



Every winter, Linda Mehlhaff decorates her home with her collection of nutcrackers for the holiday season.

Nuts About Nutcrackers

A simple gift started Linda Mehlhaff on a collecting quest

By Craig Reed

The nutcracker collection started with a gift of seven. Now 10 years later, Linda Mehlhaff's collection totals 160.

All of them are displayed in the Mehlhaffs' rural home during the holiday season. Linda brings the colorful

creations out of storage and stands them up on the Friday after Thanksgiving. They decorate and watch over the home through the Christmas season and then go back into storage on New Year's Day.

"I enjoy looking at them," says Linda, 75. "I kind of hate putting them away when that time comes."

Linda's nutcrackers range from an inch or so in height to 3 feet. She stands them up on top of a bookcase, on windowsills, a buffet, the fireplace mantel and the entertainment center above the TV. The taller ones stand on the floor.

While red is the prominent color overall, the display

features numerous other colors.

Linda says she likes them all, but when pressed she says her favorite is the Army figure nutcracker. It is outfitted in a camouflaged uniform and helmet and holds a picture frame. Linda has a photo of her grandson, Bryan Barrett, in his Army uniform in the frame.

"I've decorated with the nutcrackers every year since I got the first ones," Linda says. "Since I'm still collecting, I find new places to put them every year."

Linda says she believes a few in the collection are from Germany, where nutcrackers originated in the late 17th century. They were most commonly made to resemble a toy soldier and became a German tradition, symbolizing good luck and scaring away bad spirits.

Decorative nutcrackers were often given as gifts. Their popularity increased after World War II when American soldiers stationed in Germany bought them as souvenirs or gifts before returning home to the U.S.

Nutcrackers originally had no Christmas season ties. Gradually, woodworkers created nutcrackers of professions besides soldiers.

When nutcrackers took on a seasonal significance is hard to pin down, but their popularity as gifts and their colorful designs eventually led to a connection with Christmas. The popularity of The Nutcracker ballet in the 1960s and the presence of nuts in homes during the holiday season have also helped make nutcrackers a Christmas decoration.

Today, most nutcrackers are decorative and are not able to crack nuts without breaking. All of Linda's nutcrackers are wood except two that are metal. The jaws on all of them work, but she has never tried to crack a nut with any of them.



This nutcracker is Linda's favorite. It holds a picture of her grandson, Bryan Barrett.

While collecting nutcrackers began to become popular in the 1950s, Linda didn't start her collection until 10 years ago when a friend, Melanie Howard of Sacramento, California, gave her seven. The timing was perfect for Linda because she had just visited a nutcracker museum and had found them attractive.

"I was inspired by the collection at the museum and I've just been crazy about them ever since," Linda says. "Melanie just likes to give things away. I've been collecting ever since she gave me a start."

Linda has bought nutcrackers at yard sales and in stores and has received many as gifts from people who know she collects them.

"She's an avid collector," says Sue Wood, a friend and neighbor. "I think her collection is pretty phenomenal. She's collected them from around the world. Her home is decorated beautifully with them every Christmas."

Some of the nutcrackers that become part of Linda's collection are in need of repair. Richard has been able to fix those in his shop. He made a nose for one and fixed the lever that moves the jaw

on another.

"I've become the family nutcracker doctor," he says with a laugh. "They keep me busy. I consider them family projects."

Richard says he never previously thought of nutcrackers having a tie to Christmas, but he has no complaints about getting them out of storage each November so Linda can set them up around the house.

"If they make Christmas for her, that's good," he says. "They are now definitely part of Christmas for us."

Linda says decorating for Christmas is special because of family gatherings, but she doesn't stop there. She also decorates her house and yard for St. Patrick's Day, Easter, Fourth of July, Halloween and Thanksgiving.

Not to be outdone by Linda's nutcrackers, Richard has a collection of wooden nickels. He's been collecting those for about 10 years and has just more than 300.

The retired couple also has a collection of National Geographic magazines, with every publication back to 1930 and several more dating back to 1918. The collection was started by family and has been passed down. Linda and Richard want to donate the magazines to a place or person that will appreciate them.

As for the future of the nutcrackers, Linda says Bryan has an interest in the collection. But until that day comes, Linda says she is actively looking for new and different ones to display in her home during the Christmas season. ■



It's Christmas year-round for Nancy Wood and Patrick Dibala, who own Christmas Treasures near Blue River along the McKenzie Highway.

Christmas Treasures All Year-Round

Shop caters to those who can't get enough of the holiday season

By Craig Reed

Drive east up the McKenzie Highway into the Cascade Mountains and you will find Christmas celebrated year-round. Sitting in the midst of the brown-barked, green-needled forest near Blue River is the red-dominated Christmas Treasures.

It is a small building and business crammed full of Christmas decorations, creations and charm.

People who come through the front door are greeted by the tinkling of Christmas bells. Visitors are usually in a cheerful mood when they leave and can't

wait for the Christmas season to put their new purchases on display.

Christmas Treasures owners Patrick Dibala and Nancy Wood say there is satisfaction in putting smiles on people's faces when they find a unique ornament or collectible that they just have to have.

Merry Chilcutt of Bend admits the store regularly brightens up her days. She is a frequent visitor and has found many items to decorate her home during the Christmas season.

"There are items here that you're not going to find in a department store," she says during a September stop. "I like the

uniqueness of what is here."

Patrick and Nancy have put together a business that features themed Christmas trees, shelves and displays. Those themes include Santa Claus, nativities, music, sports, animals, angels, babies, toys, nutcrackers, fishing and hunting. More modern themes include Star Wars and Marvel heroes. Those characters all have a Christmas look, whether they are holding a candy cane, a bag of presents or a Christmas tree.

There is even a display of merchandise from "The Nightmare Before Christmas" movie.



Above, Steve Dibala works in the store and helps select the inventory. Left, a chainsaw-carved Santa created by Patrick.



To have unique items, Patrick and Nancy and their adult sons Steve, Brian and Mark search far and wide via phone, the internet and in their travels. There have been years when Christmas Treasures features products from at least 30 different states and at least 30 different countries.

In years past, Patrick and Nancy traveled to Christmas gift shows in New York City, Atlanta, Chicago, Seattle and

Portland, and visited communities that are obsessed with Christmas year-round. Those include Leavenworth, Washington, a former thriving logging town that transformed itself with a Bavarian village theme and a nutcracker museum, and North Pole, Alaska.

They have also made trips to Germany, visiting craft shops and factories where Christmas merchandise is created and made.

Patrick, 64, and Nancy, 55, have eased back on their travels and workloads in recent years, turning more business responsibilities over to Steve and Brian, both full-time employees.

Outside the store are several painted chainsaw carvings of Christmas characters, ranging from Santa Claus to one of the three wise men. Patrick created the carvings. The wooden characters range in height from 3 feet to 12 feet.

Patrick has also climbed a Douglas fir tree next to the store and wrapped it in Christmas lights. In 2003, he put about 50,000 LED bulbs on the 165-foot tree. At the time, according to his research, he claimed it was the tallest lighted tree.

“We want this to be a feel-good store

when you walk in,” Nancy says.

“Most days this business keeps you in a good mood, in a good spirit,” Steve says. “You stay busy helping everybody have a good Christmas.”

The idea to create such a Christmas store and business came to Patrick and Nancy while traveling from their Florida home to New York to visit family. They drove the back roads and visited numerous shops and stores that featured unique custom made Christmas creations.

Patrick owned a burglar and fire alarm company in Florida, and Nancy worked there. When they decided they wanted a change from a one-season location to one with three or four seasons, they looked west to Oregon. Patrick grew up in Reedsport and enjoyed outdoor recreational activities in the Cascade Mountains.

The couple bought the old Blue McKenzie Lodge in 1992. After a year of renovation with help from Patrick’s brother, Dan, Christmas Treasures opened in 1993. In those first years, most of the store’s business was done with visitors walking through the front door.

But about the time their sons were in high school, the internet was developing. Nancy remembers Steve saying, “Buy me a computer and I’ll build you a website.”

“Business shot right up after Steve created our website,” Nancy says.

After working all year to help enhance Christmas for others and working among thousands of Christmas decorations, the Dibala family simplifies its own Christmas celebration. They drive into the forest in search of a Christmas tree, preferring a noble fir. At home, Nancy says they put out a few decorations along with the decorated tree, “but we don’t dress up the house a lot.”

The family closes Christmas Treasures for three or four days around Christmas day, but they open the doors shortly afterward and the yearlong Christmas season begins for them again. ■



Garth and Cathy Herring measure and tag trees to be cut for the upcoming season. They cut about 10,000 Christmas trees each year.

Christmas Trees: A Beginning or an End?

Couple views their holiday harvest with different perspectives

By Craig Reed

When Garth and Cathy Herring walk out among their Christmas trees to select the ones to be cut for the upcoming holiday season, they have mixed emotions.

Garth thinks it's the ultimate moment for a tree when it is tagged for harvest.

"I think the tree knows it has reached its destiny, that 'I'm a Christmas tree, not just a tree,'" Garth says. "I think

the tree is happy to know it is going to become some family's Christmas tree."

Cathy, on the other hand, is sad when she tags a tree for harvest.

"I cry over the trees I tag," she says. "I know it's going to kill them. I make friends with these trees, I get emotionally attached to them. I'm sorry for them when the time comes. I have to remember it's a business."

The Herrings have been in

the Christmas tree business since first planting seedlings on the Sun Hill Tree Farm acreage near Cheshire in 1985. They grow and manage noble fir, Douglas fir, grand fir and Nordmann fir on 56 acres.

"Those are the four most popular trees for Christmas," Garth says. "Noble fir is the one everybody likes the most."

Despite mixed emotions, the Herrings are pleased their hard work through the years

to grow nice-looking trees is rewarded with families who select a tree and decorate it for their Christmas.

"It's nice to know they are going into homes to help people celebrate Christmas," Cathy says. "I've made friends across the country with people who have bought the trees."

"It feels good knowing the trees are going into homes and will be a centerpiece for family time," Garth says.



Top and above, the weather each winter varies, but the crews still have to harvest and prepare the trees for shipping to customers throughout the United States.

Top photo courtesy of the Herrings, above photo by Craig Reed

Since retiring from an off-the-farm job in 2017 and to ease the sadness for Cathy, Garth now does most of the tagging of trees for harvest. About 10,000 trees are cut annually. Most are shipped to three farm produce stands in the Boise, Idaho, area, but through the years trees have also been shipped to California, Florida, New York, Texas, New Mexico and Colorado.

Garth says it takes about 10 years for a seedling to grow to an 8-foot height. For many years, 6- to 8-foot tall trees were most popular. In recent years, however, the vaulted

ceilings in newly constructed homes have made trees up to 9 and 10 feet tall more popular.

Brothers Reggie and Brody States and their cousin Tom Ferguson began buying Sun Hill trees 15 years ago for their farm produce stands in the Boise area. Among the three stands, they buy about 4,000 trees a year.

“Their trees are great, and that’s why we continue to do business with them every year,” Reggie says. “We know they’re going to put out a quality product. It seems they love what they do. It shows in their customer service and the

time they put into their trees.”

Originally, the Sun Hill farm acreage was a cattle operation run by Garth’s parents, Ralph and Marjorie Herring, in the 1970s.

“It was always my father’s dream to have cattle,” Garth says.

But after Ralph died, Marjorie decided to sell the cattle and plant trees.

“Mom said, ‘Trees don’t get out, they don’t take out fences, they just stay in the ground,’” Garth says.

To help out after his father died, Garth and Cathy moved to the property in 1979. Garth worked full time for a recreational vehicle manufacturer, but spent most of his spare time working on the tree farm along with Cathy. Their two children, Casey and Jessica, and some of their friends also worked on the farm during their teen years, especially during harvest in November and December.

Garth says despite the influx of artificial Christmas trees into homes, the sale of cut Christmas trees has remained consistent since the 1980s. The National Christmas Tree Association estimates 25 to 30 million trees are sold annually in the U.S.

A national campaign, “It’s Christmas. Keep It Real” was released in 2016 by the Christmas Tree Promotion Board prior to the holiday season to educate and remind consumers that trees are good for the earth and have environmental benefits, such as consuming carbon dioxide.

The campaign is aimed at millennials, encouraging

them to buy real trees before they establish a different tradition. The board says attracting that age group is important because the Baby Boomer generation is getting older. When those folks move into assisted-living facilities, their tree-buying tradition and power will be lost.

In addition to providing Christmas cheer with their trees, the Herrings provide cheer to some people who are trying to get their lives in order. Working through a halfway house in Eugene, the farm gives people just out of prison a six-week paying job, helping harvest and ship of the trees in November and December.

“It’s a way to give back to the community,” Garth says. “Everybody needs a second chance. Most don’t get it. Working here gives them confidence they can go out and get a job. It gives them some experience, it gives them a hand up. Even in bad weather, they’ll say they’re OK compared to where they were.”

After the last tree is shipped off the farm about a week before Christmas Day, Garth and Cathy are happy to take a break from long days of work. Unlike the past when Garth would spend all year looking for the perfect tree for the Herring living room, they now take the last tree that was cut but didn’t make a shipment.

It gives that tree a chance to stand tall as a Christmas tree, giving it its destiny according to Garth and giving Cathy a few more weeks to spend time with it. ■

The Launch of Pear Automation

Orchardists invest in major technology and energy upgrades

By Drew Myron

Diamond Fruit Growers, a cooperative serving 85 growers in the Hood River Valley, has invested \$7.5 million in the world's first optical sorting system specifically engineered for pears.

The 18-lane automated line whirred to life in July 2018, and runs 250,000 pears an hour. This advanced system is the first in the world dedicated solely to processing and sorting pears.

Founded in 1913, Diamond is one of the oldest cooperatives in the country and one of the largest shippers of fresh pears in North America, handling 2 million boxes annually. The company's main facility is a 20-acre plant in Odell; a smaller plant is in Parkdale. The company processes nine varieties of pears, as well as apples and cherries.

The new line processes 100 bins an hour. This is more than the capacity of both Diamond's old Odell facility—30 to 35 bins an hour—and its Parkdale location—40 to 45 bins an hour—combined.

The difference is optical sorting: the process of sorting products using cameras or lasers. Depending on the types of sensors and the software used, the machines can recognize an object's color, size and shape, as well as structural properties and



Denise Patton randomly inspects pears to ensure the new sorting machine remains properly calibrated.

chemical composition.

While not new in produce, automated sorting had not been used in the pear industry. Employees manually inspected each fruit for blemishes and flaws.

With Diamond's new system, every pear is analyzed a dozen times with high-definition cameras calibrated to determine the grade of each pear.

The equipment turns pears gently from one side onto the other, minimizing damage while still allowing cameras to capture the entire fruit. A software program sorts pears into bins based on their size and grade. Product shrinkage is expected to reduce by half

with the machine's gentler handling.

"This is the first pear line in the world to flip pears over from one side to the other," says Diamond President David Garcia. "All other lines roll them through like an apple."

The search for a pear-specific system began nearly a decade ago. On the hunt for an automated system, a research team traveled to Europe. Finding none that addressed the unique challenges of the bottom-heavy oblong shape—pears do not roll, as cherries and apples do—they partnered with Unitec Group, an Italian manufacturing company that

designed a start-to-finish pear line just for Diamond.

Faced with a labor shortage and the need to maintain a competitive edge, a new system was critical, says Nick Erickson, Diamond's project manager. The company operates with 50 year-round employees, and 400 to 500 seasonal workers.

"Diamond is investing in the future to keep the company competitive," Nick says.

Along with technology improvements, Diamond leads the industrial business sector with advances in energy efficiency. Through a partnership with Hood River Electric Cooperative



Above, prior to the new technology, employees inspected and sorted pears by hand in a tedious and time-consuming process. Right, with Diamond's new system, each pear is analyzed with high-definition cameras calibrated to examine its size, shape, structural properties and chemical composition.

and the Bonneville Power Administration's Energy Smart Industrial program, Diamond has made significant upgrades in day-to-day equipment and operations.

In the 10-year partnership with the ESI program, the company has made substantial changes. Most notable is an overhaul of Diamond's fruit storage.

The facility's around-the-clock refrigeration system requires a massive amount of energy to maintain optimal temperature. At capacity, the plant in Odell stores 70,000 bins of pears. Each bin averages 2,000 pears. Pears typically enter the plant at 90 F and are cooled to 30 F.

Converting the refrigerator system to variable-speed drive fan motors allows the

entire system to operate more efficiently. It continually adjusts to optimum storage temperatures, ensuring each pear maintains its quality—and saves millions of kilowatt-hours each year.

"We're getting the same work done with better equipment," Nick says.

BPA's program helps companies manage energy use and reduce costs. Formed in 2009, the program has partnered with more than 500 companies on projects that have collectively saved more than 647 million kWh—enough energy to power nearly 60,000 homes for a year, according to BPA.

"The ESI program helps Diamond stay very sustainable and very competitive," says Bill Kostich, who has



worked with Diamond on the program.

As part of the initiative, Diamond conducted an extensive energy-load assessment that revealed systems and equipment that would benefit from upgrades, then worked with manufacturers and vendors to determine energy-efficient options.

Along with refrigeration, Diamond overhauled a

variety of systems, including dryers and compressors, lighting in the production and storage area, and doors that open and close quickly to seal and maintain storage temperatures.

"These projects save money and energy," Nick says. "The incentives make it a more realistic option and turn a 10-year payback into a four-year payback. This is just a start." ■

Healing Power of the Arts

*Carolyn Williams paints, dances
and writes her way to recovery from
devastating car crashes*

By Dianna Troyer

Knowing the frustration of finding the right gift for someone, Carolyn Williams was inspired to write and choreograph a Christmas play.

The Heyburn resident's play, "What Does God Want for Christmas?" will be performed Christmas Eve as a gift to her church.

"After the performance, everyone who comes will get a gift box with a surprise inside," Carolyn says. "We aren't giving any clues about the contents."

Carolyn says writing, singing, dancing and painting in oils and watercolors have helped her recover from two devastating car crashes in 1995 and 2000.

"Recovery is an ongoing and long-term process," says Carolyn, 69. "You prioritize and deal with the most obvious injuries, but sometimes there are injuries that aren't easily detectable."

The first accident happened when she was driving about 35 miles per hour in Rupert, and a teen driver pulled out in front of her.

"The impact rolled my van and flipped me into the back," she says. "My sinus cavity was severely damaged."

While surgery repaired her sinuses, she sustained other injuries that were harder to detect.

"The crash affected my stamina and ability to concentrate," says Carolyn, who was teaching kindergarten at Acequia Elementary School at the time. "It became hard to focus on simple tasks. Doing report cards was an ordeal and took longer



than usual."

The second accident happened on an icy interstate in 2000 the day after Thanksgiving. She and her husband, Bill, were taking their daughter's friends to the airport in Salt Lake City when a truck in front of them spun out of control.

"We hit someone, then someone hit us," Carolyn says. "My neck was broken in two places. Even after surgery it was hard to walk."

A few years later, Carolyn taught fourth grade in Burley.

"At unpredictable times, my heart would race," she says. "When it happened, I couldn't speak or move. The kids recognized when an episode was happening and would just wait a few minutes for it to pass."

A scan showed her heart was injured. Carolyn is now on five medications to keep her heart rhythm steady.

Carolyn says she began to realize she did not have the stamina and organizational skills to carry on and wear the many hats a teacher must wear. In 2002, she retired.

"I never stopped relating to kids, though, and did some private tutoring for students who had gaps in their language arts development," she says. "At first, it was hard to adjust to my new self. Many times in our lives, God reroutes us. Flexibility is the key."

Carolyn says the accidents intensified her creativity. After taking lessons and tutorials at home, she felt compelled to paint landscapes or wildlife scenes that conveyed calmness.

"Anyone who survives trauma becomes more empathetic and sensitive to others' trials," Carolyn says. "I make prints of my paintings and give them away as a way to pass on a sense of peace."

A ballet dancer since childhood, she says dance and music have helped bolster her balance and physical coordination.

"Dancing and Alice Schenk's fitness classes in Rupert have



Above, Carolyn Williams paints on the dock in her backyard along the banks of the Snake River. Right, Carolyn gives away cards of her paintings to pass along a sense of peace. Opposite page, Carolyn holds up part of an angel wing costume that will be used in a Christmas musical she wrote and choreographed.

helped me with stamina and balance and to stay limber,” she says.

About 10 years after the second crash, doctors operated on Carolyn after realizing nerves in her back had become entangled, making it difficult and painful to walk.

Carolyn says she hopes her experiences will encourage others who are healing.

“You learn to make lemonade from lemons,” she says. “Whatever I do, I still like to do it well, to the best of my abilities.”

Carolyn’s creativity is leading her to her next project: writing a book entitled “Dangerous Zeal, Christian Parenting in Retrospect.”

Carolyn’s play focuses on a military family celebrating Christmas Eve while the father is deployed overseas.

“His mother, who lives next door, is dying from stomach cancer, so a surprise happens to help the family deal with that,” she says.

While rehearsing for the play, she says she is reminded of her grandmother, Lillian, who inspired her to become a Christian. As



a tribute to her, Carolyn wrote her into the Christmas play and is performing her role.

Carolyn incorporated one of her favorite songs into the play, Amy Grant’s “I Need a Silent Night.”

“Sometimes we all need a little quiet time in our lives to learn in retrospect, listen and find peace,” she says. ■

Home Automation Gives Consumers Control

By Derrill Holly

Home automation systems are placing the power of control in the hands of cooperative members, but many questions remain about the best ways to use them to save money and energy.

“Most smart home technology is about comfort and convenience,” says Brian Sloboda, program and product line manager for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. “Consumers interested in saving money on monthly energy purchases should look at internet-connected thermostats first.

“Around half of all thermostats sold today are smart thermostats. These devices can learn your preferences and adjust the thermostat when you are not home. These devices have the potential to reduce air conditioning energy consumption by 10 percent. During winter months, the thermostats could

save 7 percent on energy used to heat the home.”

Brian has watched home automation systems evolve. He is particularly interested in identifying ways to enhance efficiency and potential savings for co-op members.

“Laundry, dishwashing and water heating can be set to occur outside of your co-op’s peak demand periods, which typically are during weekday business hours,” says Brian.

NRECA is working with one of the Department of Energy’s national laboratories on a demonstration project examining energy-saving options that could time shift some activities, but actual cost savings for the consumer is likely to be limited, Brian says.

“Pool pumps, dishwashers, thermostats and car chargers can learn their owners’ behavior and then communicate with the utility so the data can be used for demand response,” Brian explains. “The goal of the work by the

lab is to determine if a system like this can be implemented without inconveniencing the consumer, providing energy demand savings to the utility.”

Finding Value in Energy Savings

Security system notifications and thermostat controls that adapt to home automation are among the most popular options. But some consumers are tackling other tasks in ways that could help them save or manage energy use.

“There are different kinds of smart when it comes to smart appliances and devices,” says Peter May-Ostendorp, an energy technology consultant to NRECA and principal researcher at Xergy Consulting, which specializes in emerging technologies for energy savings in buildings, including homes. “For some, smart simply means ‘we connected this thing to the network,’ which adds minimal value to the consumer. In other products, smart means there is some intelligence either built into the product or connected via the cloud that enables a taste of artificial intelligence.”

Not every product using artificial intelligence is designed to save energy. In many instances, energy use is secondary to convenience or connectivity features.

“Most smart devices have nothing to do with energy use, grid management or other resource conservation, like saving water,” says Peter. “Generally, the benefits—dollar

savings to the consumer—have not been proven, with the exception of smart thermostats, grid-connected water heaters and similar devices.”

Making Connections

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, interest in connected or smart appliances is trending upward among consumers. Manufacturers are responding with a growing list of products.

“If you are thinking of purchasing a smart appliance or thermostat, look for one that is Energy Star-certified with connected functionality,” EPA officials suggest. “Those that meet our criteria are designed to encourage interoperability and offer the following features: low energy use, energy use reporting and consumer ownership of all data.”

Besides smart thermostats, available products include room air conditioners, refrigerators and freezers, laundry equipment, lightbulbs and fixtures, and power strips.

“While owning a smart product doesn’t automatically save you energy, if you are smart about using them, they can make a significant difference in your home,” EPA officials say.

Making the investment pay off could require lifestyle changes. Dashboards accessible from computers or tablets, and apps available for smartphones can help.

“I don’t think many people want infinite control over dozens of appliances and



Today, more than **4,000 smart devices** are available to consumers.

A recent international survey asked people how they are using smart home assistants.

65% check weather and news, and play music
6% control lighting, televisions and other appliances



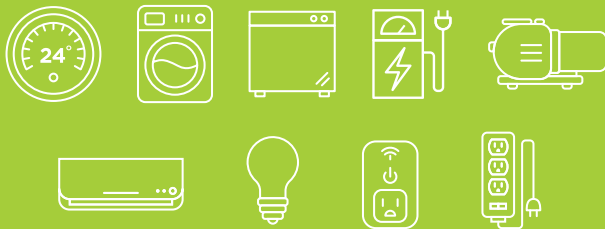
GET SMART ABOUT ENERGY SAVINGS

“Smart” devices and appliances save time and offer convenience – but not all save energy. The guide below shows how several trendy smart home technologies stack up when it comes to energy savings.

Smart Energy Savers



- Thermostats
- Washing machines and dryers
- Dishwashers
- EV charging stations
- Pool pumps
- Air conditioners
- Light bulbs and fixtures
- Power strips



Just Smart

- Virtual assistants (like Amazon’s Alexa or Apple HomeKit)
- Smart locks
- Smart alarms
- Smart video security cameras

systems in their homes,” says Spencer Sator, president and CEO of Crimson Consulting, another NRECA energy-efficiency adviser. “What we really want is ‘set it and forget it’ features that we don’t have to actively manage. The best

devices get installed, adjusted and the consumer can walk away and still potentially save some energy.”

Spencer says consumers are looking for simplicity, which is feeding the popularity of virtual assistant technologies,

such as Amazon’s Alexa and Echo, Google Assistant and Apple HomeKit. Other companies—including Samsung, Logitech and Wink—offer home-management hubs and platforms designed to help manage connected technology.

Convenience and programming simplicity are among the most important factors fueling consumer acceptance of what Spencer describes as “home ecosystem” products. Home security controls—including locks, alarm systems and lighting—are also popular features.

“We’re seeing adoption of the technology not necessarily for energy-saving reasons, but for life-enhancing applications, including some that help elderly consumers maintain independence in their homes,” says Spencer.

Energy advisers universally agree that controlling devices from various manufacturers that perform different functions with a single system enhances the value of home automation systems.

Command and Control

The challenge for consumers: deciding which features meet their expectations and justify the added investment in automation, and how well various products work together under management of a particular hub device or app.

“This is still the Wild West, from a technology value perspective,” Spencer says. “When you consider available options and actual performance of the devices available, some gadgets perform well and can save

consumers money and energy, while others don’t measure up to the hype.”

With more than 900 manufacturers marketing about 4,100 connected devices, voice command technology is seen as one way to avoid collections of various remotes that typically wind up cast aside in favor of multifunction control devices.

“The Jetsons-like experience—where your Fitbit recognizes you’re awake, tells the coffee to brew, queues up your morning news on a smart speaker, ramps up the heating setpoint—isn’t really happening,” says Peter, of Exergy Consulting. “People have thought that Alexa or Google Home might be the answer, but do we all really want to talk to our home, Star Trek style, to accomplish basic tasks?”

Smart speaker technology is primarily used to answer questions, check the weather, get news updates or play music. According to a survey conducted in five major industrialized nations, including the United States, 65 percent of those asked cited those functions, while only 6 percent reported using the technology to control lighting, televisions or other connected devices.

“No one wants a hodgepodge of technologies that can’t communicate with each other,” Spencer says, adding that the necessary hubs and powered interfaces to connect the devices could actually boost overall energy use. “The technology isn’t very smart if devices can’t work together.” ■

Wells REC

Ruralite

DECEMBER 2018



Students Get the Gift of Fun

Community support transforms playground

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Carson Ballard gives Devante Miller a helping push on a new swing at the recently updated Wells Combined School playground.

PHOTO BY CAROLLEE EGBERT



Wells Combined School student Reno Middleton goes hands-free on a swing at the school's recently overhauled playground.

Photos by CarolLee Egbert

Students Get the Gift of Fun

Community support transforms decrepit playground to joyful experience for students

By Dianna Troyer

Unlike last year, Wells Combined School students laugh and scream at their new playground. For several years, they made the best of the worn-out equipment with missing monkey bar rungs and some swings.

"Now there's a waiting line at the merry-go-round," says Parent-Teacher Organization member Ashley Hansen. "It's great to see all the smiles."

Ashley spearheaded a two-year fundraising effort to buy and install the \$25,000 playground.

Curious to hear feedback about the new swings, tire swings, merry-go-round

and climber, Principal Shaun Taylor approached the teachers. The responses the teachers heard include:

"The merry-go-round is fun because it goes so fast."

"I can do flips and other tricks from the monkey bars."

"When the tire swing spins or you do the donut, it makes you scream."

"On the swings, I can go high and touch the tree."

Shaun says Ashley's determination and persistence impressed him.

"When she decides to make something happen, it will happen," Shaun says. "Against all odds, she helped the PTO raise the money to pay for it."

Ashley and her family put action behind their words.

"They were at the playground for what seemed like three weeks straight, morning, noon and night, either tearing down the old equipment or erecting the new pieces," Shaun says. "She's a fantastic lady with a great family, giving of herself to make the playground happen."

During summer, volunteers spent a week installing equipment so the new playground would be ready for the school year.

"We saved about \$15,000 with installation because my husband, Aron, and I were project managers," Ashley says.

Ashley says she never realized how



Clockwise from left, Kason Goolsby takes a turn at tetherball. Ashley Hansen spearheaded the fundraising effort to update the Wells Combined School playground. Students climb on one of the new toy installations at the playground.



equipment. Roadway donated concrete and a dump truck to remove gravel.

Driving his skid steer, Bryan Runnion dug holes and leveled the surface to spread wood chips.

With the surface prepared, equipment was placed in a pile where it would be erected.

“Each pile had the pieces, tools needed to put it together, hardware and instructions,” Ashley says. “The day of the build, a volunteer in each group was the leader and the others helped. When we were all done, we had a free lunch donated from Subway, Petro and Blach Distributing.”

Gratified to see phase one complete, Ashley envisions more.

“Phase two for the last big piece of equipment will cost about \$40,000, so we’re still looking for donations of any amount,” she says.

The last piece is a series of interconnected slides and walkways. ■

Donations can be mailed to the school at P.O. Box 338, Wells, Nevada 89835.

deteriorated the playground was until her children started school.

“The slide was cracked and couldn’t be repaired because the parts were discontinued,” she says. “It was boarded up and eventually hauled away. Some swings were gone. On the monkey bars, some rungs were missing. There wasn’t much equipment to play on.”

In 2016, the PTO began raising money. Members organized father-daughter dances, mother-son game nights, a Halloween carnival, Polar Express movie night, mother-son escape room, color walk and weight loss challenge.

“So many people donated,” Ashley says. “During the 2017 Wells Fun Run, the High Desert Cruisers asked for donations and collected more than \$1,200 during the weekend.”

Once money was raised, Ashley asked students, the school nurse, administrators and the recess duty teacher what to order.

“Cost was a factor,” she says. “We wanted the biggest bang for our buck.”

Staff at other schools in the district advised her to buy equipment from Big T Recreation in Ogden, Utah.

“They supply Playworld equipment and are considered innovators in commercial playground equipment for parks, schools and day cares,” Ashley says.

When the equipment arrived, she asked for volunteers via social media, flyers and the local newspaper.

“More than 50 people came,” Ashley says. “It was amazing.”

The city of Wells’ public works department staff and Mitch Smith used heavy equipment to remove gravel and the old

Pioneer Recalls Pahrump's Early Days

For Tim Hafen, it began in 1951 with a 25-foot trailer, no running water

By John M. Glionna



Tim Hafen with his children, Greg Sr. and Jane Hafen circa 1958.

Photo courtesy Tim Hafen

In those hard-bitten early days, what a hungry Tim Hafen dreamed about most was something as simple as a hamburger and milkshake.

The year was 1951, and Tim was a rangy 19-year-old cowboy who had grown up on a dairy farm in Mesquite. Then his father got the chance to buy 840 acres across the mountains in the desolate Pahrump Valley and quickly decided to send his oldest son out there to handle the homesteading.

Back then, the valley was part of Nevada's untamed frontier, home to just 150 isolated ranchers and farm workers. Maxwell Kent Hafen, known to folks as "Tim," had just gotten married and was the father of a newborn daughter. He had once thought of becoming a dentist to escape the drudgery



Tim started out in Pahrump as a cotton and alfalfa farmer and later became a developer.

John M. Glionna

of milking cows. But instead of any banishment, young Tim decided that the move to remote Pahrump was a God-given opportunity to work on his own to establish a real working farm.

Truth be told, compared to Mesquite, there was nothing

out here. Ordering fast food remained a teenager's dream because there wasn't even a restaurant. The only store for miles around was a lonely post-office/trading post. Everyone did their part. Every week, resident Stan Ford set off northward across 30 miles of rock road to reach state highway 95, where he met the Reno-to-Las-Vegas bus line to collect the valley's mail.

On July 2, 1951, the Hafens moved into a 25-foot trailer with no indoor plumbing, serviced by an old Army-surplus propane generator he prayed would survive – because there were no spare parts and no service. He hauled drinking water from a nearby well he and his father had drilled, hoping his pickup ran true. When something really went wrong, when one of the kids came down with a fever, he says, "you just waited until it broke and got on with it."

These were the early days



Now a successful farmer and developer, Tim at one time was "too broke" to file for bankruptcy.

Jeff Scheid

of Nye County's largest community, long before the casinos and housing developments and steady suburban sprawl.

Tim Hafen is one of its pioneers.

He recalls how he and then-wife Eleanor attended high school with soon-to-be doctors and lawyers. "And suddenly we were out there, as the expression goes, pecking among the chickens."

Nearly 70 years later, Tim lives in a red-ochre 4,000-square-foot southwestern-styled home not far from where the old trailer once sat. He's spry at age 86, a successful cotton and alfalfa farmer-turned developer, an outspoken community leader who served multiple terms on Valley Electric's Board of Directors and eight years in Nevada's General Assembly.

When local folks want to know about those hardscrabble early days, they ask Tim. He's been interviewed numerous times and in 2015 gave a talk before the Pahrump Valley Historical Society about living the hard life off a high-desert claim in an era before modern niceties.

He likes to tell the old stories because it reminds him how far the community has come.

Gosh, it seems like so long ago!

In those first days, even driving was a chore. In the 1950s, ranch trucks didn't have air-conditioning, so to keep the air circulating on 115-degree summer days, folks drove with the window's open, soon becoming mummies covered in dust.

"So, we wrapped our better clothes in a sheet," recalls Hafen, "and stopped at a service station in Vegas to change."

In the early 1960s, residents passed a petition to form the unincorporated town of Pahrump. Ordinance No. 1 was that prostitution was outlawed within town limits. Still, brothel proprietors eventually found their way in, thanks to a homestead patented after the town boundaries were drawn.

Like most others, Tim accepted the world's oldest trade, as long as the madams were good community members. He has a photo of himself standing with a laughing Beverly Harrell, owner of the Cottontail Brothel out at Lida Junction, who'd just



Sharing old stories about Pahrump reminds Tim of how far the community has come.

Jeff Scheid

bought a framed dried cow-patty painted to resemble a huge gold nugget as a way to help fund the fire department.

Electricity arrived in Pahrump in the mid-1960s, telephones a few years after. In 1965, the "Pahrump Special Telephone Directory" was a one-page sheet that included just 75 names, each with a four-digit number, many of those old timers now long dead. Tim's number was 2061.

Residents also decided they needed street names because, as Tim puts it, "you couldn't just tell people, go down that unnamed gravel road."

Abe Fox, a Las Vegas delicatessen owner who owned land in Pahrump, had an ingenious idea: He placed a large map on a wall inside the school, on which people wrote in street names to commemorate their ancestors and children. Those names became a legacy to those who came here first, including Hafen Ranch Road.

For Tim Hafen, the times weren't always good.

In 1965, an early frost devastated his family's cotton crops, just after they'd

invested in buying the nearby Frehner ranch to augment their growing fields. Suddenly, Tim couldn't pay his bills and asked a lawyer friend about filing for bankruptcy.

"You can't," the friend said, "you're too broke."

But Tim was stubborn. He wouldn't leave the valley while owing money – "that was the one thing I wouldn't do."

He struck a deal with the bank not to foreclose and give him a chance to see things through. He warned creditors that if he went under, they might at best get 25 cents on the dollar. "I just wanted a chance to pay them back," he says, "and they'd look at me and say, 'Well, I don't have much choice, do I?'"

Tim had every last one of them repaid within three years."

The key to surviving Pahrump in those days, he insists, was perseverance.

"Lord, there were times that I would have left and done something else if I could have," he says. "But there's something about this place: Once it gets a hold of you, you can't get loose." ■

Above-and-Beyond Success

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a hit in OTEC's four-county territory

By Lisa Jacoby

Amanda Carroll read "Little Excavator" to her boys five times in one afternoon, yet the next day Cody, 3, and Jace, 5, were just as delighted to hear it again.

And again and again.

It is, Amanda says, the favorite book her boys have received so far from Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. In nine months of the program, the Carrolls, who live in Baker City, received only one book that was already on their bookshelves.

"For a family that has a lot of books, we've only had one duplicate," Amanda says.

Amanda signed her boys up for the program in January, and they received their first books in March: "The Little Engine That Could." Dolly Parton's Imagination Library provides one book, addressed to the child, each month from age birth to 5.

"He can read his name, so he knew it was his," Amanda said of Jace, who turned 5 in August and graduated from the program with the final book, "Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come!"

Cody will receive three years' worth of books, none of which will be the same ones his brother got in the mail. Every June, a panel of early childhood literacy experts review hundreds of titles to create lists for the following year in six different age categories.

In January, Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative helped launch this book program in Union, Baker, Grant and Harney counties. The cost is shared with the James and Shirley Rippey Family Foundation, which offered to pay 50



In 1995, Dolly Parton created Imagination Library to share the love of reading with children near her hometown. The program has grown nationwide to include more than 1 million children.

percent of the cost for new Imagination Library programs that were started by June 2018 in rural Oregon counties with a population of fewer than 100,000.

The Imagination Library is run by the Dollywood Foundation, which partners with a local nonprofit or school district to provide the program. The partnering entity is responsible for registering local children and providing stable funding to pay for the books, which is \$25 per child

per year. There is no cost to the families, and all children are eligible regardless of family income.

OTEC's funding comes from unclaimed capital credits. This has no effect on electric rates because unclaimed capital credits are from members who have moved and cannot be found, or who have died without heirs.

As of November 15, there are 1,246 children registered in the four counties,



In less than a year, readers in more than 900 households in Union, Baker, Grant and Harney counties have signed up to receive monthly books for children up to age 5.

“Everybody’s excited about it,” Vicki says. “It’s a great program. We really thank OTEC and appreciate Aletha Bonebrake’s hard work on this.”

Aletha, along with several other OTEC board members, have traveled around the four counties to promote the program.

“All of our communities have incredible support networks,” Nini says. “We have volunteers and organizations in every corner.”

In Union County, 546 children are enrolled in the program. Carrie Bushman, children’s services at Cook Memorial Library in La Grande, says she promotes the Imagination Library with brochures, a display of books and a stand-up cutout of Dolly Parton.

“It’s definitely getting people’s attention,” Carrie says.

Word is also spread through social media sites, and she hands out an Imagination Library brochure with every new Ready to Learn library card, which is issued to children younger than 6.

“They’ve been really excited when they get their first book,” Carrie says.

Missy Grammon, youth services coordinator at the Baker County Public Library in Baker City, has received a steady stream of registrations.

“I get probably two or three a week,” she says. “I think it very much justifies the want and need for it.”

Missy has samples of the Imagination Library books on display next to a poster promoting the program.

“These are some really good quality books,” she says.

Parents can fill out a paper brochure and return it to the library or register online at www.otecc.com/community/dolly-partons-imagination-library. It takes about six weeks for the first book to arrive, then a book will show up regularly each month until the child turns 5. ■

About the Program

Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library is a book-gifting program that mails free books to children from birth to age 5 in participating communities within the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia.

Inspired by her father’s inability to read and write, Dolly started her Imagination Library in 1995 for the children within her home county. Today, her program spans four countries and mails more than 1 million free books each month to children around the world.

- ▶ Total kids registered: 1,350,175
- ▶ Total books mailed: 109,703,783

Register at your local library, OTEC office, or online at www.otecc.com/community/dolly-partons-imagination-library.

are signed up represent an individual household,” says Nini Valerio, OTEC marketing and member services coordinator. “We are above and beyond the typical Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library’s projections for the first year of the program.”

So far, the program serves about 42 percent of the population from birth to age 5. Libraries in all four counties are promoting the program, as are various community partners and organizations that interact with families who have young children.

“We’re trying to get the word out,” says Cheryl Hancock, director of the Harney County Library in Burns. “It’s a little difficult because we’re so spread out.”

She says they have registered about a third of the eligible population. Five were signed up at the county fair held in early September.

“People are so enthused about it, and they love the books,” Cheryl says. “I think it’s wonderful.”

Vicki Waters, who heads the Grant County Library in John Day, says staff talks about the program each week at story time, and have placed brochures at the library, hospital, fair and Family First.

and 7,761 books have been mailed since March. Books are arriving at 981 households. OTEC provides the program across the entire four counties, rather than along the service district boundaries.

“Eighty percent of the kids who

TEC's New Home

Work continues on the new headquarters building

In April 2018, the Tanner Electric Board of Directors approved construction of a new headquarters building to replace its existing building.

North Bend-based DHL was awarded the contract for this long-overdue project. DHL provides general contracting services for small commercial and residential homes in the surrounding areas.

We have also used local contractors North Fork Enterprises and Clearnet to remove trees and stumps, and install security and computer networking, respectively.

The first trees came down June 1, 2018. Now five months into construction, most of the site work is almost complete. Crews are in the middle of the curb, sidewalk and parking lot construction.

When completed, all overhead lines on SE 140th will be buried, as required by the city of North Bend.

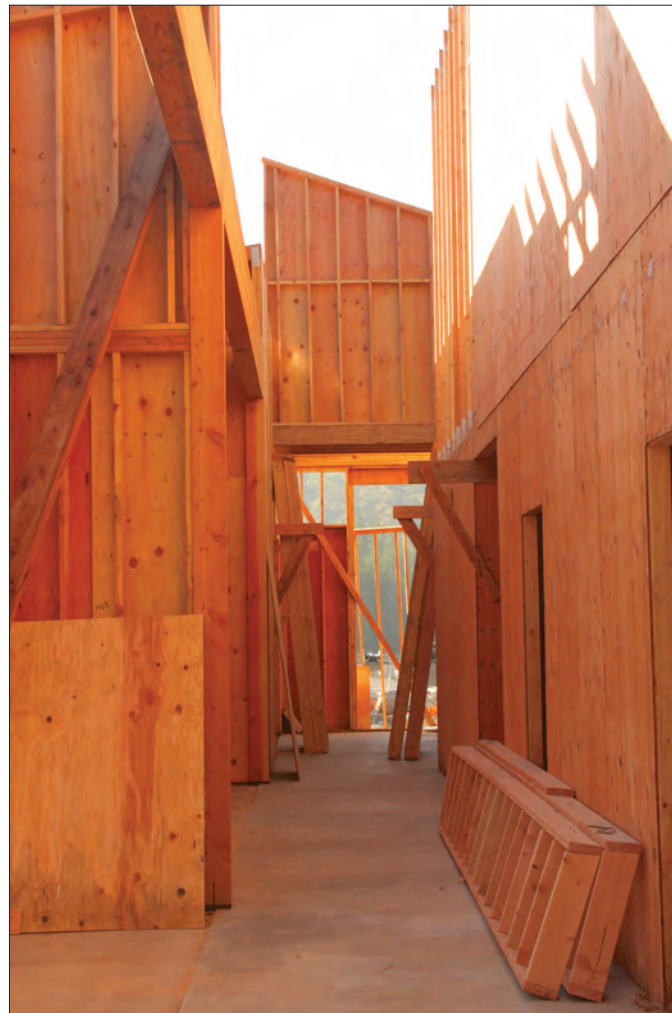
Framing is about halfway complete. Most of the work next month will focus on drying the building in. The roof is about half framed, and most of the walls have been built.

As members who live in North Bend know, when it starts raining here, it might not stop until June or July. That's why getting the roof and windows installed are priorities.

A major focus with this new facility is incorporating a Northwest theme. You will see a lot of wood, structural concrete and some tree trunks incorporated into the design. We even used a few trees from the back of the property that had to be removed and integrated them into key areas of the new offices. Three of these tree stumps will support the front porch, and one large one will support the large beam running across the conference room and lobby.

The 7,940-square-foot headquarters building is scheduled to open in the summer 2019. It more than doubles the size of the current facility. It will house the administration, engineering, information technology and member services departments. It will have a conference room for training and board meetings.

When we get closer to knowing an official move-in date,



TEC will have an open house so member-owners can see the new building. The staff and board are excited to show you the facility and all the safety and security features being incorporated. You can also see how the technology improvements we have installed are managed at the operational level in the new situation room.

Watch for more updates on the back page of Ruralite. ■



Clockwise from above, construction of Tanner Electric's new headquarters began June 1. The utility expects a summer 2019 opening. Some of the trees on the property are incorporated in the project. With wet winter weather on the way, installation of the roof and walls are priorities. North Bend company DHL was awarded the construction contract. The new building gives employees, board members and member-owners room to work and visit.

Photos by Anne Herman



The 2018 Election and Oregon's Electric Cooperatives

While November's blue wave solidified an urban stranglehold on policy and politics in Salem, it also shifted the center of power in our nation's capital

By Ted Case

Last month's landmark election will certainly have ramifications for electric cooperatives and their consumers—it may just take about seven months to determine exactly how much. That timeline represents the length of Oregon's legislative assembly and a point in 2019 when the presidential primary season comes into focus.

Not surprisingly, the election results in Oregon strongly suggest the state continues to sort itself out in electoral parlance as part blue and part red. It can best be illustrated by the number 60. With the defeat of Republican legislators Jeff Helfrich (Hood River), Julie Parish (West Linn) and Rich Vial (Wilsonville area), that's the approximate number of

miles someone will have to drive from Portland to enter the House district of a Republican legislator.

For their part, the Democrats again lost a House seat in the Bend area—where they have a double-digit voter registration advantage—thus ensuring their party has no seats east of the Cascade crest. The urban-rural divide is alive and well in statewide races as well.

Gov. Kate Brown was re-elected by defeating moderate Republican Knute Buehler by 6 percentage points, despite only getting between 15 and 20 percent of the vote in many rural counties. Urban voters more than erased her rural deficit, as Brown outpaced Buehler by 192,000 votes alone in Multnomah County.

The Democrats also extended their hold on the state Senate by picking up a Republican-held seat in southern Oregon, giving them—on paper, at least—the necessary votes to pass tax increases sought by a number of progressive organizations. However, State Sen. Betsy Johnson (D-Scappoose) is considered a maverick on revenue bills

Photo by Mike Teegarden



and often votes with Republicans.

To be sure, the supermajorities in the Oregon Legislature (18-12 in the Senate, 38-22 in the House) will make easy passage of environmental legislation, particularly the so-called Clean Energy Jobs bill (aka cap and trade). Undoubtedly, such a bill will be signed by Gov. Brown, who campaigned on her support of a cap-and-trade program.

Another high-profile energy measure—an energy choice initiative in Nevada—failed by a large margin. Harney Electric, based in Hines, also has territory in Nevada and campaigned against the measure, based on the uncertainty for rural Nevadans.

But if the November election simply solidified the Democrats' vice grip on Salem, it completely flipped the script in the U.S. House of Representatives without changing over a single congressional seat in Oregon.

Oregon's congressional delegation had already amassed considerable seniority with Second District Congressman Greg Walden (R-Hood River)—a staunch supporter of rural Oregon—holding the gavel of the powerful Energy and Commerce Committee. Walden used his leadership position to protect the Northwest's priceless hydropower resources, its natural resource economy and to focus attention on the opioid epidemic.

Beginning in January, Walden will surrender the gavel and become a ranking member of the committee. Congressman Kurt Schrader (D-Canby)—the recipient of the 2018 Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association's Cooperator of the Year award—has strong bipartisan credentials and will be in the majority on the Energy and Commerce Committee.

One of the key players in the entire U.S. House of Representatives may be Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Eugene), who takes over as chairman of the House Transportation Committee. DeFazio, a veteran legislator passionate about America's crumbling infrastructure, could be at center stage if the Trump Administration looks at funding highways, bridges and ports as areas of possible bipartisan compromise with a Democratic House.

The U.S. Senate will continue to be in the hands of the Republicans, though Oregon's two Democratic senators will hardly be bystanders, with Ron Wyden a senior member on several key committees and Jeff Merkley exploring a bid for the U.S. presidency.

It is the race for the White House in 2020 that makes the window for legislating exceedingly tight. With a potentially large number of candidates fighting for attention on the Democratic side, a combative President Trump and a polarized electorate, it is unclear if the first few months of the next Congress will yield bipartisan success or partisan gridlock.

But it is clear that while Oregon's congressional delegation represents a deeply divided state with few electoral votes and



Rep. Kurt Schrader, ORECA's Cooperator of the Year, will be a key member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Photo courtesy of the office of Kurt Schrader



With the new Democratic majority in Congress, U.S. Rep. Greg Walden will relinquish his chairmanship of the Energy and Commerce Committee.

Photo by Riley Bushue

far from the nation's center of power, their collective experience, committee assignments and legislative savvy will keep them in the forefront of the debate. ■