. Against her parent's wishes, the teenager pursued her dream of flight. To pay for lessons, she worked as a receptionist at the local airport, as well as waitressing, pumping gas and washing planes.

To acquire her multi-engine rating, Kathy took on an enviable role: flight attendant to rock stars. In the 1970s, she flew across the U.S. with top bands. With insider status and backstage access, she got chummy with America, Crosby Stills & Nash, The Commodores and more.

"It was just so much fun," she says.

Later, still reaching to

acquire a higher level, Kathy took on a variety of gigs: providing transport for coal mines, night pilot with infrared camera over forest fires and certified flight instructor, where she met her future husband, Kevin, who was her student.

Years later they reconnected, dated, married and moved to his family farmstead near Wasco, where they raised two children.

Her aspiration growing closer, Kathy found she enjoyed flying cargo planes filled with an array of freight, from zoo animals to cars, salmon and even French fries.

In 1981, after 14 years of flying, Kathy was hired by Northwest Airlines to pilot commercial flights. She worked for the airline for 26 years, starting on the 727 and DC-10s and ascending to Captain Kathy and the Boeing 747.

From the start, there were cracks in her achievement. She says discrimination was persistent: sexist jokes, snide remarks and constant undermining. She says her every move was under a microscope, then questioned and critiqued. But she persevered and let it go, again and again, determined to prove herself.

"I always thought doing a good job would show others your ability, but that's not enough," Kathy says. "You have to be three times as good



Since retiring, Kathy has written two memoirs. She is now working on a novel.



as a male pilot, and they still put you through the wringer.”

She says retaliation from male colleagues and the male-dominated union keeps women from speaking up and fighting back, but Kathy makes one thing clear: “I am not a male basher.”

Kathy says she has earned her perspective on gender equality. She says although discrimination was rampant in the 1980s and 90s, it is even worse now.

“It’s discouraging,” Kathy says. “It’s regressed. The struggles and prejudices I experienced in my career still exist today. We early women pilots think we have made a difference, but it hasn’t been enough. I don’t know what the answer is, but maybe if everyone does a little bit, we can make changes. It will take a huge grassroots movement and some brave women to make a difference.”

To improve the profession for others, Kathy serves as communications chairwoman for the International Society of Women Airline Pilots—a group advocating for greater visibility, acceptance and understanding of women airline pilots around the world.

As a way to encourage female pilots, the organization raises scholarship money for flight training—an expensive process that is, for many, a deterrent to becoming a commercial pilot.

Recently, the group advocated for changes to maternity policies. Kathy told the *New York Times* that airline maternity policies are archaic.

Unlike most major companies, U.S. airlines don’t offer paid maternity leave or alternative ground assignments for breastfeeding mothers.

Airline unions—which could mandate changes—have been slow to support women’s

issues, Kathy says.

“They do the bare minimum,” she adds.

Kathy did secure a win. As a former Delta pilot—Northwest Airlines merged with Delta in 2008—Kathy advocated on behalf of pilots to Delta management. The airline revised its policy to provide 10 weeks’ leave and job security for up to one year. American Airlines and United Airlines followed suit. Kathy hopes other airlines will step up, too.

In 2005, at age 50, Kathy’s career was cut short with a sudden onset of visual migraines. Unable to fly, she retired after 34 years as a pilot. Other health crises soon emerged: appendix cancer and breast cancer.

She handled these personal challenges just as she had her professional hurdles: with optimism, perseverance and a gratitude that has fueled her

Kathy McCullough was the fourth female pilot to be hired by Northwest Airlines. She flew for 34 years.

Photo courtesy of Kathy McCullough

to help others. Now recovered, Kathy speaks at schools, prisons and community centers, encouraging youth to pursue their ambitions.

Kathy is traveling again, but as an informed tourist rather than a working pilot. The landscapes she once admired from 30,000 feet are now up-close and personal. Her camera—a Nikon D800—captures every moment.

“I’m proud to say I hit the ground running on almost every layover of my career,” she writes in *“To the Edges of the World,”* a travel memoir featuring her photographs.

Since retirement, Kathy has published two memoirs and is working on a novel.

“Looking back,” she says, “I can’t believe the places my life has taken me.” ■

Determined to Serve

*World War II vet
just wanted to do
his part*

By Craig Reed

Stan Hermann wanted to become a soldier after graduating from high school in 1941. World War II was ongoing, and the 18-year-old wanted to be part of his country's effort to put a stop to it.

But the U.S. Army wouldn't accept him. Stan didn't have 20-20 vision and wore glasses.

"That's why I was rejected," he recalls.

But Stan didn't give up on serving his country. The 1941 graduate of Grant High School in Portland attended Oregon State University in Corvallis for two terms and was enrolled in the Reserved Officers' Training Corps program. But he dropped out of school, making himself eligible for the military draft.

"I quit school because I wanted to be drafted," he says. "That's the only way I could get in the service. I was rejected until I was drafted. I wanted to be able to do for my country what others were already doing."

Being drafted gave Stan that opportunity. He joined the Army in 1942 and served through the end of the war in 1945 and then into early 1946 before returning home from



Stan Hermann served in the U.S. Army during World War II, with posts in India and China.

his posts in India and China.

Now a resident of Sutherlin, Stan will celebrate

Veterans Day and his 95th birthday this month. He has enjoyed being a spectator

and featured veteran in the annual Veterans Day Parade in downtown Roseburg.

“I did my country a good service,” he says. “I took whatever came my way as best as I could. I had some good experiences. I felt I was able to use my talents to help in the war effort.”

After basic training at Fort Warren in Wyoming and some time at Fort Lewis in Washington, Stan was shipped out of the Los Angeles harbor. The ship and its sailors and soldiers survived “the damnest storm I ever saw,” according to Stan, and reached Perth, Australia, after a 60-day voyage. His next stop was Ceylon (now known as Sri Lanka) and then Calcutta, India.

“My job was to stand guard at night and keep people from climbing on board,” Stan says. “People were starving in India at that time and they were desperate to find food somewhere. We were instructed to hit any hands coming over the side.”

Stan’s next assignment was to protect a textile manufacturer 20 miles north of Calcutta. Because of his ROTC experience, he was put in charge of the 21-soldier detail at the mill.

Stan eventually was assigned to be a driver in a convoy of military trucks that traveled north to Chabua Air Force Station in Assam, India.

Stan was in charge of air freight, working with others to ship clothing, ammunition and other gear and equipment to U.S. forces and their allies in China. Chabua was a major supply point for ferrying supplies over the Himalaya Mountains. The 800-mile



Stan was issued this dress uniform hat in 1942. He says it was used very little so has stayed in good condition.

flight became known as “flying the hump.”

The last land route, the Burma Road, by which supplies could be delivered to the Allies, had been cut off by Japanese occupation in 1942. Air transport was a necessity.

Stan was stationed at Chabua for two years. Six large warehouse-type buildings housed the various supplies flowing to the Allies.

Stan heard plenty of stories and knew the hump flight was dangerous because of the altitude needed to clear the mountains, the rugged terrain and violent storms with snow and ice.

U.S. reports indicate there were 167,285 flights over the Himalayas during the war. Those flights moved a reported 740,000 tons of gear. The flights were considered a success despite the loss of 460 aircraft and 792 men.

When the war ended in late 1945, a lot of unused U.S. gear was in China. Stan was given “essential status.” While many soldiers were shipped home, he remained to document gear that was flown from China back to Chabua.

When Stan returned to the U.S. and was discharged in 1946, he returned to Oregon State University and married Lilian Davis.

“About 13 million Americans were discharged from the service at about the same time, so they were all competing with themselves for jobs,” says Stan, who opted for college and earned a degree in accounting.

He worked at several jobs, including controller of Vancouver Federal Savings & Loan. With that experience, he was hired as manager of Umpqua Savings & Loan, resulting in a move to Roseburg in 1952. During his years with Umpqua, the organization expanded to eight branches in three southwestern Oregon counties.

But when the government closed the savings and loan institutions between 1986 and 1995, Stan was left without a job. He started his own loan company, operated it for five years and then retired.

Stan and Lilian were married for 62½ years before she died in 2008. Five years later, Stan married Burne Bryden.

Stan and Burne and their respective previous spouses knew each other through their work with the American Red Cross in Roseburg. After the spouses died, Stan and Burne “met again” while participating in a senior exercise program and decided to marry.

“Stan had a lot of adventures,” Burne says of his military service and the stories she has heard. “He escaped a lot of situations that could have been dangerous. He’s had a really, really interesting life.”

Stan and other veterans will be recognized and honored on Veterans Day. ■



Students on tour of Washington, D.C., stop to thank veterans from Honor Flight of Central Oregon for their service.

Never Forgotten

Korean War veterans receive trip of a lifetime to Washington, D.C.

By Courtney Cobb

Upon returning home, few, if any, Korean War veterans received ticker tape parades or public proclamations of gratitude. Honor Flight of Central Oregon wants to correct that oversight and ensure those veterans receive their long

overdue recognition.

“They never had a welcome home, closure or the recognition because it was the forgotten war,” says Deanna Lynn Neilsen, HFCO Administrator. The Forgotten War—waged from 1950 to 1953—was so labeled due to being overshadowed by World

War II and its official characterization as a police action.

Honor Flight works to change this oversight through free once-in-a-lifetime trips to visit our nation’s capital.

A Trip of a Lifetime

In June, Honor Flight took 23 Korean War and two World

War II veterans and their guardians on a whirlwind tour of Washington, D.C. The trip began with a parade of Pomp and Circumstance through Portland International Airport accompanied by hearty applause from fellow travelers to Washington, D.C. They were greeted with a



Top, from left, veteran Leonard Zierlein, guardian Katherine Zierlein and veteran John Meyer read their mail call packet of letters from area school children, friends and family.

Photos by Clint McAuliffe

brehtaking scene of patriotic pride upon arrival at Reagan National Airport.

“It’s overwhelming emotionally,” Deanna says. “It’s beautiful to see how (the veterans) are welcomed and appreciated. It’s a pretty amazing scene with little kids smiling and giving high fives or saluting them.”

The tour’s first stop was the WWII memorial where the veterans were greeted by Rep. Greg Walden and his staff. “Each veteran was presented with a flag flown over the capital and a certificate thanking them for their service to our country,” says Deanna.

The veterans toured several other memorials including the Lincoln Memorial, Vietnam Memorial, FDR Memorial, Air Force Memorial, and finally the Korean War Memorial. “It was priceless for the veterans to see their memorial,” says Deanna. “It

meant so much to them.”

The trip also included visits to the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, as well as the viewing the changing of the guard and wreath laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.

Another highlight for many on the trip was a visit to the Capitol for a private tour.

“I really liked the congressional building,” says Neil Chase, HFCO attendee and Army Korean War veteran. “I liked being where it all happens, seeing the statues, the rotunda and all the heroes that were there.”

Everywhere the veterans went, they were greeted by applause, salutes, and gestures of gratitude. Deanna and Clint McAuliffe, HFCO photographer and Navy corpsman, recalled a moment when they entered the Old Ebbitt

Grill and everyone in the entire restaurant stood up and applauded the veterans.

“It was something else,” says Clint. “It was neat to see all the veterans welcomed so warmly as we wound our way around the restaurant to our tables.”

The marching bands, rifle brigade and precise synchronization of the Marine Corps Sunset Parade at the Marine Barracks at 8th and I streets also made a lasting impression.

“It was one of the most outstanding things I had ever seen,” says HFCO attendee Bill Jensen. “There were 1,000 Marines in full dress uniform doing drills.”

The Air Force veteran laughed as he recalled the event and says, “They were really impressive and made me want to join the Marines instead.”

Deanna explained prior to going on the trip, HFCO gathers letters to thank the veterans from kids, church groups, and friends. On the flight home, each veteran received a packet of the letters.

“This is a pretty emotional part of the trip,” Deanna says. “It brings tears to their eyes because they didn’t have that thank you or welcome coming home from the war.”

She says veterans, guardians and volunteers alike come back with much more than memories—each feels a deep desire to relive the experience.

“The trip was so worthwhile and a great experience,”

says Neil. “I’m telling everyone I know what I have experienced and I have been encouraging them to sign up.”

Bill echoes Neil’s sentiments and says, “It was a trip of a lifetime and it was so impressive. Jump at the chance if you can go because it’s well worth the time.”

How to Get Involved

HFCO trips are five days long with three days reserved for traveling between Central Oregon and Washington, D.C. The group has two full days to tour many sites around the capital. Up to 25 veterans and their guardians can go at a time.

“If they don’t have a friend or family member to go with them, we can match them with a volunteer,” says Deanna.

HFCO holds fundraisers and solicits donations from local businesses to make the trips cost-free for the veterans. For this trip, Central Electric Cooperative sponsored two veterans.

Guardians and volunteers pay their own way. The cost per veteran is about \$1,250, taking care of airfare, hotel, meals and incidentals.

“For those five days, veterans are treated like royalty,” Deanna says. ■

The next HFCO trip will be in May 2019. There are a variety of ways people can get involved with the nonprofit and help local veterans. For more information on HFCO, go to www.honorflightofcentraloregon.org. The website includes applications for veterans, guardians and volunteers.

A Part of Our Communities

WOEC doesn't just keep the lights on, it helps in the communities they serve

By Scott Laird

When most members think about West Oregon Electric, they think of their electric cooperative and the benefits they get from having a reliable energy source. When nasty weather hits and the power goes out, members might think about the linemen working outside to get their lights back on. When they pay their bill each month, members might think about their rates and how much energy they use.

What most members probably don't think about are some of the other things WOEC does in the community to help—things that don't directly relate to providing power to a home or business.

“One of the Seven Cooperative Principles that we operate under as a co-op is ‘Concern for Community,’” says WOEC General Manager Bob Perry. “Most of our employees are also members of the co-op. We live in the communities we service. We bank here and we shop here, so it is important that we also help support the community when we can.”

Recently, R&S Market in Vernonia—where WOEC headquarters is located—needed help. WOEC stepped in.

“We had a refrigeration compressor go out that sits on top of our roof, and those weigh over 300 pounds,” says market owner Randy Parrow. “There's no way to get the replacement up on the roof without some kind of boom lift.”

The co-op has helped with this task at the market twice in the past five years.

“They've been really helpful,” Randy says.

Following the severe flood in 2007 that affected much of Vernonia's infrastructure, homes and businesses, the market installed a permanent generator so they could have power during future emergencies.

“WOEC made time and came down and took us off the grid, stayed around while we fired up the generator and tested everything, and then hooked us back up so we can take care of the community,” Randy says.

WOEC has also used its equipment to help the Vernonia School District.

Following the 2007 flood, Vernonia moved its entire school campus. After building a new school, which opened in 2012, the district has slowly added sports facilities as funding and resources become available. Volunteers have gathered donations and built dugouts for baseball and softball.

Vernonia School District Superintendent Aaron Miller spent countless hours working on the playing field surfaces.



WOEC workers lift a refrigeration compressor onto the roof of the R&S Market in Vernonia.

“WOEC has been a true partner for the Vernonia School District, helping with equipment and manpower to complete projects that would not otherwise be possible,” Aaron says. “Installation of our tall backstop poles at Holce Field and Alumni Field (softball) were performed by WOEC employees. Anchors to ensure those poles stay upright were also installed by WOEC.”

In addition to helping with the sports fields, WOEC has



WOEC has donated use of its equipment to help decorate the Vernonia Christmas Tree for the last several years.

helped the new school in other ways. On several occasions, a heavy heating unit or other materials have been needed on the school's roof.

"WOEC equipment has made this process quick and easy, and has eliminated the need to rent expensive equipment that would have been delivered from an hour away," Aaron says. "West Oregon Electric Cooperative has been a true and valued partner of the Vernonia School District."

WOEC helps with community events around town, including using equipment to string lights on the town Christmas tree to kick off the holiday season at the annual Spirit of Christmas in Vernonia event at the beginning of December.

"WOEC has shown up for at least the last six years to put up our Christmas lights, and then they come back and take them down for us," says Nicole Larke with Intercultural Society of Vernonia. "It's a huge help, because we've had a 30-foot tree and



The Vernonia School District received help from WOEC to set and anchor poles at its new baseball and softball fields.

we wouldn't be able to get the lights up without them. We'll be asking them to help us again this year, and I'm sure they will."

WOEC has also helped during the Vernonia Friendship Jamboree and Logging Show by energizing electrical hookups for vendors and helping set the poles used during the logging show.

Bob notes that many WOEC employees are involved as volunteers in their communities, whether it's coaching youth sports, helping organize fundraisers or in numerous other ways.

"One of the basic values of being a cooperative is having a concern for the community, and we always try to do that when we can," Bob says. ■

Surprise Valley

Ruralite

NOVEMBER 2018

Firefighting a Monumental Task

More than 1,000 firefighters and volunteers battled a spreading August wildfire

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The Watson Creek Fire grew to 58,330 acres in August, threatening the town of Paisley and ranches at the foot of Winter Rim.

PHOTO BY NICK BJORNSTAD



The Paisley airport became the base of operations for firefighting helicopter operations.

Firefighting Efforts a Monumental Task

More than 1,000 firefighters and volunteers battled a spreading August wildfire

By Toni Bailie

The Watson Creek Fire in August grew to 58,330 acres, threatening the town of Paisley and ranches at the foot of Winter Rim. The fire was discovered in the high country near Lee Thomas Meadow. It flared above Winter Rim and advanced to Slide Mountain, gnawing its way through a vast swath of beetle-kill pines.

Initially, 40 volunteers from the Paisley Fire Department and High Desert Rangeland Fire Protection Association cut fire breaks around Summer Lake ranch structures. Local ranchers gathered

cattle in danger from the fire—a total of 2,500 grazing in the high country. Ranchers hoped the remaining cattle would find refuge near streams in small mountain meadows.

The Northwest Interagency Coordination Center deployed an Incident Command Team to battle the Watson Creek Fire. Paisley's population of 250 expanded as 1,068 personnel converged on the town.

Local rancher Martin Murphy offered use of his pasture for large white-peaked office tents and small sleeping tents.

Firefighters came from as

far away as West Virginia, Tennessee and New Zealand. Hot shot crews arrived from Redmond, Vale and Wolf Creek.

Residents gathered at community information meetings to hear reports from agencies working together to protect the town and local ranches. Representatives appeared from the Oregon Department of Forestry, Incident Command and the U.S. Forest Service.

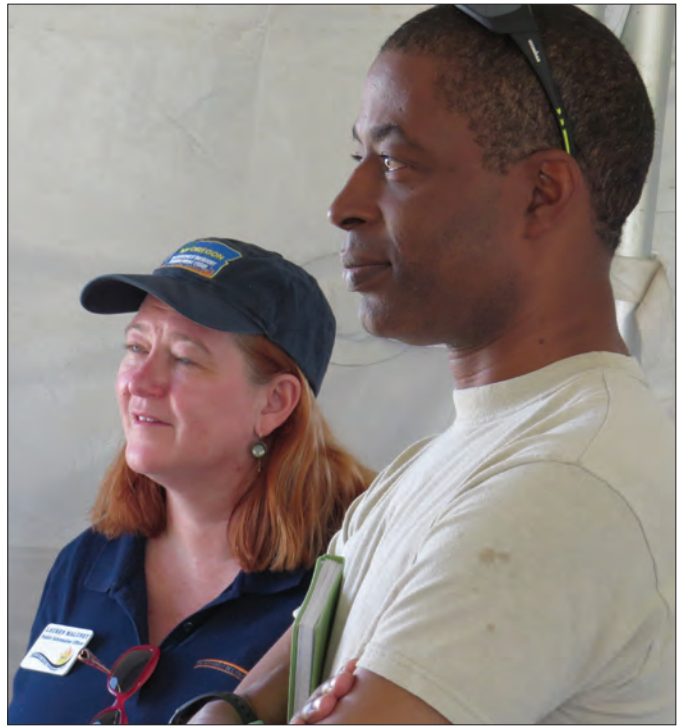
For several days, Paisley was at level two evacuation, which means be prepared to leave. As the fire was contained, evacuation notices were called off, and life could

return to normal. Meanwhile, crews remained for mop-up and habitat restoration.

Organizing a fire camp is a monumental task. Logistics Section Chief Bill Menke likens it to the infrastructure of a small city.

"It's like putting together the pieces of a big puzzle," Bill says. "It's a city built from a hay field."

It takes about three days to construct the camp and provide office space, sleeping quarters, computer systems, sanitation, showers, recycling, trash, ice, food, signs and traffic control. The firefighters' effectiveness is linked to how healthy, well fed and



Clockwise from top left, finance personnel Saren Whitney and Barb Haxby were responsible not only for payroll, but support for the camp, including \$80,000 a day for food. Public information staff Lauren Maloney and Bariki Mallya kept the public up to date. More than 1,000 firefighters and support staff converged on Paisley.

rested they are.

“Our job is to take care of the people here,” Bill says. “Sanitation is huge in fire camp. We provide hand-washing stations. The ‘camp crud’ can get a lot of people sick real fast.”

When laying out the camp, the kitchen and refrigerator trucks are situated first, and parking areas are established for the heavy equipment.

Firefighters typically work 12-hour shifts. Day-sleeping accommodations for the night crew included semis fitted out with bunks and air conditioning, as well as local church buildings and the Paisley Community Center. Day shift workers slept overnight in their individual dome tents.

Arizona-based Latitudes Catering served hearty breakfasts and dinners, and provided sack lunches for

the crews. Each firefighter receives 6,000 calories a day, with specified amounts of protein, carbohydrates, fruit and as many bottles of water as they want. It costs \$80,000 a day to feed 1,068 people, according to the finance section.

Peaked white tents with swamp coolers house the support staff: communications, computers, medical services, strategic planning, ordering and finance. Sam Cuevas, communication unit leader, installed the radio system, which provides two-way handheld radios for each firefighter in the field.

Much was learned from the tragic loss of 14 firefighters in 1994 in a Colorado fire, and safety has become a top priority. This includes improved communications and daily reports by fire weather forecasters.

Barb Haxby, finance section chief, oversees a staff of 14, which tracks all the contracts and wages, makes sure everyone is paid, monitors the cost of tents, kitchen, toilets, land rental and medical claims.

“A camp this size costs \$1 million a day,” Barb says.

Planning Section Chief Bev McCulley formulates daily incident action plans and develops maps based on information from nightly infrared flights over the fire. Before going out to the fire, every crew receives a briefing, a set of maps and a report from the fire weather analyst.

In the Operations Division, Ryan Sullivan and Vince Grace plan field operations and send resources to priority areas, including ground crews and air operations.

The Paisley airport was converted into a helibase. Helibase Manager Rocky

Pankratz was responsible for aircraft base operators who coordinate aircraft, and monitor take off and landings. Each morning, a helicopter made a reconnaissance flight over the fire, pinpointing areas that need water drops. The helicopter serves as “eyes in the sky,” communicating with the firefighters.

“People on the ground are busting their butts,” Rocky says. “This is a group effort. We want this work to be safe and effective.”

Helicopters cannot fly when smoke limits visibility to a half-mile or less. When they did fly, several contract helicopters dropped water from their buckets or holding tanks. For the Watson Creek Fire, water was obtained from a 6,500-gallon heli-well at Coffee Pot Flat and from Campbell and Dead Horse lakes. ■



Larry Fairbairn saw a lot of the world during his 23 years of service in the Seabees, including time in Alaska and Antarctica.

Three Wars, 23 Years of Service

Local veteran traveled the world as a Seabee, building anything troops needed

By Craig Reed

Larry Fairbairn was involved in three major wars. He's the first to admit he is fortunate to have survived each without much more than a scratch.

After being drafted in 1942, Larry joined the U.S. Navy Seabees and became a heavy equipment operator. He was involved in combat construction in World War II, the

Korean War and the Vietnam War.

Larry, 94, had a 23-year career in the Navy, retiring in 1966. He lives a quiet life in the McKenzie Bridge area with his wife, Sam, of 37 years.

"I thank God every night that I'm still alive," he says. "I'm very lucky. The good Lord was looking after me."

Larry was not on the front lines in any of the three wars,

but while operating equipment on construction projects, he was within range of long artillery and on many occasions there were explosions around him. The Seabees were skilled workers capable of any type of construction, anywhere needed, under any conditions or circumstances. They were also trained to drop their tools and equipment if necessary and take up weapons at

a moment's notice to defend themselves.

In 1944, Larry was in Guam, working to expand the airstrip to accommodate B-29 heavy bombers when a ground explosion resulted in shrapnel injuring his left leg. A field doctor said, "We'll put a Band-Aid on it," and Larry was quickly back at the construction site.

Larry's only other major



Above, the Seabee emblem on Larry's shirt.



Left, Larry in 1943 at boot camp at Camp Bennion in Faryagut, Idaho.

health issue while in the service also occurred in Guam. He came down with dengue fever—a mosquito-borne tropical disease. He was bed-ridden in a hospital for most of a week before getting his strength back and being released.

“I saw people lying on the ground dead, but I was fortunate,” he says.

After the war ended in 1945, Larry was sent to Tinian in the Mariana group of islands to help rebuild airstrips. He returned to the U.S. in 1946, was discharged and attended Oregon State University for one year on

the GI Bill. He then took a job with the Army Corps of Engineers.

He didn't feel quite right, however, and soon checked into a program “for those who suffered shellshock,” he says. He spent three months in the program and then decided to re-enlist in the Navy.

“I felt that is where I belonged, in with other military people,” he recalls. “I really enjoyed the training, what the possibilities of advancement were and the opportunity to learn marketable skills.”

Larry eventually taught equipment operation and surveying at a Seabee school at Port Hueneme near Oxnard, California. When an operation for testing equipment in cold weather came up, he volunteered and spent six months at Point Barrow, Alaska. He helped build an ice base and airstrip there.

When Larry's time on that project ended, his next

stops were back in Southern California and then to Adak, an island town in southwestern Alaska.

The Korean War began in 1950. Larry was eventually deployed to the South Korean town of Pohang-dong, spending six months with the 8th Army. That war ended in 1953.

Larry spent several years at numerous sites, either working in construction, training, instructing or being a teacher to military personnel, helping them reach a high school equivalency in their education. He also taught classes for local children.

On a project in Antarctica, he helped build another ice base and a road system. While there, he volunteered to join a Russian expedition that was using “huge snowmobiles” to travel around the region.

“I joined that group to learn about their snowmobiles,” he said. “Sometimes it was so cold there, you couldn't go outside.”

Larry's next stop was Auckland, New Zealand, for a 30-day leave. Then he spent a year in Da Nang during the Vietnam War.

While in Vietnam, Larry came up for reassignment. He was a chief petty officer and was offered a commission but turned it down because he would have had to commit to seven more years in the service before considering retirement. Instead, he finished his military career at a recruiting office in Ukiah, California.

While working in Ukiah,

Larry met a U.S. Forest Service engineer. After hearing about Larry's construction experience, the engineer told him there would be a forest service job available for him when he retired.

Larry retired from the Navy in 1966 and went to work for the forest service that year. He was both a district engineer and a project manager in his 18 years with that agency.

He worked out of Ukiah, San Bernadino and Ojai offices in California, working on campground construction, logging roads, trail construction, building quarters for forest service personnel and managing facilities. He worked on building 20 miles of the Pacific Crest Trail that runs from the border in Southern California to the northern border in Washington.

Larry says that Veterans Day on November 11 is special for him. He participated in a Veterans Day event a year ago in Eugene and has been a special guest in past Veterans Day parades.

Other than limited hearing, he is in good health for his age and hopes to participate in future Veterans Day events.

“I think he's had a great life—a wonderful life,” Sam says of her husband. “He's gotten to see so much of the world. He's gotten to meet so many good people.”

“I'm very patriotic,” Larry says. “Other than being shot at, I can't find anything wrong with my career in the Seabees. I was happy to serve.” ■



Volunteers setup for monthly shopping at the Triangle Grange. From left are board members Frann Olson, Mabel Barnett and Carol Wennstrom.

Volunteers Work to Stop Hunger

The Triangle Food Box lets families 'shop' for the food they need

By Craig Reed

On the third Thursday of each month, volunteers unbox food items and laying them out on tables. Their efforts are rewarded the next day when individuals and families in need arrive to select their food.

There are smiles on both sides of the tables as choices are made between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

The Triangle Food Box and its 40 volunteers provide this opportunity once a month at the Triangle Grange.

"Alleviating hunger in and around Blachly, Oregon," is the food pantry's mission statement.

Most of the program's volunteers gathered at a recent barbecue/potluck at Triangle Lake.

They say there is a need in the area and there is satisfaction in helping those folks.

An average of 70 families from a radius of about 30 miles show up on food box day. Those families range in size from one to nine members and range in age from babies up to 94. Some food boxes are also delivered to people who are homebound or unable to make the trip that day.

Overall, the food helps feed about 200 people.

"You see all these smiling people," Bryn Tomlinson says, gesturing toward the volunteers at the barbecue. "You get that tenfold on shopping day. I find a lot of meaning and fulfillment in this community when helping people."

"We do this out of the goodness of our hearts," says Carol Wennstrom.

"We do it for the love of our community," adds Cyndie Blake.

Triangle Food Box is a designated emergency food pantry. It is part of a rural delivery program

organized by Food for Lane County. On the third Thursday of each month, the pantry's box truck is loaded with produce, dairy and bread products in Eugene and driven to Triangle Lake.

Volunteers spend several hours putting the food out, setting up a shopping style pantry. The next day, visitors to the pantry can choose what they need.

"There is a stigma to coming in and picking up a food box," Cyndie says. "Country people have a lot of pride, so we try to make it more of a shopping experience by letting them choose."

"It gives them more dignity when allowed to choose what they want," Bryn explains.

The shopping process also eliminates food waste because people will usually take only what they will use. Those with specific diet requirements can shop accordingly.

"They're not going to take something they don't like or can't eat," Bryn says.

Volunteers put signs and dividers among the food items, explaining how much each family can take of each item if there is a limited supply.

In addition to the Food for Lane County delivery, the food program also receives produce from backyard farmers and occasional donations from larger commercial operations.

Monetary grants from the Oregon Community Fund, Three Rivers Foundation, Coquille Indian Tribe Community Fund and Blachly-Lane Electric Cooperative have provided the food pantry with funds to buy food.

A recent Oregon Food Bank grant of \$10,000 helped the pantry buy a used box truck.

Additional funds are raised for the food pantry at events such as bunko and bingo nights and at an annual talent show.

Volunteers also hold toy and clothes drives.

"We operate with the generous help of our community," Bryn says. "We understand that life happens and sometimes people need some help."

The Triangle Food Box has provided food to the needy in the area for almost 35 years. It started as a free distribution program for U.S. Department of Agriculture products and was partnered with the Triangle Grange, according to volunteer Frann Olson.

In the mid-1990s, volunteers Migel Santana, Jeannie Trudeau, Cynthia Coyne and Laverne Montique pushed for the program to achieve non-profit status. Jeannie filed the required paperwork to become nonprofit. The first board members were



Volunteers Josh Gardiner and Claudia McNight organize grains and beans for Triangle Lake Food Box recipients.

Jeannie, Frann, Roy Schweder, Linda Richardson and Larry Avery. Frann, Linda and Larry are still on the board. Larry is chairman. The other board members are Carol, Bryn and Carrie Andrews.

"The people who started this have made it a wonderful program," Bryn says.

Cyndie is the program manager, Carol is the assistant manager, Bryn is the secretary and Frann is the treasurer.

"I believe in feeding people," Frann says. "No one should go hungry. At least two-thirds of the food is gone on shopping day, so that tells you there is a need."

Carol says the program not only provides a service for those who come and shop, but that it is a social outlet for many of the volunteers.

"I get to see people I don't see every day," she says, adding that many of the volunteers are seniors. "We watch out for each other and enjoy seeing each other on the setup and shopping days."

Bryn says the program is in need of new and younger volunteers.

After visitors have finished their shopping, the volunteers reward themselves by sitting down and enjoying a mid-afternoon potluck.

A month later, volunteers gather again to set food products out and to provide their area with another shopping day. ■

For more information on the Triangle Food Box or to contact the program, visit www.trianglefoodbox.webnode.com or www.facebook.com/trianglefoodbox.

WWII Veteran Remains a Proud Marine

By Craig Reed

Tom Teela says he has lived his life for the future.

With that attitude, he has lived a long life with few demons, if any, from his time serving as a U.S. Marine in World War II.

Tom, 93, has little trouble with recall about those years as a young adult after he enlisted at age 17. But after suffering a stroke in April, he struggles to find the right words. With patience, he summarizes his life story.

Tom doesn't see himself as a hero for his military service. He agrees with many other veterans that those who died in the war are the heroes.

An estimated 16 million U.S. military personnel served in some aspect of World War II. A reported 405,399 died during the war, and another 671,000 were wounded. As of September 2017, it was estimated 558,000 U.S. World War II veterans were still alive, many of them in their late 80s and early 90s.

The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs reports about 400 of these veterans die daily, leaving fewer and fewer of them to share their stories from the most destructive war in history.

All U.S. military veterans will be honored on Veterans Day at events across the country, including a celebration in La Pine.



Tom displays a photo album full of memories from his Honor Flight trip to Washington, D.C., in 2015.



Tom's Marine service alpha uniform bears the 2nd Marine Division patch and his corporal stripes.

Tom enlisted in the Marines shortly after graduating from high school in Havre, Montana. Tom's father was a Marine who fought in World War I and was wounded, needing several months to recover after being hit by shrapnel.

"I joined the Marines because they were the best," Tom says. "I was very proud of it. People say thank you for your service to me, but it was my privilege to be a Marine and to participate in the war."

After basic training in San Diego and a stop in New Zealand, Tom was assigned to the 2nd Marine Division as an infantry rifleman. He deployed to the Pacific in September 1943.

In his first action, the Battle of Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands in November 1943, Tom was shooting at an enemy machine gun when a bullet hit his rifle, shredding it and wounding Tom with shrapnel.

An estimated 6,400 soldiers on both sides of the four-day battle died before U.S. forces prevailed.

"It was either kill them or get killed," Tom says. "We had trained and trained

and trained. We were good; we were the best outfit in the world in those situations."

Four days after being wounded, Tom returned to his division. He fought in three more major battles before the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima August 6, 1945, and another on Nagasaki three days later, forcing the Japanese to surrender.

Tom and his fellow Marines were sent to Nagasaki.

"We had to make sure they had really given up," Tom says of the Marines' mission in Nagasaki.

He says he has no regrets about the atomic bombs used and the deaths they caused because he believes the Japanese were not ready to give up. He says a lot more U.S. troops would have been killed and the war would have dragged on for much longer.

"I saw a lot of terrible things, but you expect to see that in war," Tom says quietly. "In war, people are going to get hurt and killed."

Japan surrendered September 2, 1945. Tom and other Marines spent the last few months of that year in Nagasaki before shipping home, arriving in San Diego January 1, 1946.

"I was very fortunate to come home in one piece," Tom says. "I saw a lot of blood and [death]. A lot of soldiers were killed in the water or on the beach at Tarawa."

Because many victory celebrations had already been held for soldiers who returned to the U.S. earlier, Tom says his ship was not greeted by a cheering crowd. He remembers just two women on the dock that day.

"I was just happy to be home," he says.

Tom says his attitude was to look ahead. He worked for the railroad as a switchman and brakeman for several years in Montana. He married Betty Winchell in 1947. The couple raised sons



Tom Teela served with the 2nd Marine Division in World War II, fighting in several major battles in the Pacific, where he was wounded by shrapnel.

Don and Richard.

Wanting a work change, Tom chose to go into enforcement. The family moved to Southern California, and Tom joined U.S. Customs and Border Patrol and worked along the California-Mexico border for three years. He eventually transferred to a position at the port of entry at Tijuana—the busiest point of entry between the U.S. and Mexico—for eight years.

Promotions followed, and Tom became an operations officer in Los Angeles for three years before being transferred to Washington, D.C., for three years and then returning to Los Angeles and becoming the director of control for the L.A. port. There he managed U.S. Customs personnel who inspected ships and cargo.

Tom concluded his career with a transfer to Los Angeles. International Airport and a smaller airport nearby. He managed 300 customs personnel who inspected airplanes and cargo. He also

managed the collection of money for duties on products.

Whether it was traffic at Tijuana, ships at the harbor or planes at the airport, Tom says most busts involved the movement of illegal drugs.

He also made several trips abroad to help several countries set up customs programs.

“With no college, I’m very fortunate to have had the life I had,” Tom says.

Tom was married to Betty for 46 years before she died in 1993. He married Donna Green in 1995. She died in 2015.

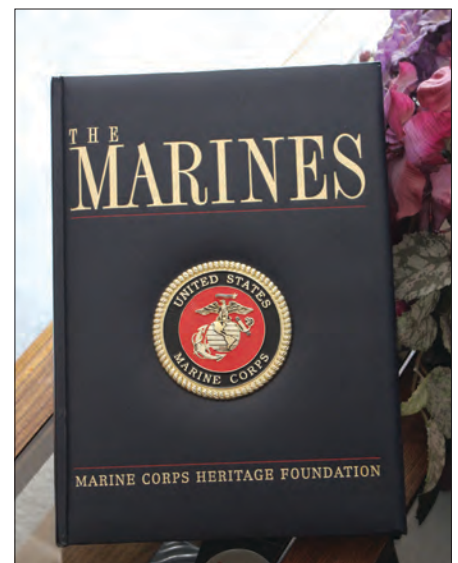
He says now it is just him and Verde, his green-eyed cat.

“I can’t believe he has done everything he has done,” says Don, Tom’s son. “He’s been quite an inspiration. He’s been a positive influence on a lot of people.”

In 2015, before Donna died, the couple made an Honor Flight trip to Washington, D.C., to visit the national memorials. Tom was not initially in favor of making the trip, but he now

says he is pleased he did.

“He was a Marine because there was a job that needed to be done,” Don says. “For him, it wasn’t for any recognition.” ■



Visitors at Tom’s home can thumb through the Marine Corps’ rich history in this coffee-table book.

Giving Thanks for Nanny Red's Dedication

Longtime bus driver steers her way into generations of students' hearts

By Dianna Troyer

During the past five decades, Caroline Davis' red hair has dimmed with gray undertones, but her smile is still radiant when she greets students riding her bus in the Minidoka School District.

To generations of her passengers, she will always be known by her nicknames: "Nanny Red" or "Red."

"I might think about retiring when they get enough drivers," says Caroline, 76, who drives a route for special needs students.

Depending on the year, it ranges from five to 20 kids, Caroline says.

Her supervisor and other employees—including her daughter and former aide, Coleen Jones—discourage her from retiring.

"She can't leave because she loves us, and we love her," says Ryan Edwards, district transportation supervisor. "We hope she never retires."

Mechanic Spook Breeding says when people find out where he works, the first thing they ask is if Red is still driving.

"Everyone is glad and amazed she's still doing it," Spook says. "She started driving two years before I was even born."

Caroline and Coleen consider the mechanics, drivers and other staff members at the bus garage in Rupert to be their second family. The staff eats lunch together. Caroline often fulfills requests for one of her salads.



Minidoka School District bus driver Caroline "Nanny Red" Davis, left, and aide Lisa Pena help Chloe Cattle get off the bus. Seventy-six-year-old Caroline has been driving for five decades.

Photo by Coleen Jones

Caroline's second family comforted her when her husband died in 2009 and when her house burned down two years ago. The fire destroyed dozens of homemade cards and gifts students had given to her.

"One girl gave me a silver bracelet," Caroline says. "Another made a brownie mix in a jar and had a spatula with a tag saying, 'Stir up some Christmas magic.' Someone gave me a rice bowl with pot

holders. One student taped a small chalkboard to a clay flower pot."

Coleen says work camaraderie and appreciation from students energizes her mother.

"We get here at 5:30 every morning and are done at about 4:30," Coleen says.

Caroline and Coleen worked together on the same bus for 15 years.

"I was hired as her aide in 2002," Coleen says. "This is the first year I'm



Clockwise from above, Caroline's daughter, Coleen, was her aide for 15 years. Mechanic Spook Breeding says he is often asked if Caroline is still driving.

not doing it because I'm the in-office driver trainer."

They joke that Coleen became familiar with her mom's bus routes even before she was born.

"I was pregnant with her when I started driving in the spring of 1967," Caroline says. "A family friend worked at the Paul bus yard and knew a substitute driver was needed. The only thing he wondered was whether I could fit behind the steering wheel. I've been driving ever since. When they were children, Coleen and her brother, Robert, rode with me sometimes."

During her career, Caroline has driven most routes in the sprawling rural district, often through hazardous winter weather.

"It takes about 20 minutes to even get to the start of some routes," Coleen says.

Like dealing with shifting weather and changing road conditions, Caroline has adapted to new regulations and procedures.

"We used to be able to make kids get off the bus if they misbehaved," Caroline says. "Once, two brothers started

fighting, so I told them they either had to sit down or get off the bus. They decided to get off and walked home."

The current discipline policy requires drivers to write a ticket to the misbehaving student and have parents sign it before allowing the student to ride again.

Caroline says most children behave when she gives them "the look" in the mirror above her steering wheel.

New regulations also require assigned seating.

"If there's an accident, the seating chart is a way to account for all the students," Coleen says.

Whatever unexpected things happen during her students' school day, they know they can count on a comforting greeting



and reassuring smile from Caroline.

"I always tell them hello in the morning and greet them by their name," she says. "When they get off the bus, I tell them to have a good evening or weekend."

Along with her friendly demeanor, Caroline also makes her bus welcoming with holiday decorations.

"They like it when I surprise them by wearing holiday earrings or a costume at Halloween," she says. "I'll probably keep driving as long as my health is good." ■

Become a Conservation Champion

A few simple steps can cut energy use and save you money

By Christina Sawyer

Extreme weather is looming. Physically managing the cold weather is tough enough, but what about the associated power costs? Drastic measures can reduce these costs, but the most affordable way is to become a conservation champion.

Energy efficiency means doing more with less energy. Saving money, improving the economy, helping the environment and enhancing the quality of life are some of the reasons people choose to use energy more efficiently. Your electric

bill reflects the amount of electricity consumed by you and your family in your home. Your neighbor has a completely different set of circumstances—a different number of people living in the home, different lifestyle, different size home, different equipment and methods—which is why comparing bills with neighbors is not useful.

It is far better to learn more about your own energy

use. To do that, you need to understand a little bit about electricity and how it is sold.

A 100-watt light bulb burning for 10 hours uses 1,000 watt-hours of electricity, which equals 1 kilowatt-hour. Your utility bill reports the number of kilowatt-hours you use and the rate you pay. A typical household consumes about 11,800 kWh year.

Conservation Champion

Becoming a conservation champion does not require a lot of expense.

Start by completing an energy audit with your family. Ask yourself some basic questions: Do you leave unnecessary lights on? Is the computer always in standby mode? Does your air-conditioning unit really need to be set at a cool 65 degrees? Has your family become accustomed to 20-minute showers?

All of these lifestyle choices increase your energy use.

Imagine if each member of your family made a single energy-saving change. The cost savings can really add up.

Start by setting your thermostat at 78 degrees during the summer and 68 degrees during the winter. You can save about 3 percent for every degree you change.

Programmable thermostats make it easy to save by offering pre-programmed settings to regulate your home's temperature.

Smart Appliance Use

Appliances account for about

13 percent of household energy costs—with refrigeration, cooking and laundry at the top of the list.

Stop phantom power use by plugging home electronics—such as computers, printers, TVs, DVD players and gaming devices—into power strips. Turn the power strips off when the equipment is not in use. Computers, TVs and DVD players still use power in standby mode.

On existing refrigerators and freezers, make sure seals fit tightly when doors close. Keep outside coils clean. Dirty coils make your refrigerator compressor work longer to remove heat. Set your freezer no lower than 0 degrees and your refrigerator at 37 degrees.

If you decide to upgrade your refrigerator, look for the Energy Star logo. Energy Star products meet strict efficiency guidelines set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy.

When you shop for appliances, think of two price tags. The first one covers the purchase price. View this as a down payment. The second is the cost of operating the appliance during its lifetime. You will pay on that second price tag every month with your utility bill for the next 10 to 20 years, depending on the appliance.

Properly disposing of old appliances is an important part of energy conservation.

If you hauled the old refrigerator out to your garage and plugged it in, you are not saving any money.

A Tighter Home

Air that transfers in and out of homes through cracks, crevices and holes can increase energy consumption.

On a windy day, carefully hold a lit incense stick next to your windows, doors, electrical outlets, ceiling fixtures, attic hatches and other places where air may leak. If smoke travels horizontally, you have an air leak that may need caulking, sealing or weather stripping. Seal around pipe penetrations coming through walls. Ensure weather-stripping around doors and windows is tight.

When your fireplace is not operating, its flue should be tightly closed. Check the ceiling behind the cornice of built-in bookshelves for holes cut during construction. Drop-down, disappearing stairways should fit tightly into the ceiling and be carefully weather-stripped.

Whole-house attic fans should be tightly sealed during the winter. Make sure your outside dryer vent door closes when the dryer is not in use. Check the insulation in your attic, exterior and basement walls, ceilings, floors and crawl spaces.

One of the most cost-effective ways to make your home more comfortable is to add insulation to your attic, including the attic trap or access

Ways to Save

- Use a programmable thermostat
- Use CFLs or LEDs
- Take shorter showers
- Add insulation to attic
- Replace single-pane windows
- Install Energy Star appliances



LED holiday lights are safer, sturdier, longer lasting and substantially more efficient than other options, which can mean big savings on your electric bill.

door. If you have R-19 or less insulation in your attic, consider bringing it up to R-49 in cold climates. If you have R-11 or less floor insulation, consider bringing it up to R-25.

Heating and Cooling

Heating and air conditioning uses the largest chunk of your home energy dollar. Keep it running “lean and mean” to increase its efficiency.

Have an HVAC technician check your systems to verify they are moving the correct amount of air. Heat pump and air-conditioning systems should be checked annually to ensure they are properly charged. Inside and outside coils should be kept clean and free of debris.

Lighting

Replacing incandescent bulbs with energy-efficient halogens,

CFLs or LEDs can save 30 to 80 percent on energy bills. That adds up to annual savings of \$50 to more than \$100.

Energy Star-qualified LEDs use about 20 to 25 percent of the energy and last up to 25 times longer than traditional incandescent bulbs. They come in a variety of colors, and some are dimmable or offer convenient features such as daylight and motion sensors.

Water Heating

Water heating is the second-largest energy expense in your home. It typically accounts for about 18 percent of your electric bill. To cut the water heating bill, use less hot water by taking shorter showers instead of baths and wash only full loads of dishes and clothes.

Turn down the thermostat on your water heater to 120 degrees. Insulate the water

heater. If your water heater’s warranty has expired, consider replacing it with a new, more energy-efficient model.

Windows

Windows can be a home’s most attractive feature. They provide views, daylight, ventilation and heat from the sun in the winter. Unfortunately, they also can account for 10 to 25 percent of your heating bill by letting heat out.

If your home has single-pane windows, replace them with double-pane, high performance glass, low-e or spectrally selective coatings. In colder climates, select gas-filled windows with low-e coatings to reduce heat loss. Windows with low-e coating on the glass reflect heat back into the room during the cold winter months.

If you cannot make the investment in new windows,

keep curtains closed tightly and windows locked.

And the Winner is ... You

The benefits of becoming a conservation champion are many. The results of the small changes you make are endless. Your home is more comfortable, your appliances run more efficiently and you have more money in your pocket.

The cold winter months are looming, so now is the time to turn your family into conservation champions. Complete a household energy audit and start a project list of small changes you can make.

Whether you take simple steps or make large investments, you will see lower energy bills. Over time, those savings will typically pay for the cost of the improvements and put money back in your pocket. ■



Nurse practitioner Veronica Stevens opened Aspen Quick Care in Wells in September. There has not been a clinic in town since 2015.

Photos by Carol Lee Holt Egbert

Local Health Care Now an Option in Wells

Hometown nurse practitioner Veronica Stevens opens new clinic in Wells

By Dianna Troyer

When she opened Aspen Quick Care in Wells in September, nurse practitioner Veronica Stevens hung an appreciation plaque and photo of her mentor, Dr. S. Joseph Smith, in the waiting room.

"I made sure to put it where patients would see it," she says. "He was beloved in our community and was known for his diagnostic skills, honesty and being a country doctor who treated everything from snake bites to broken bones."

In high school, Veronica unintentionally discovered her medical career path while working at Joseph's clinic at 197

Baker Street. His wife, Jody, coached Veronica on the school golf team and was also her husband's office manager and medical assistant.

"She hired me to help at the clinic," Veronica says. "I was sure I wanted to run a golf course one day, but after a few months of working at the clinic, I fell in love with medicine, which led me to choose nursing instead. I learned to take vital signs, draw blood and shoot X-rays."

More than a decade later, Veronica, 31, has returned to the clinic as its sole practitioner, offering health care to Wells residents for the first time since 2015. The urgent care and family practice clinic is

equipped with a medication dispensary, digital X-ray equipment and a laboratory.

After Joseph retired in 2011, the Northeastern Nevada Regional Hospital in Elko opened the clinic for several years. It closed in 2015.

"People in Wells are like family to me," says Veronica, who grew up in the town of 1,200. "Opening the clinic is my way of giving back to the community."

With the new clinic open, people do not have to drive an hour each way to Elko or four hours roundtrip to Twin Falls for medical care or to fill their prescriptions.

Veronica, medical assistant Leandra



Left, medical assistant and X-ray technician Emma Whitaker sets up a patient X-ray. Above, Veronica, Emma and medical assistant Ady Prado take on Wells area health care.

Moschetti, medical assistant and X-ray technician Emma Whitaker, and receptionist Ady Prado will serve about 2,000 people in Wells and in Ruby, Starr and Clover valleys.

To keep the clinic sustainable, Veronica is counting on the type of community support that sustained the original practice in Wells for 29 years.

A University of Arkansas School of Medicine graduate, Joseph was looking for a small town to raise a family when a blizzard stranded him and Jody in Wells.

At the 4-Way Casino and Restaurant, they met Mike and Lois Nannini, who welcomed them to town. To convince Joseph and Jody to stay, Wells Civic Improvement Corporation members provided a rent-free clinic and land to build a house near the golf course.

Re-opening the clinic has been a year-long labor of love and logistics to obtain medical equipment and various licenses.

The idea was Dave White's, a physician's assistant who had opened an Aspen Quick Care clinic in Spring Creek to serve a remote area. He called the Wells

city manager to ask if anyone was interested and qualified to open a similar clinic there.

"It was a call out of the blue," Veronica says.

She had graduated from Great Basin College in 2011 with a nursing degree and worked in the emergency room at the Elko hospital and as a school nurse in Wendover.

To be qualified to open a clinic, she enrolled in an online program through the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. After 18 months, she earned credentials as a board-certified nurse practitioner in 2017.

While re-opening the clinic, not all of Veronica's duties have been related to medicine.

"My dad and I spent weeks stripping the old wax from the floor and applying a new coat," she says. "My husband and I repainted the entire interior. My mom, aunt and uncle all helped me get the building cleaned up and ready to serve the community. I couldn't have done it without them."

Veronica recalls Joseph's emphasis on preventive care and his honesty.

"He would tell patients who had

routine coughs and colds that he could either give them antibiotics, and they'd be better in seven days, or they could go home and eat chicken soup and they'd be well in a week, too," she says.

Five months after he retired, Dr. Smith, 71, died from pancreatic cancer.

"He left big shoes to fill," Veronica says.

Like Dr. Smith, she says she is committed to staying in Wells. She and her husband, Loren, were high school sweethearts and have a son, Talen, a kindergarten. Loren is an Elko County Sheriff's deputy in Wells.

"We're considering purchasing a lot for our own home that happens to be behind Dr. Smith's house," she says.

Veronica says she plans to provide cradle-to-grave care, emphasizing preventive medicine to curtail chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

"I'm excited and optimistic for the clinic's future," she says. ■

The clinic is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Most insurance is accepted, and a membership plan is offered for individuals, families and businesses. Appointments can be made at (775) 773-8010 or wells@aspenquickcare.com. Walk-ins are welcome.

Save on Your Heating Bill with These Simple Steps

By Vern Hee

Winter is just around the corner. We will soon put away shorts and sunscreen and break out our favorite sweaters and coats.

We also have to prepare our homes for the cool-down.

Valley Electric Association's vast service area receives varying amounts of snow, but the air can have a bite everywhere with the mercury dropping well below freezing. It gets cold enough that people spend a lot of money staying warm.

Here are some tips from experts at VEA, the Department of Energy and our friends at Touchstone Energy Cooperative to help shave costs off the power bill and assist in preparing your home for the change in season.

Service your heater

VEA recommends you service your heater annually. Heater malfunctions can cost big bucks. Check your settings. VEA meter technicians find that some residents set heaters to "Emergency Heat" and forget to return it to its normal settings. This oversight can double your heating bill.

Update the thermostat

Now is the time to not only program new temperatures into your thermostat but also make sure it is working properly. The Department of Energy recommends 68 degrees while you are awake during the winter months. Cooler during the sleeping hours.

Replace your old thermostat

Programmable thermostats can help



Replacing air filters as VEA member Carl Hereford is doing here can increase airflow, improve comfort in the home and reduce costs.

Photos by Jeff Scheid

save you money by allowing setback temperatures to be programmed, according to Touchstone Energy Cooperative. If you don't have a programmable thermostat, maybe this is the time to make the change.

Setback temperatures, according to the Department of Energy, are 7-10 degrees lower than your normal temperature setting. According to the DOE, this can save you 10 percent on your heating bill.

Drapes and blinds

In the summer, we let the blinds stay down to keep the home cool. According to Touchstone Energy, keep the blinds open during the fall and winter. Allow sunlight to flood the house to warm it up, especially on the south side, which gets most of the sun. When the sun goes down, close the blinds to trap as much of

that heat as possible in your home.

Doors and windows

The doors and windows should be checked. Inspect the seals on all exterior doors and windows. Feel for drafts, and seal them. The DOE says any drafts can severely affect your heating bill. Cold air will enter from any holes or gaps found in the door seals or window seals. Use foam, weather stripping, and window caulking to reduce the amount of air coming in. It's also a good time to inspect hard-to-get places for air leakage in the house. If you have one window that is drafty, at the least make sure it has a heavy curtain.

Timer for water heater

VEA recommends that members check into buying a timer for their water



Make certain the fireplace damper is closed when not in use.

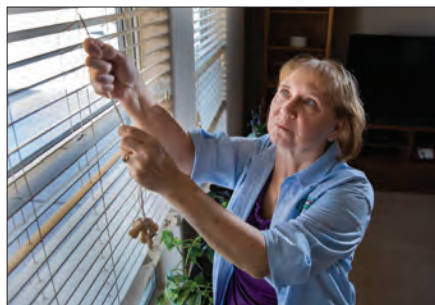
heater. The timer allows you to use the heater only when needed. Install a timer that turns off your electric water heater at night or during other times when you know you won't need it.

Blanket for water heater

VEA recommends an insulation blanket for your water heater. The insulation keeps the heat in the water heater. A \$20 blanket goes a long way and will save money in the long run. For those that have a water heater on the garage floor, elevate the heater onto a platform. If it's touching the floor, it's losing heat.

Wrap ducts and change filters

This is a great time to check your HVAC ducts for leaks, according to the DOE. Leaks can cost you up to 30 percent. Replace air filters, which can



In this photo and on the cover, Nancy Hereford allows sunlight to flood the house in the winter to warm it up, especially on the south side, which gets most of the sun.

increase air flow and help with comfort in the home. The DOE recommends changing filters monthly.

Fireplaces

The DOE says the change in season is a good time to do maintenance on the fireplace, check the chimney and flue for

cracks in the seal in the damper. Make sure the fireplace damper is closed during the winter when not in use. The damper is like a window, allowing heat to escape up the chimney.

While using the fireplace to heat the home, crack the nearest window slightly, about one inch and close the doors leading into the room. Lower the thermostat setting to 50 degrees and 55 degrees while the fireplace is in use.

For more information on winterizing your home VEA recommends visiting the Department of Energy link on Home weatherization:

<https://www.energy.gov/public-services/homes/home-weatherization>.

Another helpful link is the home efficiency Analysis Tool by Touchstone Energy Cooperative: <http://homeefficiency.touchstoneenergy.com/>. ■

Storm Clouds Brewing

OTEC awaits the effects of looming political issues

By Anthony Bailey
OTECC CFO

Several political issues on the horizon could have a severe impact on Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative and you, our member-owners.

The effects of these issues could be felt in several ways, including significant increases in electric rates for OTEC members and a threat to the reliability of OTEC's power supply. The result could be a potential loss of one of the most reliable, carbon-free, renewable power resources on the planet: hydroelectricity.

One of the main issues that threatens OTEC and its members is a proposal to remove dams on the lower Snake River, which could result in these hydro resources being replaced with carbon-based resources, such as gas-fired generation plants.

How does this action help the environment if more carbon-based fuels are used?

The breaching—or removal—of the lower Snake River dams creates more questions than answers. Will their removal really save endangered orcas in the Puget Sound area like a Washington State task force indicates?

Is the carbon tax proposed by Oregon Gov. Kate Brown and likely to be taken up by the Oregon State Legislature during the upcoming 2019 session the right approach for Oregon? That remains to be seen, but it would be difficult for OTEC to support

cap-and-trade legislation until the state of Oregon recognizes its current environmental policies are inconsistent with proposed cap-and-trade legislation.

Will a continued spring and summer spill of water over the dams really lead to an increase in fish survival? So far, scientific evidence supports that extra spill increases nitrogen in the water, which can be lethal to salmon.

With questions like these unanswered, Brown and the state legislature are gambling that their actions will have a positive outcome, when most experts say otherwise.

The Orcas

Recent news stories have reported the primary detriment to the southern resident orcas—killer whales—are the four dams on the Lower Snake River.

This orca population has numbered between 75 and 100 during the past 40 years. The whales range between southern Alaska and central California, and are more abundant in colder water.

The animals can be found worldwide, but are center stage in the Pacific Northwest because one of their home bases is the Puget Sound.

This topic has become a political football. The state of Washington says the lower Snake River dams are the reason the orcas are imperiled.

The state created the Southern Resident Orca Task Force and has issued draft recommendations for the orcas' recovery. Unfortunately, the draft plan includes the potential for further harmful changes to operation of the four federal dams on the lower Snake River that could ultimately lead to their removal.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries says the primary factors affecting the southern orcas include the lack of food supply, pollution and disturbance from boats and other human-caused noise pollution. While in and around the Puget Sound area, these orcas primarily feed on chinook salmon in the Fraser River Basin in Canada and the lower Columbia River.

These rivers are just two of 31 West Coast chinook salmon populations that the orcas feed on. There are more Columbia River and Snake River fish available now than in the past several decades due to improvements made at the dams for fish passage and the



Puget Sound orcas are cited as a possible reason to remove four lower Snake River dams.

Photo courtesy of Center for Whale Research/WhaleResearch.com



number of hatcheries increasing fish production.

Conversely, according to NOAA Fisheries, between 11 and 43 percent of salmon and steelhead runs are lost due to predation from primarily non-native birds and sea lions counteracting these efforts.

NOAA Fisheries reports the bio-accumulation of chemicals built up during the life cycle of the fish the orcas eat have contributed to some of the highest contaminant levels observed in any wildlife populations. In addition, boating and shipping traffic has increased during the past few decades, significantly increasing noise and pollution, which both directly affect the orcas' ability to survive in the Puget Sound.

Removing the dams will not solve the problem of contaminants in the orcas' food supply, nor noise pollution.

The Carbon Tax (or Cap and Trade)

Oregon lawmakers are considering a major change in how the state will reduce its contributions to climate change. During the 2019 legislative session, Oregon legislators will likely propose some form of a carbon tax. This has been a high priority for Brown since she took office.

A legislative group has worked on the cap-and-trade proposal since the end of the 2018 legislative session. It is expected the proposal will be released early in the 2019 legislative session.

While there is general knowledge of how the proposal is structured, there are still things that remain unknown. At this point, we don't know who will be regulated and at what level. Will the tax be imposed at the Bonneville Power Administration level or the utility level? In other words, will the tax be proposed at the bulk distributor for fuel, or your local gas stations? Either way, you can expect the price of fuel to rise, something that will hit both OTEC and its member-owners squarely in the wallet.

We don't know how cap and trade will impact transportation taxation. We believe there may be an exemption for farm vehicles, but even that remains unclear. Regardless, the outcome looks like higher prices at the pump.

We don't know the magnitude of cap-and-trade penalties and subsequent taxes. During the 2018 legislative session, it was estimated Oregon would have

When state legislators convene in Salem in January, they will tackle a number of issues that could impact the price you pay for electricity. Please make your voice heard.

Continues on page 6

Storm Clouds Brewing

Continues from page 5

a \$700 million revenue stream from this new tax. We have no idea what the projected revenue stream is with the current proposal.

If this proposal becomes a reality, we don't know where the revenue stream will go or how, once collected, it will be distributed. How much of revenues will go to mitigate the effects of carbon? How much will go to offset higher utility bills? How much will the administrative burden be to operate this new tax be?

The Spill

Another issue that has been on the front burner for much of 2018 remains a court-mandated decision to spill more water over Snake and Columbia rivers dams.

In April, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals denied an appeal that would block spilling more water over eight federal dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers. As a result, additional water was spilled over the dams from early April through mid-June during the annual migration of juvenile salmon down the Columbia to the Pacific Ocean.

Increased water spill is intended to help young salmon migrate to the ocean. The spill program was to begin in 2017, but was delayed until this year and is projected to continue until 2022.

Migrating salmon on the way to the ocean have averaged a 95 percent survival rate

from the dams, but that is only part of the puzzle. Salmon and steelhead must also survive predation by birds and sea lions, which eat 11 to 43 percent of the salmon run. Conditions vary in the ocean, where salmon live for several years before returning to their spawning grounds.

Spilling water over the dams affects BPA—which

markets wholesale electrical power produced by dams on the two rivers—and power companies and cooperatives that buy a large share of their power from BPA. The dams are operated by the Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation.

Hydropower is generated when water flows through a dam's turbines. Spilling over the dams results in lost power of about 1,000 megawatts per month. For perspective, 1 megawatt can power 700 homes.

Water that doesn't run through the turbines and goes over the dams is power that the BPA doesn't generate. BPA must then replace that from another resource—generally a carbon-based resource—that comes at a higher cost, both financially and environmentally.

The spill is not the only cost associated with fish and wildlife. In 2016, fish and wildlife costs totaled \$621.5 million—one-quarter to one-third of the total costs for BPA power.

One major concern is that the spill—which is intended to help salmon—does not align with Oregon's proposed cap-and-trade carbon tax, which is designed to reduce greenhouse emissions.

Hydroelectric generation is carbon-free, which conflicts with the concept of increasing water spill over dams that would decrease the amount of water available to produce electricity.

Conclusion

Oregon legislators have left us with too many unanswered questions, whether that's the carbon-tax proposal (cap and trade), actions that may or may not protect Puget Sound orcas, spilling more water over dams on the Columbia River or removing dams on the lower Snake River.

At the least, every outcome proposed thus far negatively affects your electric cooperative and your electrical rates. You, the member, will pay the price.

We encourage you to become informed, get involved and let your voice be heard about these confusing and conflicting policy changes by contacting your legislators.

OTECC remains alert to these issues and is working hard to keep you informed.

Our representatives owe Oregon citizens more in-depth discussion, careful review of scientific evidence and detailed analysis before proceeding. Decisions this severe should not be made quickly without carefully examining the consequences and, certainly, not without a public process. ■



A federal court has ordered that water be spilled over the Columbia and Snake river dams each spring through 2022.

Photo courtesy of the Bonneville Power Administration

Contact Your Oregon Representative

Several issues that could impact Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative and its member-owners are detailed on preceding pages. Make your voice heard about these confusing and conflicting policy changes. Contact your local legislators.



Rep. Greg Barreto

Party: Republican
District: 58
Counties: All of Union and Wallowa counties, as well as portions of Umatilla County
Capitol Phone: (503) 986-1458
Capitol Address: 900 Court St. NE, H-384
Salem, OR 97301
Email: Rep.GregBarreto@oregonlegislature.gov
Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/barreto



Rep. Lynn Findley

Party: Republican
District: 60
Counties: All of Baker, Grant, Harney and Malheur counties, as well as parts of Lake County
Capitol Phone: (503) 986-1460
Capitol Address: 900 Court St. NE, H-475
Salem, OR 97301
Email: Rep.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov
Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/findley



Sen. Cliff Bentz

Party: Republican
District: 30
Counties: All of Baker, Grant, Harney, Jefferson, Malheur and Wheeler counties, as well as parts of Deschutes, Lake and Wasco counties
Capitol Phone: (503) 986-1730
Capitol Address: 900 Court St. NE, S-301
Salem, OR, 97301
Email: Sen.CliffBentz@oregonlegislature.gov
Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/bentz



Sen. Bill Hansell

Party: Republican
District: 29
Counties: All of Gilliam, Morrow, Sherman, Umatilla, Union and Wallowa counties, as well as parts of Wasco County
Capitol Phone: (503) 986-1729
Capitol Address: 900 Court St. NE, S-415
Salem, OR, 97301
Email: Sen.BillHansell@oregonlegislature.gov
Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/hansell



U.S. Congressional Delegation

To reach the Washington, D.C., office of any senator or representative, call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121. Ask the operator to connect you with the senator or representative to whom you wish to speak.

Train Aficionado, Wife Create Christmas Extravaganza

By Dianna Troyer

Dressed as Santa Claus, Ron Williams struggled to understand what a little boy was telling him during the Christmas Express celebration at his ranch near Alamo in 2013.

Realizing after a moment that the boy was deaf, Ron looked into his eyes and crossed his arms over his chest to deliver an important message.

“Santa loves you,” he signed.

The boy beamed with joy.

“Those are the kinds of memories we want to make every year for visitors,” Ron says.

Since 2010, Ron and his family have hosted the free holiday extravaganza at their ranch, 33 miles south of Alamo on Highway 93.

“It’s our way to show how much we appreciate our friends and customers and to help families make lasting holiday memories,” says Ron, founder and co-owner of Western Elite, a major waste management and recycling company in Nevada. “We want people to really feel the joy of what Christmas is all about.”

Last year during the first two weekends of December, 11,000 people flocked to the ranch for the sights, sounds and smells of a country Christmas.

Every year, visitors ride historic rail cars bound for “the North Pole,” sing carols, pay



Ron and Lynn Williams at their ranch near Alamo.

Photos courtesy of Ron and Lynn Williams

homage to Mary, Joseph and Jesus, and warm up with chili, hot dogs, corn bread and hot chocolate around campfires.

“It’s so much more than a train ride,” says Vicki Miller of Hiko. She and her husband, Doug, go yearly with their children and grandchildren.

“There are so many activities,” Vicki says. “Hay and buggy rides, a barrel train for children and Christmas characters in costumes walking around for photo opportunities. I tell people who haven’t

gone that they need to go.”

Visitors stroll down Gingerbread Lane where they can pick up a hot chocolate or lollipop and see a mime portraying Jack Frost.

After getting tickets in the historic Moapa train depot, visitors tour several rooms while waiting for their ride.

“Each room has a different theme,” Vicki says. “You can write a letter to Santa or see his workshop.”

Every 15 minutes, a train car picks up passengers for a

40-minute journey through several holiday scenes, including a pond of ice skaters, toy land, and an elf village. Eventually the train stops at the North Pole, and Santa climbs aboard to visit children and pass out treats.

“At the end, everyone is quiet when the train stops at the live nativity,” Vicki says. “Spending an evening at the Christmas Express is a wonderful way to start the holiday season.”

Ron says his wife, Lynn, is the visionary miracle-worker behind the production and sometimes Mrs. Claus to his Santa.

“She’s the Disney—the creative one with the imagination,” he says. “She’s unbelievably talented.”

This year, Lynn has planned several new scenes.

“There will be a hobbit house, which might even include Gandalf,” she says. “The little Nordic girl from ‘The Christmas Wish’ will make a debut. And the Coca-Cola bear is coming too.”

Lynn, also founder and co-owner of Western Elite, says her inspiration for Christmas scenes comes from what she sees in the trash that can be recycled.

“The elf village, gingerbread house and Santa’s workshop are all made from wooden crates that were used at trade shows,” Lynn says.

Her holiday imagination was sparked in 2010 when Ron, a historic train aficionado, bought a vintage rail car



The elf village with its dancing elves is one of several holiday scenes passengers travel past on the Christmas Express.

from a historic train in Heber, Utah. It was to be used as a theater at the ranch.

Lynn planned a family Christmas party using “The Polar Express” as a theme.

Several years later, the Moapa train depot, built in 1905, was brought to the ranch and restored.

“Everyone loves trains,” Ron says. “So many people started coming to the Christmas Express that I bought two more rail cars from back East so people wouldn’t have to wait in line

so long. We run four cars with each having a capacity for about 80 people.”

In 2017, Ron acquired two unique rail cars in Las Vegas, where Western Elite is based. The elegantly restored Blackhawk and Cascade carried Buffalo Bill Cody and his Wild West Show from 1906 to 1917.

“I heard they were in the way when a casino owner wanted to expand,” he says.

Appreciating their historical significance, he brought them to the ranch.

To host the Christmas Express, Ron and Lynn rely on 125 people—most of them paid employees—each night.

Her sons, daughters and their spouses each have assignments. They work as conductors, oversee food, staff scenes, load passengers and run the wagons.

Scott Seastrand, vice president of Western Elite, dons old-fashioned Christmas attire and greets guests. A special welcome is extended to military families November 30.

“It’s humbling to give back to those serving in our military who protect our freedoms,” Scott says. “It’s a joy to see veterans with their families enjoying the Christmas spirit.”

The evening wraps up around 9 p.m. as celebrants head home, warmed with memories.



Visitors can write letters to Santa in the depot.

“There’s nothing like seeing a child’s face light up when I introduce myself as Santa,” Ron says. “Our family is blessed to be able to do this and help people feel the true spirit of Christmas.” ■

This year, train rides begin at 5:30 p.m. November 30, December 1, 7 and 8. Reservations are required. Those interested can call (702) 440-4242 to make a reservation.



The Christmas Express awaits passengers.

Setting the Facts Straight On Salmon, Orcas and Dams

In October, federal experts recommended that facts and science—not emotion around dam breaching—guide the recovery of southern resident killer whales

By Ted Case

The heartbreaking images from the Puget Sound spread across the world. A female southern resident killer whale who lost her newborn kept its body afloat for more than two weeks in what was believed to be a display of mourning.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has studied the decline of the southern resident killer whales and found several threats, including reduced prey, vessel traffic and noise, toxic contaminants, and health risks such as inbreeding.

Much of the focus has centered on one aspect of a complex problem: reduced prey.

Opponents of the federal hydroelectric system also have seized the opportunity to reopen discussions about the fate of four Snake River dams that help provide electricity to the Pacific Northwest, among other attributes of the hydroelectric system.

What followed was a factually challenged online petition signed by more than 600,000 people calling for immediate

breaching of Snake River dams.

“Nothing else—not more spill across the dams, not more hatchery fish, not less boat traffic, not more studies—can achieve this in time to save wild salmon or southern resident orcas,” the petition stated.

In response to myriad misstatements and falsehoods regarding the Snake River dams, federal officials from the Bonneville Power Administration and Army Corps of Engineers hosted a webinar October 4 to address misconceptions regarding the dams and southern resident killer whales.

Following are rebuttals to information being circulated in the online petition.

Claim: The four Snake River Dams “produce only low-value surplus electricity.”

Kiernan Connelly, BPA’s senior vice president of Generation Asset Management, said the four Snake River dams generate about 1,000 average megawatts a year, which approximates the electricity consumption of

Seattle City Light during the course of a year.

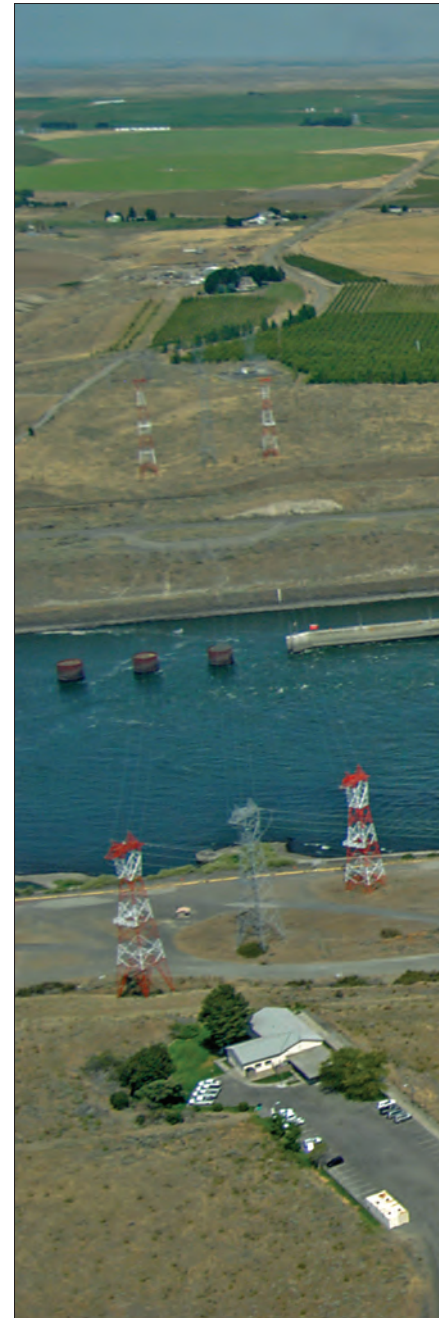
“These are some of the most affordable power resources in the federal power system,” Connelly said.

He noted that as the Pacific Northwest attempts to decarbonize, the dams play an important role in reliability and integrating new renewable resources. They also support the nation’s largest fish and wildlife program.

Claim: The orcas are starving because “more than 50 percent of their diet comes from salmon produced in the Columbia Basin, half of which were produced in the Snake River system.”

Kristen Jule, BPA’s fish and wildlife planning manager, said there are more Snake River chinook now than there were in the 1960s, before the lower Snake River dams were built.

She noted that one of three pods that makes up the southern resident population—the same one to lose the newborn—doesn’t travel to the mouth of the Columbia to



feed on chinook. She added that while all three pods rely on 15 different chinook runs, only two of the runs are from the Snake River.

“Geographically and timing, they are not the key limiting resource or prey for the southern resident killer whales,” Jule said. “Trends for the status of these stocks have been increasing over time.”



Claim: The Corps of Engineers can immediately—and unilaterally—begin breaching dams using their existing authority.

Beth Coffey, the Army Corps of Engineers chief of civil works, said “breaching will require congressional authorization.” She noted the Corps does not have standing authority to eliminate a project authorized by Congress.

“It would take several years to implement once we get authorization and funding,” Coffey added.

In its fact sheet about southern resident killer whales and salmon, NOAA stated that dam breaching is a “long-term” proposition and would take “several generations, at least, before any results could become clear.”

Federal officials conceded the situation facing the southern resident killer whales is a complicated natural resource issue that requires a serious understanding of the problem so the chosen solution will have a positive effect.

“We strongly believe science should be the basis for our discussion and the foundation for our decision,” Jule noted. ■

Federal biologists have challenged the notion that breaching Snake River Dams—including Ice Harbor, shown above—is a panacea for the southern resident killer whales.

Photo courtesy of the Bonneville Power Administration



**THE
FURY
OF HURRICANE
FLORENCE**



Marlboro Electric Cooperative linemen Justin Cheek and Caleb Bailey work atop a power pole to restore power after Hurricane Florence.

Photo by James Emanuel



Photo by William Fleming Jr.



Photo by Justin Cheek

Even before the floodwater subsides, Marlboro Electric Cooperative linemen Nicky Jacobs (above left) and Caleb Bailey (above right) join the fight to restore power. CEO William Fleming (top right, next page) joins Nicky as he helps MEC member Ella Walker. At bottom far right, crews hustle to remove a tree from the lines off Antioch Church Road as the sun finally shines.

Her angry winds and heavy rains intensified in the Atlantic as Hurricane Florence barreled toward the South Carolina and North Carolina boundary. Wilmington was the first to be hit by a storm that slowed and dumped unprecedented amounts of rain on the area before it inched downward into the Palmetto State.

For three days, Marlboro and Dillon counties endured the wind and rain. Then came the flooding. Streams, rivers and ponds overflowed, inundating entire neighborhoods and expansive crop fields.

When Florence finally took her leave, damage assessment and cleanup began.

At Marlboro Electric Cooperative, employees worked through the wind and rain. Trudging through knee- and chest-high waters, linemen toiled as day turned to night—around the clock—intent on repairing the damaged power system so vital to our modern, everyday life.

MEC crews weren't alone. More than 80 linemen and other workers from as far away as Alabama and Missouri traveled to Marlboro and Dillon counties to help rebuild damaged lines. Right-of-way crews worked on either side of local

highways, and state forestry employees and members of the National Guard cleared debris from culverts and removed downed trees from roads.

Neighborhood restaurants chipped in to provide warm meals for hungry crews. Some even prepared food by the light of a lantern because their restaurant had no power.

When families required evacuation, it didn't matter what one's "official" job was. If you were closest to the scene, you pitched in and helped people to safety.

The MEC Trust understood immediately that people couldn't wait for federal government assistance to begin. Families needed emergency funds for a temporary place to sleep or for food and dry clothing. The MEC Trust established a 501(c)(3) fund for donations. Marlboro Development Team was the first to step forward and donate \$50,000. This generous act was quickly followed by others. The fund soon exceeded \$100,000—all of it going to families in need.

Receding waters exposed damage to hundreds of homes, vehicles and cropland. It will be a while before life returns to normal in Marlboro and Dillon counties, but our character will allow us to move forward. As we look back, we will be reminded of the blessings we have today. ■



Photo by Matt Haynie



Photo by Steve Ellerbe