Greg and Leah Sempel enjoy mountain farming at Pokey Creek Farm near Santa, Idaho.

The Sempel Life at Pokey Creek Farm

By Lori Mai

Far away from the increasingly high-tech world of commercial agriculture, Greg and Leah Sempel tend to their 5-acre hillside farm near Santa, Idaho, mainly by hand.

Named after the creek that meanders along their mountainside property, Pokey Creek Farm fashions an unusual vegetative blanket amidst the towering evergreens in the forest.

"We do what I call mountain farming," Leah says, "which means we do a lot of hand planting and hand weeding. This is not traditional agriculture ground, but we plant amongst the trees."

The Sempels believe the quality of food affects the quality of life. They also think a combination of meticulous hand work, ideal altitude, clean air and pure water of this pristine northern Idaho mountain location is essential to the high quality, certified organic food they grow.

Pokey Creek Farm is well known to Moscow and Coeur d'Alene area farmers markets, natural food stores and restaurants, but it has taken time and hard work to evolve into a successful enterprise.

Forty years ago, Greg, a Seattle native, and Leah, who was raised in New Orleans, met in Washington, where she was picking fruit and he was planting trees. The pair connected over their love of the outdoors and desire to get back to the land.

They bought 23 acres of hillside property when there was virtually nothing else in the area.

"We just wanted to do a little homestead, raise kids and live a simple life," Leah says.

They built a cabin from logs on the property and used solar panels for energy since there was no electrical power. Greg worked a variety of forestry jobs. Leah maintained a large garden and raised their four children.

Every year, Leah took bedding plants and excess vegetables from the garden to sell at the Moscow Farmers Market.

As forestry work dwindled, Greg began helping Leah at the farmers market and saw the potential in growing good food for people. He developed an interest in turning their small, part-time hobby into a larger operation, but the mountainous, forested terrain provided a challenge.

"We were crazy," Greg says of attempting to grow vegetables in a forest. "We gardened the south hillside since we moved here. We've always grown food on it. I thought of the northside garden to preserve water. Then I thought, 'You know, it's all in the tilth (soil condition). If you have good tilth, you can grow anything.'"

Greg wanted to grow garlic, which is hardy and can be planted in colder climates.

"Greg has always been fascinated with garlic species and varieties," Leah says. "There was this old guy, Emil, who grew garlic. He gave Greg bulbs to use for seed. We're still planting garlic from Emil 40 years later."

To boost the soil quality, Greg experimented with amendments such as biochar, which is carbon-rich and holds nutrients in the soil.

"We've really increased the size of our garlic and the fertility of other plants by using it," Greg says.

From left, Leah checks on arugula in one of the eight greenhouses at Pokey Creek Farm. Greg and Leah inspect their potatoes and garlic.

Photo at right courtesy of the Sempels

He added potatoes as another major crop, learning the art from an organic potato breeder in southern Idaho.

He phased out of forestry work and began farming full time.

"Once Greg got involved, it exploded," Leah says.

This growth meant that they needed more land and more power. The solar panels couldn't keep up with their need for electricity so they chose to connect to Clearwater Power.

"We couldn't farm like this without electricity," Greg says. "Once we got power, we really expanded."

They also received permission from the Martin family in St. Maries to farm their 5-acre, flat, river bottom parcel.

"We have to do a whole different farming system there," Leah says. "We use some equipment, and it is self-irrigated for much of the year. We lay plastic because the weeds are incredible."

On the new field in St. Maries, the Sempels grow onions, beans, kale, peppers, strawberries, celery, beets, cabbage, spinach, lettuce, arugula and more in addition to their major crops of garlic and potatoes.

Everything grown at Pokey Creek Farm is certified organic by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture Organic Crop Certification program. All ingredients used must adhere to a strict list of materials approved by the federal Organic Materials Review Institute.

This means that for Pokey Creek Farm to use the certified organic inscription, each item used in the growing process needs a certificate. It is time-consuming, but the Sempels say it is paramount to be able to provide the healthiest food possible to customers.

To help manage nutrients and increase flavor, Greg and Leah use natural ingredients such as kelp spray, organic chicken manure, fish fertilizer, cover crops and a powder called azomite that contains 100 volcanic minerals to fertilize and create the best possible environment for their crops.

"There's a lot of study involved because new products and techniques come out all the time," Greg says.

Pokey Creek Farm has eight on-site greenhouses for plant starts in early spring. There is a washing station, storage coolers and cabins for University of Idaho student interns or others who wish to study the operation.

Greg and Leah rely on help from about five workers each season. On a weekend day in September, they host a "crop mob" where people and families come out to the farm, take a tour, eat a meal, help plant garlic and harvest potatoes. The crop mob harvested 1,800 pounds of potatoes in three hours in 2018.

In a normal year, the Sempels grow more than 4,000 pounds of garlic. They distribute up to 3,000 pounds nationwide for organic seed through Filaree Garlic Farms in Omak, which requires large bulbs at least 2 inches in diameter. Each clove of a bulb is considered a seed.

Greg and Leah grow approximately 5 tons of 13 potato varieties such as German Butterball and Huckleberry Gold, which include five fingerlings such as Amarosa and Peruvian Purple. Moscow-area restaurants buy about 2,000 pounds of potatoes each year.

"It's so great when you go into a restaurant hauling all the food, and the people can see for themselves that it is local," Leah says. "We're lucky to have a community that really supports the farm-to- table concept."

In addition to selling to restaurants and natural food stores, the Sempels load their truck every weekend from May through October to sell their fresh produce at the Moscow Farmers Market.

"We get so much love from our customers and we are uplifted," Leah says. "It is worth it for us to do the work, because it is appreciated. People like to feel connected to people they get their food from. That people-to-people connection is what keeps us going." ■

Joyce and Glen Ward spend the winter looking forward to spring when they can head up to their cabin at Lake Penland.

Why Not Make a Lake?

Ambition leads to adventure and two new bodies of water

By Jody Foss

As the sun wraps around the Wards' hilltop home in Heppner, a forked-horn buck deer pushes on the kitchen door, ready for a morning snack.

Glen and Joyce Ward have lived in their home on Cemetery Hill since they married in 1956.

"It used to be just this front part," Glen explains. "When we started having our family, we needed extra room. I asked my neighbor if he would sell me a little more land from his lot. He said he would—for a dollar."

After Glen graduated from Oregon State University in 1951 with a degree in wildlife biology, he went to work in the high country of Eastern Oregon, running a pack string of mules for the Fish and Wildlife Commission. Later, when he was raising his family in Heppner, he took groups of Boy Scouts to the high country, teaching them not only the joys of getting out in the wild but also sharing what he knew about the forest and the animals that call it home. He initially intended to coach sports teams, but his time in the wilderness translated into a career with Fish and Wildlife.

When Glen met Joyce in 1952, she was working as a deputy sheriff for Morrow County.

"I figured I couldn't get in too much trouble if I was married to a deputy sheriff," Glen says.

When the couple's three children were in school, Glen coached the girls' softball team and Little League, and was transportation director of the swim team, taking the team to meets in La Grande, Hermiston, John Day and beyond.

"Glen is one of these people that if you need anything done, go ask Glen," Joyce says. "And that is everything he's ever involved in. Go ask Glen, he'll do it."

When the local theater burned down in 1964, Glen was commander of the American Legion, so he set up and showed movies in the hall. When the Kinzua Mill closed down in 1978, Glen arranged for roller skating equipment to end up in Heppner, and a roller rink was created at the fairgrounds. He and a friend went to Portland and bought 80 pairs of roller skates and a music machine. A wooden floor was laid and the fun began.

"We had a room full of kids and all

What was once Penland Prairie became Lake Penland. In January 1972, Orville Cutsforth decided to try the first boat on the lake, even though the it was still frozen.

Photo courtesy of Glen Ward

Glen tags a fawn as part of his job with the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Photo courtesy of the Fish and Wildlife Commission

they wanted was to go fast," Glen says. "They put a fast song on the music machine and off they went. It was mayhem."

"He has been active in everything that has went on," Joyce says.

Glen's job for Fish and Wildlife was an important one. A wildlife management district was created that included Wheeler, Gilliam, Morrow, Grant, Crook and Sherman counties. Glen managed the area for 40 years.

In 1978, Glen went with a crew to Hart Mountain to trap Rocky Mountain sheep that were hauled in horse trailers to some large ranches along the Columbia River.

"That is a pretty hazardous job, jumping out of the helicopter onto the rims, landing in shale rock," he remembers.

When he left home, Joyce says, "I didn't know if he would come back in one piece or not."

Glen took care of all the beaver, deer and elk habitats and introduced new species such as wild turkeys, chukars and antelope. He taught children hunting safety and wilderness preparedness, and enforced hunting laws in the Bureau of Land Management and national forests.

When Glen came to the area, there were no lakes in Morrow County. Mel Cummings—a close friend of the Wards—was chukar hunting with Glen in the late 1950s, and the two men were discussing this.

"Get busy," Mel said to Glen.

The idea took hold.

Bull Prairie Reservoir was built in 1959 and opened three years later.

Glen was teaching an outdoor school at Bull Prairie. There was already a house and a campground there.

"Looked like we could get about a 30-acre lake," Glen says. "It had narrows to build a dam, and Kinzua and the Forest Service agreed to donate the land."

Morrison Knudson out of Boise got the contract to build the dam to create Bull Prairie Reservoir

Then it was on to Lake Penland, which was built in 1962. After two failed core drillings at two different locations, they settled on its location—27 miles from Heppner—although they were not 100 percent sure it would hold water.

"We went up and down the street and got people involved in it, with the promise to open it to the public if we got it built," Glen says. "Got 26 people to give $250 to start with."

Two people backed out after learning that it might not hold water.

After getting a high bid to build the dam from a contractor, local wheat farmer Orville Cutsforth offered the services of his brother-in-law, Earl Baldwin, who built the dam to create Lake Penland for $40,000.

It took two years to build the lake and the dam on Mallory Creek.

"I couldn't have done it without the volunteers," Glen says.

Glen's friends surprised the family by pouring the foundation for the Wards' cabin at Lake Penland: a two-story 26-feet-by-34-feet building with a stone fireplace, full kitchen and bathroom.

Now Lake Penland is open to the public year-round, and is a favorite summer place to camp and fish. In the winter, snowmobilers enjoy the remote location. Each year, 20,000 rainbow trout are delivered to stock the lake.

Glen goes to the cabin about three or four times a week in the spring, summer and fall.

"He can't wait to go back," Joyce says. "He just loves it up there." ■

Expanding Opportunities

Marta Yera Cronin works to extend the reach of Columbia Gorge Community College

By Kathy Ursprung

For the new president of Columbia Gorge Community College, access is a priority: access for remote communities, career seekers and diverse populations, and access to community education classes and financial aid.

Marta Yera Cronin has lived and worked in urban settings most of her life, yet she sees many parallels with her role in a rural community college.

"I grew up in urban poverty with a single mother, so I know what that's like," Marta says. "I would not have been able to afford housing. If I had not had the train, I would not have been able to go to school."

Poverty, housing and transportation are issues that translate from an urban to a rural setting. Education as the pathway to a better life is a mantra emphasized in Marta's family since childhood.

"That's why it became so important to me for people on the outskirts to have access," she says.

Marta is working to expand CGCC's reach so students in communities outside the college service area have access to services comparable to what students have in The Dalles and Hood River. She and her administration are working on outreach to Sherman and Gilliam counties, and she envisions working with Wheeler County.

"Some students may go into family businesses, whether farming or whatever, but some of them maybe don't want to," Marta says. "They need to have opportunities. For me, access is the important thing we do here."

Fall enrollment at CGCC increased 6 percent. Marta credits part of that to ending the practice of putting students on a wait list when classes are full. Now, they open a new class section.

"It's important for students to have reliable access to the classes they need," Marta says.

Marta Yera Cronin is the new president at Columbia Gorge Community College.

SOAR—CGCC's student outreach team—has increased its efforts to build partnerships with high schools and generate buzz and excitement about the college.

One of Marta's early priorities as head

of CGCC has been to review the roles of members of the leadership team.

"We identified strengths and people we weren't really putting to good use," she says. "That's one of the first things we needed to do before we decide where we are going: make sure the right people are in the right places."

CGCC plans to get high school students started in programs earlier. Part of that effort is expanding the virtual campus so more students can take college-level classes while still in high school.

"We know, in some cases, students are not able to make the drive," Marta says.

Marta hopes availability of new student housing and a new skill center will improve access.

"We're not going to neglect academic and transfer students, but we want to be sure we are offering all the vocational and Career Technical Education tracks needed in the area," she says. "We could easily triple the welding program, but we don't have the space for it."

The college is working to secure $3.5 million of funding for the housing and skill center projects before the end of January.

Surveys have indicated other needed career tracks include fiber-optics installation and mechanics.

On the academic side, CGCC is redoing the general education portion of the curriculum, including math, science and English—the core courses needed to transfer to a four-year institution.

State university transfer requirements vary, so some students end up with surplus credits they don't need, which can unnecessarily spend financial aid.

"There are limitations on how many credits financial aid will pay for," Marta says. "We don't want them to get to their bachelor's degree and run out of aid."

To ensure students don't lose credits in transfer, the state is developing universal degrees, starting with English, biology, teacher's education and business.

Marta hopes to encourage more vibrant campus life.

Marta hopes the amphitheater at the heart of the college campus will soon be busy with new activities to enhance the student experience.

"Student government this year is very active," she says. "They are working on more events and are encouraging students to offer more clubs."

Some of the spaces on campus are being re-envisioned, including the library.

"We want it to be more of a hub, with a coffee bar and a tutoring center," Marta says.

Expanded scholarship and financial aid opportunities are also a high priority. College teams are visiting high schools to help students and parents complete the free application for federal student aid. The foundation director's position has increased from part-time to full-time to help grow scholarship opportunities for students.

"We're also trying to get more word out on Pell grants," Marta says. "Most students are eligible for Pell grants, and that's money you don't have to pay back."

Marta is continuing with minority outreach efforts—a key strategic goal of the college since before she took office.

"We want all of our high school students, no matter what their race or ethnicity, to be able to take advantage of all sorts of classes, whether academic or not," she says. "It used to be that a lot of our dual-credit classes were academic. Now we're moving in the other direction because not every student is an academic student."

While settling in at the college, Marta, her husband and her dogs are also settling in their new home in The Dalles. It took some time to find a house, which she says speaks to similar challenges for students.

"I'm loving small-town life," says Marta, who grew up in Manhattan and moved to The Dalles from a college district of 300,000 residents. "It's interesting to me to go places and be recognized. I was at the farmers market and was recognized by so many people. Back home, I had 265 faculty and could go out on a weekend and not run into a single one of them. This is more like a family environment. There is such strength in how the community works together. You don't see that in a lot of other places." ■

Colleen Leskinen greets one of the children she cares for after school. She and her late husband, Fred, started a home-based afterschool care program many years ago.

A Lifetime of Stories From Nespelem

By Vic Bobb

Ask Colleen Leskinen to share a memory of a lifetime spent in Nespelem, and you never know from what historical period the reminiscence is going to emerge.

It might be a small ocean of information about the town's landmark millpond and the place it had in the lives of young people. She might weigh in on the debate as to what business served the best ice cream in downtown Nespelem. Despite some folks' votes for Edna's, Colleen insists Mr. Davis' was the superior product.

Having known the businesses and people who defined Nespelem since before its incorporation as a town, Colleen enjoys sharing a world of information with lively and riveting narratives.

Pivotal to this world of memories is a gentleman named Fred Leskinen. On Halloween 1975, the rodeo man showed up at Colleen's house and presented her with a female German shepherd that he believed would be useful as protection. The next day, Fred came back to chat and take Colleen to the Sage for a meal.

They married in April, beginning a 31-year partnership that would end only with Fred's death when, as the family put it in the newspaper obituary, he "rode his last horse in the pasture above Five Lakes." He was mortally injured in a horse wreck triggered by an encounter with a bear.

Today, nearly a dozen years after Fred's last ride, Colleen carries out her child care commitments west of

Above and lower right, Colleen keeps her home unique inside and out with sculpture and a variety of decorations. Above right, Colleen reviews a writing assignment with one of her afterschool students.

town. Although the house she and Fred planned to build on their 80-acre patch of land had not yet come into being that fatal June day—and although their dream business of raising broncs and other rodeo stock had already been scaled back—Colleen looks at her life today with nothing but gratitude.

"I don't know if Fred had a plan or not," she says, "but it sure turned out to be a good one."

Her positive attitude might seem implausible to anyone familiar with her story. While the new house was being built, Colleen hired movers who stole most of her possessions, including family heirlooms. They even stole Fred's ashes.

And what is Colleen's response to this avalanche of loss and disappointment?

"Fred always said two things," she says. "Life goes on, and don't let it get you down. I don't let things bother me the way they did back then."

Her gaze draws back to her front yard, to the present, to the immense steel sculpture of an uprearing horse that anchors the space around her home.

Colleen says she is at peace, wholly grateful for every aspect of her life—even the pain and the loss.

"I grew so much from it," she says.

She has stories to tell, both those involving Fred and those of the community at large: the time she and some other Nespelem kids were playing Dudley Do-Right at the old mill and one of them managed to turn on one of the immense saws; the miracle when Fred was kicked in the face by a horse, the hoof breaking and dislocating his jaw. Before they could go to the hospital, Fred had to interact with another horse, who unintentionally head-butted the already anguished man. The result of the head-butt? Fred's joint slipped back into place, and the shattered mandible was pushed into alignment so perfect that the emergency room doctor said he couldn't have put him back together any better.

Want to hear about the epic mustard fight in the old dance hall? Curious about the miners' cabins along the highway, or buying candy at Casey's? Interested in knowing about the one-armed woman who lived upstairs in New Deal Hall and could play "In the Mood" on the piano?

Ask Colleen. She can tell you. ■

The Corvallis Boys and Girls Club has more than 3,000 members, with an average of 1,000 kids participating each day.

Corvallis Youths Have a New Hangout

Boys and Girls Club builds new facility to focus on supporting area teens

By Craig Reed

The Dr. Ken & Dot Johnson Center For Youth Excellence Teen Center at the club opened September 7, 2018, culminating a five-year project.

The entrance to the new teen center at the Boys & Girls Club of Corvallis is decorated with colorful designer concrete blocks and wood benches backed by raised flower and plant beds.

Inside, teenagers walk on a tricolored carpet highlighted by a bright sky blue. There are bright orange, green, blue and gray chairs at tables and at the coffee and smoothie shop counter. A green felted pool table and a green-with-white-trim ping pong table sit in the middle of the center.

Hanging on a wall overlooking the teen center is a picture of a bull with long horns. The silent message to the center's visitors is to take the bull by the horns and create an enjoyable, successful life.

Helen Higgins, the club's CEO, says the center was needed because the club had 150 high school student members. They needed their own space instead of sharing with grade school and middle school kids.

"The board had to decide whether we were going to deliver programs to high school kids or not," Helen says. "The board said yes, there is clearly a need for these kids."

At the same time that decision was being made, Helen says there was a teen suicide crisis going on in Benton County. Because a 10-year-old dental clinic in the club had greatly decreased tooth issues for kids, it was decided a medical and mental health center in the new addition might also be successful.

The Dr. Fred & Mark Brauti Wellness Clinic is on the second floor over what has become known as the Johnson Teen Center or JTC.

"We've created a system where we've brought youth and health care together to break down any of those barriers that might be out there for kids," Helen says. "We did it with dental care. We pulled out a lot of loose teeth, and kids began to walk themselves into the dentist. Our hope in putting health and mental health services on campus is that kids will walk in on their own.

"We want them to realize their physical and mental health are really important and are a component of their overall wellness. There is nothing to be feared or embarrassed about, but rather something to be embraced."

Ken Johnson, who started the club's dental clinic and volunteered his services for many years, was both a financial donor and capital

Above, the entrance to the new teen facility is modern and inviting. Top, Guillermo Valla runs the coffee and smoothie shop at the club.

campaign fundraiser for the new center and clinic.

"One of the main problems our community has had is mental health issues with our teens," he says. "That was a big emphasis for me to step forward to help solve and eliminate that problem among teens. We needed a building specifically for teenagers, and it is now something that the community will benefit from for many decades.

"I love what I see now. Every time I talk about the center with someone, I get goose bumps. It's way more than I envisioned."

The capital campaign raised $6.5 million for the construction. An additional $1 million has been raised, and the goal is to raise another $2.5 million to create an endowment that will sustain the teen programs and provide maintenance of the facility. Individuals, couples, businesses, agencies and foundations have all been donors.

As a community member, CPI recognizes the importance of teen health and helping residents prosper. CPI donated to aid in the construction of the facility, and donated to the club's scholarship program through Operation Round Up.

"The Boys and Girls Club has such a positive influence on the kids and families it serves, and helps them set up a good foundation to succeed," says James Ramseyer, director of member services at CPI. "This additional facility will further allow our next generation to access any assistance they need."

Mariah Morales has seen the teen project gradually become reality. She became a club member when she was a sixth-grader. Now 21, she is the club's front office coordinator, a full-time position.

"Watching it grow from an idea to what it is now has been amazing," Mariah says. "It provides a safe place for kids. There are a lot of kids with nowhere else to go. If we weren't here for them, they'd be out on the streets not doing great things."

Guillermo Valla, a 17-year-old high school junior, is another long-time club member. He is in his second year as manager of the club's coffee and smoothie shop, a position previously held by Mariah.

"The new center is a great place for kids to experience more of a community, to have a strong sense of friendships and to gain job skills," Guillermo says.

Deantay Harrison, a 12-year-old seventh-grader, says the club provides him with something to do "instead of being lazy at home."

The mission of the club and the teen center is not only to provide a safe place for high school students, but to also provide them with academic support, job skills training, leadership opportunities and skills, and career exploration.

In addition, the upstairs wellness center offers physical health and mental health services, nutrition education, residency education and research initiatives through Samaritan Health Services. Complete primary care is provided for babies, children and teens. Mental health services include counseling, medication management and evaluation, and treatment of a wide range of mental health concerns with a focus on education, prevention and early identification.

Resident physicians, a pediatrician, a child psychiatrist, a therapist and child psychiatry fellowship interns staff the center.

"There are a lot of pressures on teens today with the pace of communication and the impact of social media," Helen says. "There's pressure to perform academically and socially. Our goal is to help build skills in kids so they are better able to deal with any of their future concerns."

The club has 3,095 members, ranging from kindergartners to high school seniors. On average, about 1,000 kids a day are involved in the club's after school programs, both at the club and at area schools. Many of them will eventually be old enough to benefit from the new JTC and know the wellness center is there to help them. ■

Children at Royal Family Kids' Camp enjoy blankets donated by the Tri-Cities Project Linus Chapter.

Photo courtesy of Project Linus Tri-Cities Chapter

Warming Hearts & Bodies

Local chapters of national non-profit look to help children in need by providing them with hand-made blankets.

By Taylor Beightol

Blankets have been seen as a source of comfort for children for many years, and one of the best depictions of that is the character Linus, from "Peanuts". He was always carrying around his blue blanket as he followed along on adventures with his older sister and her friends.

Project Linus hopes to give every child in extreme circumstances just a glimmer of comfort through a hand-made blanket, created by their "blanketeers". Blanketeers are volunteers at Project Linus who spend their time making a variety of blankets for children in need in their community.

Eva Mitchell (left) and Agnes VanWingerden make the finishing touches on a crocheted blankets ready for children to love.

Photos by Elecia Copenhaver

The Yakima County chapter of Project Linus is one of over 400 across the country who make blankets for children who are seriously ill, traumatized or in need. Eva Mitchell, chapter coordinator for Yakima County, started out as a blanketeer for the Tri-Cities chapter.

For about five years Eva quilted blankets throughout the month and then drove them up to the Tri-Cities to add to their donations. This was until she started the Yakima County chapter.

"I was working on finding a speaker for a group of women and I asked Project Linus to tell people in Sunnyside what Project Linus is," Eva said. "From then on there was such a huge interest from a lot of women down here in the Lower Valley who wanted to know if we could have one here."

So, the Yakima County chapter was born. Eva quickly found out that a few other women in the Yakima Valley had been volunteering with the Tri-Cities

chapter as she did, and from there it has only grown. Around two dozen women, including a handful from Yakima, Ellensburg and even out of state, are serving as blanketeers for the Yakima County chapter.

"It's inspiring to see all of these different quilts," Eva said. "We have some really talented ladies and we have had some wonderful donations." One of the biggest donations that the chapter has received was from a late blanketeer, Nancy Smith, whose daughters donated her extra fabric and yarn after she passed away.

"The donation from Nancy was such a huge help to us," Eva said. "It was so expensive when we were first getting started, but now we have a wonderful supply of fabric from a beautiful quilter."

Project Linus' two-fold mission statement says that not only will they provide love, a sense of security, warmth and comfort to children who are seriously ill, traumatized, or otherwise in need through giving them handmade blankets, but the organization will also provide a rewarding and fun service opportunity for interested individuals and groups in local communities, for the benefit of children.

Organizations up and down the Yakima Valley have benefitted from the work that the Yakima County chapter is doing. The Sunnyside School District, Child Protective Services in Sunnyside, Heartlinks Hospice and Rod's House, which helps teenagers experiencing homelessness, are all local benefactors of Project Linus.

The chapter has also been able to help people much farther away than the lower

Every blanket is tagged with a Project Linus label.

Each blanket is folded and tied with a ribbon. A message is attached with care that says, "It may look like a blanket, but it's really a hug—made just for you with a whole lotta love!"

valley. Wildfires in Calgary, Alberta, and Paradise, California, have provided Project Linus chapters across the nation with another area where they can focus their blanket making.

When the Tri-Cities chapter started 18 years ago, they chose to make Kadlec Regional Medical Center their major benefactor. Today they donate blankets to over 30 other organizations throughout the Tri-Cities and give out a minimum of 250 blankets per month.

"We go with how our community wants to do it," said Linda Porter, Tri-Cities Project Linus chapter coordinator. "We looked at our community and we had a ready-made avenue to give blankets to children who needed them. We give Kadlec close to 100 blankets every month."

Both local Project Linus chapters are looking to expand in terms of finding more avenues to help the children in their community through giving blankets to various organizations and in turn they would need more volunteers to make blankets.

The two groups work together closely, and the Tri-Cities chapter played a large role in helping the Yakima County chapter get started, but it is the volunteers and the need in the community that has helped drive both chapters forward.

"We have really dedicated ladies who put in a lot of time," Eva said. "They all love doing it, because it goes to a good cause. I never expected this, it really takes on a life of its own." ■

Project Linus Local Chapters

Yakima County
Eva Mitchell
509-831-4322

Tri-Cities
Linda Porter
509-545-5391

Ken Harrison, along with his wife, Sharon, has applied his forestry knowledge to his tree farm, earning recognition by the Douglas Small Woodland Association as the Tree Farmers of the Year for 2018.

The Family Trees

Ken and Sharon Harrison lovingly care for their forest on 127 acres

By Craig Reed

When Ken Harrison wants a workout, all he has to do is step out the front door of his rural home.

"This is my way of going to the gym, this is my golf game out here," he says while looking around at the Douglas fir trees growing on all sides of his house in the east side foothills of the Coast Range.

For the past 18 years, Ken, with help from his wife, Sharon, has worked among these trees, planting seedlings, pruning, doing pre-commercial thinning, and spraying and controlling blackberry, scotchbroom, poison oak, grass and weeds. The result is that the 127-acre Harrison Tree Farm looks like a park.

The Harrisons' effort in managing and maintaining their property to benefit the trees and the habitat for frequent visits from deer, elk, bear and other wildlife was recently honored by the Douglas Small Woodland Association. Ken and Sharon were named Tree Farmers of the Year for 2018.

The Harrisons have been members of the 200-member association since 2002.

"For me, I get emotional talking about it," says Ken, 77. "To be recognized for what you believe in and what you enjoy doing is very gratifying. I do this because I like it.

Above, Ken's grandson, Riley Stutzman, helps plant Ponderosa pine trees on a hillside of his property. Right, Ken and Sharon inspect their trees.

There's personal satisfaction in improving the property."

"I just follow along behind and help when I can," Sharon says. "I contend that if Ken lives long enough, he'll have the whole place looking like a park."

Roy Brogden, president of the woodland association, says forest management is the key criteria when the association selects an award winner each year. Properties are toured before a winner is picked.

"The Harrisons have done a lot of work," Roy says. "They've taken care of the land and have managed it well. They've prepared the ground for planting, they've planted and reforested, they've done weed control, they've taken care of their roads so there's no erosion, and their trees are surviving and growing."

Ken gained forestry experiences from previous jobs. After one year in a forestry tech program at Lane Community College in Eugene, he worked eight years for the U.S. Forest Service. He then worked for a private timber company for several years before moving to Douglas County and working for Roseburg Lumber for 10 years and Lone Rock Timber for six years.

"I just enjoy forestry," he says. "I did a lot of management work, taking care of tree planting during my career."

The Harrisons, who were living in Winston at the time, bought 34 acres in 2001. The property had been logged. Ken described it as being "in disarray." After some clean up, he and Sharon planted 5,500 seedlings.

"I was the mule," Sharon says of packing the seedlings while Ken dug the holes and planted the trees.

In 2014, the Harrisons bought 93 acres to the south that was next to their original 34 acres. Fifty acres of the purchase had second-growth trees that had germinated naturally in the 1980s. The property also had some acreage that had been slashed and burned in the early 1900s to provide pasture for horses that were used on the nearby stagecoach line. Since the end of that era, cattle and sheep had grazed in the area.

To return that area to timber and to fill in other areas with trees, the Harrisons hired a planting crew and had 10,000 Douglas fir seedlings planted between 2014 and 2016.

During that same time, Ken and grandson Riley Stutzman planted 600 1-foot tall Ponderosa pine plugs on a dry hillside where they would do better than Douglas fir.

More recently, Ken has planted another 2,000 fir seedlings. He plans to plant another 1,000 this winter, replacing a few previously planted seedlings that died and filling in some other areas.

"I get excited when I think that four years ago that was just grass," Ken says of the former pasture area. "Now it's a young forest, what it was originally. It has come full circle. I get excited every time I look around and I see a green spot growing."

After living in Winston for 38 years, the Harrisons, moved out among the trees in 2016 after Sharon finished her three two-year terms as mayor.

"I bowed out of politics because we were moving out here," Sharon says. "I had the last 17 years in the house we designed and helped build in town, so I figured he could have the next 17 years out here in his trees.

"Working with the trees is something he enjoys, it's something he's done all his life. It keeps him active."

Ken admits he loves his trees and to date hasn't harvested any of them. But he is considering the prospect.

"I want to log some of my trees, even if it is just one load," he says with a laugh. "I'm considering some select cutting for wildfire prevention. That would make for a load or two. Trees do have value, so they just might have to go to the mill."

Whatever decisions are made for the future of the Harrison Tree Farm, the small woodlands property will remain in the family since it is in a trust to go to the Harrisons' two grandchildren, Riley and Emma. ■

What Happens When the Lights Go Out?

Power outages are not typical, but WOEC's crews jump into action when the power goes out

By Scott Laird

Many of us take for granted that when we flip a light switch or plug something into an outlet, the power to run that appliance or lightbulb is going to be there for us. But sometimes, the power goes out.

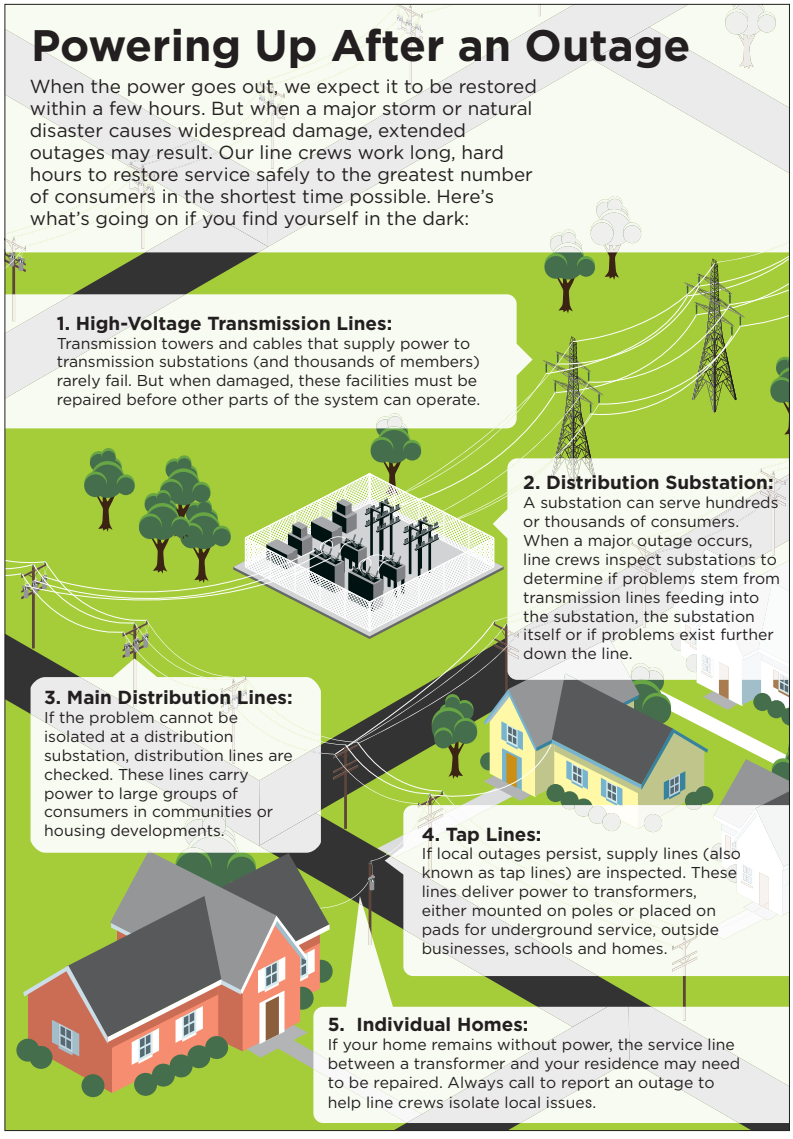
What causes a power outage? What should customers do when power goes out? How does West Oregon Electric Cooperative respond to an outage? Why do some outages last longer than others?

Don Rose, WOEC's director of operations, manages the linemen who maintain the poles and lines that bring members their electricity. When there is an outage, linemen work day and night in all kinds of weather and all kinds of circumstances to restore the power.

"It's often not the best scenarios that we have to work in," Don says about his linemen crews. "Sometimes they have to be pretty inventive because it's not a textbook repair. But they have enough experience—and the aptitude and the talent—to figure out a solution and get it done."

Members should stay clear of fallen lines and call WOEC to let the co-op know about any outages. This helps crews identify where the problem is, as well as the size and scope of the outage.

Although the co-op uses social media during major storms and outages to help get the word out to members and inform them of specific areas and the repair schedule, staff doesn't monitor those sites for outage notices from customers.



According to Don, 90 percent of outages are caused by trees or limbs falling onto power lines. Reliability across WOEC's system has improved dramatically. Tree-related outages have dropped by 64 percent in the past five years.

"We've changed our tree-trimming program in our right-of-way," Don says. "We've gotten more aggressive by adding another crew, purchasing some new equipment and making our program more efficient. We still have tree-related outages, but those are mostly big trees that are outside the right-of-way that we can't touch."

A basic understanding of how WOEC gets electricity to a home or business helps explain what happens when the power is out.

WOEC gets most of its power from the Bonneville Power Administration. WOEC has six local substations fed directly from BPA. Those six substations are tied together to form a large loop, so power can be fed around the system in either direction if any part of the system goes down. WOEC is upgrading the feed from the Mist Substation to Vernonia—a weak spot in the system—with new poles and wires.

In some of the more remote areas of WOEC's service area—areas that bump up against other service providers—WOEC

"Every outage can be so different because there are so many variables."
—Don Rose

has six metering points where they receive power from other utilities including Portland General Electric, Pacific Power and Light and Columbia River PUD. Those utilities provide the power up to the metering point, where WOEC buys it for its members beyond that point. From those substations and metering points, the power is fed along WOEC's distribution lines to individual homes and businesses.

Often the power goes out when there's a big storm. Strong winds or heavy, wet snow are a danger to power lines and power poles. Add in the heavily treed region that WOEC serves, and that danger multiplies. WOEC maintains a 40-foot right-of-way along its power lines in areas known for trees that can grow to more than 200 feet, so damages can happen when trees or limbs fall. When a big storm hits, usually there's some warning. WOEC has its crews on standby, ready to head out and get the power back on.

Power outages don't only occur during storms, and there can be many different causes. Traffic accidents often take out power poles and lines. In some areas, lines travel through dense forest and across ravines and canyons where trees and limbs are plentiful, making them difficult to reach except on foot.

People operate heavy equipment without knowing where power lines are, especially underground lines. Sometimes lines just get old.

"Every time something falls on a line, or if we have to splice it back together, it weakens it," Don says. "We can't just replace all our miles and miles of wire. Sometimes when the power goes out, we put it back up as fast as we can and get the power back on, and then have to move on to the next problem."

In certain areas, getting the power restored is completely out of WOEC's hands. An outage along a line to a remote metering point—the responsibility of those other utilities previously mentioned—may not be a priority for those utilities to repair, so WOEC customers may have to wait longer than usual to have their power restored. Don says BPA is usually pretty quick to respond to outages on their lines.

What does WOEC do during a typical power outage?

First, there is no such thing as a typical outage.

"Every outage can be so different because there are so many variables," Don says. "A lot of what we do involves assessment, because the locations are always different. The reason for the outage and the time of day may be different, or the damages that caused it are different. It's hard for us to even know how long it's going to take to get power restored or how many crew members it might take, until we've done the assessment and find out what's wrong."

During a big storm, WOEC crews clean up any normal work they have and then stand by for the storm to hit. Crews may wait until the storm is over before heading out to make repairs.

"If it's really raging, there's no sense in starting to put the wires back up if the trees are still falling," Don says.

Crews go out and make assessments of the damage, where it's occurring and what they need to fix it. They prioritize the repairs, with transmission lines and lines to substations first, then the feeds to larger populated areas. Next are major distribution points, and finally the more remote areas, especially the more heavily treed areas.

Crews make repairs in needed areas, check in with the dispatcher, then move on to another assignment. In some of the more difficult-to-reach areas, communication between the crews and the dispatch may be spotty or even non-existent. In some situations, repairs may need to wait until daylight.

"You can't accomplish anything in a ravine full of brush and trees at night," Don says. "During storm work, we try to take advantage of the daytime hours as much as possible."

Underground repairs may also be delayed because of the heavy equipment needed to dig and uncover them.

Don reminds WOEC members who use generators during emergency outages to make sure they are wired correctly.

"We've been really fortunate here, but there have been a lot of linemen burnt or even killed over the years due to generators that were hooked up improperly," he says.

During a large storm, crews usually work for 30 to 36 hours straight. After 30 hours, the crews are assessed for fatigue.

After 36 hours, crews are given an eight-hour break, usually during dark hours so they can get some sleep. Crews are called back during daylight hours so they can get as much work done as possible. In really large storms, Don may have to call in assistance from other utility crews to help with repairs.

If an outage happens that's not during a storm, either the office notifies a crew or—if the outage is after hours—the 24-hour dispatch notifies an on-call lineman. The crew will mobilize and head to the location where an assessment is done to identify the problem. Either the repair is made on the spot or more equipment is brought in if needed. Sometimes more than one crew may need to be activated if there are outages in several locations, and repairs are going to be time consuming.

"I'm really proud of our crews," Don says. "They often have to work under extremely difficult situations. But they work very safely and conscientiously, and they do what they have to do to get the job done." ■

Custom Guitars With Flair

Luthier crafts unique guitars and mandolins to match each customer's dream

By Craig Reed

Stephen Holst began playing guitar at age 15. He played in a five-member band, The Backdoor, with school friends.

A year later, Stephen decided to build his own guitar because he wanted his own instrument.

"I was one of six kids in my family, so there wasn't a lot of money for things like that," he explains.

Stephen admits his first two or three finished guitars were hardly worth playing. There were issues with being out of tune or staying in tune, strings breaking and the wood pieces not fitting tightly. At first he used a hard maple wood, but eventually discovered it was too heavy.

He was persistent, revisiting his father's wood shop in the family garage and starting over on another guitar. There was no internet in the mid-1980s to give him guidance. He just tried to copy what he could see when looking at a guitar.

The 1986 Sheldon High School graduate was finally somewhat pleased with his guitar building on his fourth or fifth effort.

"I knew I had it right when it would stay in tune," Stephen says of a guitar made with alder and mahogany. "I liked playing in bands a lot, and it was too much fun to not keep trying."

Those early efforts, his persistence, and a three-year part-time job at a Eugene business that made custom electric guitars and bass guitars led Stephen to decide to become a professional custom guitar maker. He decided to specialize in archtop guitars and later added mandolins.

Stephen Holst shapes the neck of a custom archtop guitar in his shop.

Photo by Craig Reed

"I didn't play archtop guitars myself, but I thought they were the prettiest guitars," he says.

The hollow, steel-stringed guitars have a distinctive arched top on the body and are popular with jazz players. Those musicians became Stephen's customers.

Now 50, Stephen has sold 168 archtops and 45 mandolins. His instruments sell for an average of $5,000 depending on their wood type, ornamentation and trim. All are customized to the customer's requests.

Like his father, Stephen's home workshop is in half of the garage at his family

Above, a finished mandolin. Top, a finished archtop guitar.

Photos courtesy of Stephen Holst

home several miles east of Creswell.

"I still take a lot of pride in what I do," he says. "What's fun is when I put the strings on it, when I finish it, when I first play it, when I first listen to it. It never gets old."

Stephen plays the new instrument for 30 minutes or so to check its tone and sound. Then it is placed in a pressed plywood case with padding and packed in a stout cardboard box with more packing material for its trip to its new owner.

"I never want to keep them because I want to get paid," he says matter of factly. "But every once in a while, all the stars align and it turns out extra special. I'm happy to send those off, to know when the guy opens the box, it'll be a wow moment."

Stephen's instruments can be found in the hands of professional musicians, many of them jazz players, throughout the world. In early November, he shipped his most recently finished archtop guitar to Australia.

"Throughout my career I've had the pleasure of making guitars for people from all over the world," Stephen says. "One of the most important things I've learned through this experience is that every customer will have a totally unique set of needs and wishes for their instrument. One of my archtop guitars is a true collaboration with the result being a guitar that is as much my craft as it is a person's vision and inspiration."

Several years ago, Stephen built a mandolin for Jim Magill, a professional musician in North Carolina. Jim posted a review about the instrument on Stephen's website.

"I find it to have an elegant, gratifying tone that is both exciting and familiar," he wrote. "Tone is something you can't do much about; an instrument either has it or it doesn't. To my great satisfaction, this one has it, and I hear much potential in an instrument that I already find impressive, and have high hopes that it will become a truly outstanding mandolin."

Because of the distance between the workshop and the customer, Stephen has extended conversations via phone and email to determine what musicians want in their instruments. He says decisions must be made on neck widths, body shapes, finish colors, choice of scale lengths and fingerboard radius, unique and personal inlay designs, wood types and the appropriate response, tone and feel of the instrument.

"Each guitar and mandolin I make reflects the unique needs and wishes of its owner," Stephen says. "It's my sincere desire to provide every customer with not only a beautifully crafted guitar or mandolin, but to furnish them with an instrument that will give them a lifetime of enjoyment."

Stephen starts each order with a solid block of wood. He carves it out, stopping when he taps on the wood and hears the tone he wants.

"The wood and tone resonates, and it takes experience to know when to stop," he explains. "Guitar builders are all different and all have a different interpretation of the tone and when to stop carving."

Stephen says maple, because of its grain, is most popular for the back and sides of the instrument. Spruce is the traditional wood for the top because it is light yet strong and resonates well. The neck is generally mahogany and the fingerboard is ebony. Stephen buys wood from businesses that specialize in instrument wood and obtain them from forests around the world.

"I feel like I've done enough of these and I feel confident enough that if somebody comes to me who wants a certain sound, I can create it for them," he says. "Every guitar is like a series of variables, and a builder can manipulate those variables to get the sound that a musician wants."

Kathi Holst, Stephen's wife and a middle school special education teacher in Creswell, says what her husband creates is amazing.

"He's humble about it, but he makes beautiful art," she says. "He makes dreams come true for those people who want a customized guitar or mandolin. He spends hours talking to them about what they want and then creates an instrument they like."

At the couple's 1994 wedding, Stephen played an archtop guitar he made and sang the Beatles' "In My Life" and Eric Clapton's "We're All the Way."

That guitar has a special story, and Stephen is hopeful all the others he has made have also created special memories for their owners. ■

To learn more, visit www.pacinfo.com/~sholst/index.htm.

Stefano and Kathleen Cremonesi with a picture of when they were younger.

Circus Life Leads to Love

Chance meeting across the big top in Europe leads couple back to Elmira

By Craig Reed

When Kathleen Harryman entered the big tent, her gaze looked past the massive elephants high-stepping around the circus ring and settled on the young man in the background who was directing the animals in and out of the show.

"I thought he was cute standing between those elephants," she says of her first impression of Stefano Cremonesi. "He seemed in command, keeping the six elephants going forward and in line."

The next day the two 22-year-olds met. They've been together ever since: an American woman from small-town Elmira and an Italian man from big-city Milano.

Their chance meeting took place in 1988 in Villarreal, Spain. They each continued to do circus work in Spain and then in Italy for a few years before ending their circus careers and moving to Elmira in June 1991. A month later they were married on a beach along the Central Oregon Coast.

After working a few years at a coffee

The couple's love of elephants continues today as is evident from this display in their home.

roaster business in Eugene, the couple started Stefano's Espresso Care—an espresso machine repair business—out of a shop on their home property a mile outside Elmira.

Kathleen and Stefano were asked many times how they met. When people heard Stefano's thick Italian accent and heard about the couple's circus experiences, they encouraged Kathleen write a book.

She wrote "Love In The Elephant Tent—How Running Away with the Circus Brought Me Home." In the book, she describes her adventurous spirit as a young woman, details finding her true love and soulmate, and explains the poor conditions that exist behind the big tent for both circus animals and employees.

Kathleen says her book focused on her emotional journey as a young woman as much as her physical journey.

The book was released in 2015 and won an Independent Publishers' gold medal award.

Her story started with running off to follow the Grateful Dead after her 1983 graduation from Elmira High School rather than going to college. At age 22, her wild spirit took her to Europe and to Spain, where she joined a group of street performers who played music and juggled for tips.

When the juggler said he was going to the circus to ask for a job, he asked Kathleen to come along and interpret.

That decision changed her life forever because it led to her seeing Stefano across the circus ring.

Stefano also had an adventurous spirit. He and a friend also tried playing music on street corners, "but we were pretty much starving," Stefano says.

The circus was in nearby Barcelona, so Stefano sought a temporary job to make money so he could keep traveling.

"When I walked in the elephant tent, it was basically love at first sight," he says. "I was told it would be demanding work, but I insisted and they made me the assistant elephant handler."

Kathleen admits if not for Stefano, she would have left the circus. She was a dancing girl and worked in the employee kitchen, neither of which she liked. She did ride the elephants in the circus ring for a week or so, something she did like.

A month after meeting, Stefano and Kathleen left for Italy, where Stefano was hired as head caretaker of another circus. A couple weeks later, Kathleen got a job at the same circus making food for the animals.

The two maintained those jobs for the next couple of years. In addition, Kathleen rode an ostrich during some circus acts, and was a dancing girl. She swam in a large tank with two nurse sharks for 18 months.

"It was stressful, tough carrying on a relationship," Kathleen says. "Work was exhausting. Stefano was working all the time."

The two didn't like seeing the elephants and other animals held in captivity, but they could do nothing about it except provide them with food and the best care they could give.

"I knew I could take care of the elephants better than anybody because I did care," Stefano says. "I was fascinated by them, the majestic size of them. I couldn't change their status, but I could make their life a little better."

Because the elephants needed daily care, Stefano took no days off. He admits the work finally took a toll on him. He quit after a disagreement with circus ownership.

Kathleen traveled with the circus to Yugoslavia, but a few months later she left and reunited with Stefano. The two decided to travel to Elmira.

"I came here, had time to look around, I said 'I think I can live here,' and then we got married," says Stefano, who became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 2006.

"The circus is a good memory because of what we have now, the life we have now," he adds. "I honor the history of the circus, the human performers, but I hold a soft spot in my heart for the animals in captivity."

Kathleen says her travels and experiences as a young woman "were a path toward maturity for me."

"We both learned a lot of lessons working in the circus," she says. "Before then—as a solo traveler—it was just a matter of taking care of myself. At some point you have to learn about community, about working toward a long-term relationship, about working hard toward a common goal that makes it important for both of you." ■

A portion of the money from the sale of "Love In The Elephant Tent" is donated to an elephant sanctuary in Tennessee. The couple also has made financial donations to an elephant nature park in Thailand.

Mikael Naramore's narration studio gives him a space to be creative and bring story characters to life.

Small Sound Booth With Big Impact

Mikael Naramore turned his enjoyment of storytelling into a career

By Jeanie Senior

On an average work day, audiobook narrator Mikael Naramore sits inside a closet-sized sound booth dimly lit by a computer screen, an iPad and a small lamp, and brings the written word to life.

As he reads and records the text of a science fiction book by J.S. Morin, the characters and their voices—male and female, young and old, aliens and a grouchy wizard—become real. His narration sweeps listeners into the story.

"It's a great way to make a living," says Mikael, whose business is called Terrestrial Media.

Buy a Morin audiobook and Mikael's name has equal billing on the cover.

He grew up in Nashville "where everybody is in the music business" and started out as a recording engineer.

He remembers a first-grade field trip to Music Row, where he got hooked on the smell and sounds of a recording studio. A friendly sound engineer let the students listen to the recording he was working on. It was Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers performing "Islands in the Stream."

Mikael's work earned him an Audio Publishers Association award in 2017.

Influenced by Nashville, Mikael says he wanted to be a musician. But he also wanted to have a family, he says. The music industry has changed to such a degree it's like taking a vow of poverty to work toward success.

In 2001, after college, he interned at Brilliance Audio in Grand Haven, Michigan, not far from where his family lived. Mikael was quickly promoted to sound engineer and director. Brilliance, now owned by Amazon, is a major producer of audiobooks.

That was the starting place for his career as a narrator. Mikael has narrated more than 300 titles, ranging from romance novels to mysteries to nonfiction. He also has directed and engineered about 1,000 books and works as an audiobook director.

Mikael earned an industry honor in 2017, when he won an Audie Award—the Audio Publishers Association's version of an Emmy.

For the past three years, a large share of the audiobooks he has narrated have been by Morin—a rising star whose titles include the popular Black Ocean series. Mikael says Morin's books remind him of Firefly, Fox's quirky sci-fi space Western series. Although the network canceled Firefly 15 years ago after just one season, it has a massive cult following.

"It was a perfect TV show," he says.

Science fiction and fantasy are his favorite category to narrate.

"It's a lot of fun," Mikael says. "What's great about it is you generally can invent accents."

Apart from imaginary alien-speak, Mikael has a keen interest in accents, which are important in his profession.

In a day, Mikael says he can record and engineer about three finished hours of narration. Morin audiobooks, for example, generally run from just under nine hours to almost 12 hours.

He works for publishers and independent authors, and mostly gets jobs through emails or phone calls.

Amazon has a site where audiobook narrators can look for work, but Mikael says he has been busy enough that he doesn't need the service.

"It's taken me years to get to this point," he says.

He cautions that he works in a cyclical business. Although audiobooks are a growing phenomenon—recording double-digit sales—print book and ebook sales have been shrinking. Industry analysts point to audiobooks' portability and convenience as a reason for that.

In his White Salmon studio, there are photos of Mikael's wife, Leslie, and their two sons, as well as an array of music editing equipment. There are guitars, a collection of vinyl records and a restored upright piano that belonged to an uncle who was a professional musician.

Mikael continues to write and record music, and is an aquarium enthusiast. As a volunteer, he maintains the aquarium at Whitson Elementary School. ■

A Healthy Expansion for La Pine

Central Oregon receives a boost to health care

By Craig Reed

St. Charles Family Care in La Pine has increased access to medical services for the residents of several Central Oregon rural communities.

With the population growing in southern Deschutes County, northern Klamath County and western Lake County, officials recognized more medical services were needed.

The 2010 census reported there were about 25,000 people in those areas. Nine years later, that estimate is around 30,000.

"There are not enough medical facilities to meet the needs," says Vic Russell, a Midstate Electric Cooperative board member.

The La Pine Community Health Center, a federally qualified health clinic, provides services for approximately 10,000 people. That leaves about 60 percent of the population who don't have close adequate access to medical services, says John Jepson, senior philanthropy officer for St. Charles Health Center in Bend.

There are also thousands of people who visit Central Oregon annually. They recreate on Mount Bachelor, in the forests and mountains, on the rivers and in the high desert. They may also need medical care.

Considering all those factors, St. Charles Health System, based in Bend, decided to build a new clinic in La Pine. The immediate care department of the clinic opened May 17, 2018. Primary care opened September 5.

"There's been a ton of positive response," says Danielle Baughman, manager of clinic operations for the La Pine facility. "We're excited to be working with St. Charles. We want to grow the clinic to meet everybody's needs."

John Jepson, senior philanthropy officer with St. Charles Health Center in Bend, and Corinne Martinez, a member of the St. Charles Foundation Board, walk in the hallway of the new clinic.

The clinic eliminates medical-related road trips to Bend for people who live east in the Christmas Valley, Fort Rock and Silver Lake areas, and those who live south down to the Chemult area. Those who live close benefit too.

"By bringing more immediate care and primary care here, people don't have to put off seeking care and then end up more sick and needing more care," John says. "With care being provided closer, people can get it earlier, quicker and more frequently when needed.

"The fire department is also saying it is getting a lot more calls for more emergency situations. It's a $600 ride to Bend in an ambulance. This is about getting primary service closer to home. Localizing care will bring the cost of care down for everybody."

Corinne Martinez, a member of the

St. Charles Foundation board, was one of the first people to instigate conversation about St. Charles expanding its system to La Pine. She is also involved with the La Pine Urban Renewal Area program.

Corinne spotted the future home of the La Pine clinic just off Huntington Road on the north side of La Pine. The property had been donated to Deschutes County by a private donor. Ownership was then transferred to La Pine.

The 2.5 acres were donated to St. Charles in late 2016. St. Charles paid for utilities to be installed on that land and on another 2.5 acres on the north side of the clinic site. Ground on the new structure was broken in July 2017.

St. Charles is a nonprofit, so every major expansion must be partnered with a community and private money. Donors from every community in the area contributed almost $1.2 million of the $5.5 million project.

Corinne and Vic were co-chairs of the capital campaign for the project.

"I get chills thinking about how the communities responded," Corinne says. "They donated out of their pockets. People donated who I never thought would. They found the means to do it. People who vacation here even donated. It all speaks to the necessity of expanding medical access here."

"Local businesses outside the area supported it because they knew their employees lived here," John says.

Vic says he was surprised by the response, calling it "incredible."

"I'm so proud of the people who got behind it," he says. "It's another foundation block for a community that is changing and growing."

The rest of the money for the project came from the St. Charles Medical System, whose mission is "Creating America's healthiest communities together."

Helping to design the building's look was open to community members.

"We wanted a lodge feel rather than a modern look or a brick building," John says. "I think it's a very welcoming setting among the trees. St. Charles designs spaces with a healing environment. Every exam room has natural light through a window."

The clinic was designed to look like a lodge.

The artwork in the building represents Central Oregon and other aspects of south Deschutes County.

Vic says he likes the design of the building, especially because community members were involved.

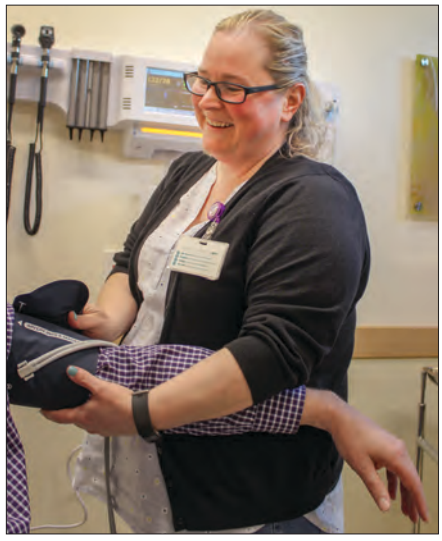
"I'm very pleased with the look," he says.

The staff at the clinic consists of eight shared immediate care providers, one primary care provider, three registered nurses, three certified medical assistants, two radiology technicians and two phlebotomists.

"I'm completely confident we'll have more primary care providers in the near future," Danielle says. "We've had a lot of interest, but we want to ensure we get the right fit for the community.

"Our visitor count is consistently increasing, at least 10 to 20 percent a month," she adds. "It's been a nice ramp up. As the visitor numbers increase, we'll increase staff to go along with those numbers."

Danielle says the facility wants to hire staff who want to settle down in the La Pine area.



Certified Medical Assistant Erika Lee takes a patient's blood pressure.

"This is a growing rural community," she says. "If you have any desire to work in a rural community, this is a really great place to be able to serve.

"We want this to be a stable medical home for patients, and we want patients to know they'll get the same person for their primary care." ■

The clinic provides immediate care from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. seven days a week, and family care from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday.

Wyatt Bruesch has been riding bulls since October 2017. He stays on as his bull gets airborne during a rodeo at the College of Southern Idaho Expo Center.
Photo by Kelly Magee

A Second and Third Chance at Life

Every day is a gift for teen bull rider Wyatt Bruesch

By Dianna Troyer

The first time Wyatt Bruesch's heart stopped beating, he could still hear doctors talking in Pocatello's Portneuf Medical Center's emergency room. His lungs and heart were injured after a bull he had ridden trampled him during a high school rodeo Friday, May 18, in Burley.

"They were getting the paddles ready to shock my heart," Wyatt says. "Then I heard one say, 'We won't need those, he's back.' "

The second time his heart stopped beating, he says he saw a radiant light.

"It was blinding—brighter than any light I've ever seen—but it didn't hurt my eyes," says the 17-year-old Raft River High School senior. "It was a light like when you die. I used to be scared of dying, but it felt peaceful."

Doctors later told him he flatlined a third time.

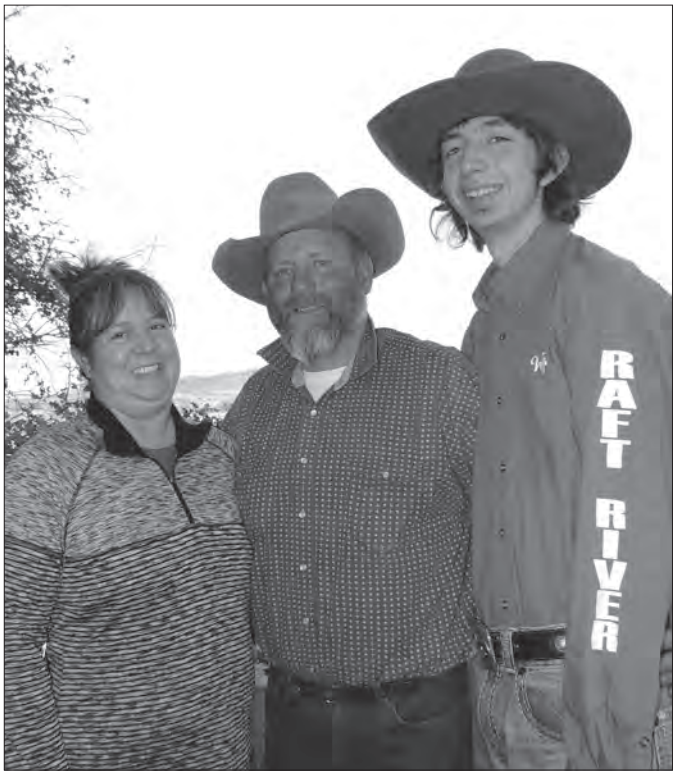
"I don't remember the last time or much of what happened the next week at the hospital," he says.

Wyatt does remember what the doctors and nurses called him: a miracle.

Surviving the accident has given Wyatt an intense and renewed appreciation of life.

"I realize life is short," the soft-spoken young man says. "Every day is a blessing. I don't take any day for granted."

"His doctor told us he couldn't believe Wyatt was still alive," says his mother, Nicole.



Above, Wyatt flatlined three times after a bull trampled him during a high school rodeo competition May 18 in Burley. Right, Wyatt's mother, Nicole, and stepfather, Ken, did not know the extent of his injuries until they arrived at the hospital.

Above photo courtesy of Wyatt Bruesch

His stepfather, Ken Erickson, says, "Emergency room nurses came up to his room in intensive care. They wanted to touch him to make sure he wasn't a ghost."

Nicole, a title company escrow assistant, and Ken, a cowboy at Albion Ranch, stayed with Wyatt during his ordeal at the hospital.

The bull trampled Wyatt at about 9 p.m., three seconds into his ride. He was stabilized at a local hospital. Two hours later, he was transferred by air ambulance 80 miles to Portneuf Medical Center, which was staffed and equipped to deal with his injuries.

"He was wearing his protective vest, so we didn't know the severity of his injuries," Nicole says. "The staff didn't give us updates because they were so busy just trying to keep him alive. When the doctors told us later what happened, we were glad we didn't know."

After flatlining a third time, a doctor did a risky procedure with patients having only a 7 percent chance of survival. Under Wyatt's left arm, the doctor made a 6-inch-long incision so he could reach into his chest cavity, massage his heart and grip his lung to prevent blood loss until surgery. A broken rib had punctured his lung.

With surgery complete at about 3 a.m., Wyatt was put in a medically induced coma and transferred to intensive care. A cooling blanket was draped over him to maintain his temperature at 40 to 50 degrees, keeping his blood thick to prevent loss.

Late Saturday evening, the cooling blanket was removed. He was given medication to revive him from the coma.

"We had to wait about 30 minutes for it to take effect," Nicole says.

"We didn't know if his brain would be injured because he'd lost so much blood," Ken says. "Would he be able to function? The happiest day of my life was seeing his finger twitch when he started to wake up."

Unable to talk with a breathing tube down his throat, Wyatt wrote on a piece of paper.

"Why are we at the hospital?" he asked. "I saw a light, like a light when you die. Where's my cross in the pants they cut off me? Did you get a video?"

Nicole began recording her son's rides in October 2017 when Ken's uncle, Todd Erickson—a bull riding contractor—gave Wyatt lessons. Tall and slender with long legs to grip the bull's sides, Wyatt was a natural.

"It's an adrenaline rush," he says.

"I'm not thrilled that he rides bulls, but I support him because he wants to do it," his mother says.

Reflecting about the accident, Ken says, "Words can't describe how much we were blessed. A world of people touched our lives with people praying. The outpouring of support was overwhelming. This has made me appreciate every day."

At a checkup in July, Wyatt was told he had fully recovered and had no restrictions on what he could do. After graduating from high school, he plans to enroll in a college to study diesel mechanics and compete on a rodeo team.

"Whatever I do, I'd like to stay as far away from a hospital and needles as I can," he says, grinning.

When the high school rodeo season begins in late March, Wyatt plans to ride bulls again. If he ever draws the bull that injured him, named Bar 41, would he ride it again?

"Sure," he says, smiling. "People have told me it's crazy to ride again, but it's something I love to do." ■

An Inclusive School for All

Principal embraces opportunities to serve

By Drew Myron

Kim Yasui was born and raised in Odell and was once a student at Mid Valley Elementary School, where she now works as principal.

Mid Valley Elementary in Odell could be called the school that rarely closes. Serving 500 students, the school opens with morning's first light and doesn't close until after dinner and into the night.

"We model our school as a community building to be open as much as possible for as many as possible," says Principal Kim Yasui.

The school day begins at 7 a.m. with child care to serve the needs of parents working early shifts at area fruit-processing plants. Nearly every child receives free breakfast. Free or reduced-price lunch is provided to nearly every student, along with free fruit and veggie snacks in the afternoon and free dinner during the after-school program. The school is open year-round and serves as a hub for all of Hood River County School District's summer students. Even the library, which lends to both students and parents, is open year-round.

"We have kids who need a lot of services, and we need to be that source of support so we work to keep the doors open," Kim says.

With its dramatic economic gaps, the Hood River area is a study in contrasts. While downtown Hood River features the affluence of booming tourism, poverty rates soar just a few miles beyond the bustle.

Across the county—from Odell to Parkdale to Cascade Locks—roughly 70 percent of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, which is a standard economic indicator. Many have limited or no access to computers or other academic tools. Thirty percent of Hood River County is Hispanic—though the number swells during agriculture season—and 85 percent of Mid Valley families speak Spanish. These socio-economic disparities, says the school district, illustrate the need to develop programs that serve all students.

As the community's primary gathering place in which a variety of backgrounds come together, Mid Valley Elementary School has embraced the opportunity to learn from, and about, one another.

Along with extended school hours and community services, Mid Valley stands apart for its approach to language and culture. It's the only grade school in the

district offering bi-literacy education with dual-language classrooms.

About a decade ago, while Portland schools were offering bilingual education, Mid-Valley educators wanted to do more to address their students' specific needs. In Odell, students are learning English and growing skills in their native languages. With the goal of developing bilingual fluency, all Mid Valley students have daily experiences and instruction in a second language and culture.

"We want to honor the language their parents are speaking," Kim says. "I think it's made us more competitive. We're shifting the culture and changing the dynamics."

The reward, she says, is students are prepared for a life in which they get to choose what they want to do.

"If they want to work in the orchards, great," she says. "If they want to move away, great. But we want them to be equipped, prepared and have the ability to make their own choices."

The program has proven so popular there is a lottery system for enrollment.

Kim, 46, was born and raised in Odell and was a student at the school she now leads. She attended Hood River Valley High School, earned a Spanish degree from the University of Oregon and a master's in education from Pacific University.

Kim returned to Mid Valley Elementary and taught migrant students and English language learners for 12 years. In 2010, she acquired her administrative license from Portland State University.

In 2012, Kim was awarded the Women of Distinction honor from Soroptimist International.

"Kim has made it her mission to ensure that every child at our school, regardless of socioeconomic status, native language or family dynamic, has the opportunity to pursue greatness," wrote Peggy Dills Kelter, a colleague who nominated Kim for the award.

In 2015, Kim was named principal of

Cristian Sonato, left, and Alejandro Solano share a lively lunchtime. Free and reduced-price lunch is provided to nearly every student, along with free snacks in the afternoon and free dinner during the after-school program.

Mid Valley Elementary School.

"There are a lot of memories in this building," she says. "I walk into the music room and the smell brings me back, or a student's grandparent will call me Kimmy, and I haven't been called that since I was little."

It's fitting that Kim—with a Japanese father and Finnish-Irish mother—leads a school embracing cultural diversity. She knows the pain of hiding your heritage.

Her great-grandfather, Masuo Yasui, was a first-generation Japanese American who was a farmer, business owner and prominent community leader in Hood River. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, he was forced from his own farm—Yasui Orchards in Odell-and spent four years in an internment camp.

He was among 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry forced from their homes and sent to detention camps following President Franklin Roosevelt's order. After the war, the Yasui family was able to retain a small portion of their

Melissa Figueroa Manzo enjoys lunch with friends.

farm. Kim's parents, Philip (Flip) and Maija, are the third generation to own and operate the family orchard.

"With my own grandparents, I could see how they did not want to emphasize their Japanese culture," Kim says. "Historically, it wasn't safe. I couldn't fix it for them, but we can learn from this and do things differently now." ■

Class members work on projects at an Art Accelerated painting class hosed at the Pelican Pub and Tap Room.

Art for the New Year

Artist collective finds ways to share art and brighten Tillamook

By Denise Porter

This year, while making your New Year's resolutions, why not add an art class to your list of new experiences? Your class fee can even help a child attend art classes.

The artisans at Art Accelerated in downtown Tillamook have a lineup of fun classes on their winter roster. Co-director Christine Harrison says the classes are reasonably priced, taught by locals and have a laid-back atmosphere. The adult class fees also benefit one of the nonprofit's missions: to provide low-cost art classes for area youth.

Taking an art class gives participants, "the self satisfaction of learning a new skill, but also it's a chance to meet people who share some of the same interests," Christine explains. "If you're buying a piece of art, it's something to enjoy. If the piece is of your own making, you're adding a memory of that experience."

Art Accelerated offers writing, poetry and painting classes, acrylics, wire sculpture, recycled art and other forms such as Shibori art, which is similar to tie-dying, but uses thread to bind the cloth before dying it.

Art Accelerated began with a pop-up art show in 2015. Christine, an instructor at Tillamook Bay Community College, says she and other art friends thought area artists needed a collective place to showcase and sell their wares. Renting business space individually could be too expensive for a single artisan.

With several vacant storefronts in the downtown corridor, hosting art shows in the spaces would allow community members to see the insides of the retail buildings.

Shibori art class students dye their materials outside the downtown Tillamook studio.

The group wondered how partnerships could be formed to benefit both artists and property owners.

"It was five of us who just wanted to put some art up and do something in one of the (empty) storefronts in downtown," Christine recalls.

The debut Art Accelerated show was held in a building on the corner of Pacific Avenue in Tillamook. Building owners George and Carol Langlois agreed to let the artists use the space for their exhibit.

They called the pop-up show "Art Accelerated—Blink! You Miss It," because the idea was to pop into a building, have an art show, leave it up for a small window of time and then take it down.

Event organizers secured a grant from the Tillamook County Cultural Coalition to host the event. They asked each artist to offer one piece of art for sale, with proceeds donated to local charities. The rest of their work was for sale for their own profit.

"It was very successful," Christine says. "It was our first effort. We made $1,700 for nonprofits in the community and then we sold at least $2,000 or even $3,000 in local art."

After that first show, Art Accelerated was on the move. Since then, the group has applied for and received several grants and donations to help secure their current building in Tillamook.

From their 2015 beginning, Art Accelerated's goal was to showcase local artists.

"And it was always our plan to begin teaching kids," Christine says.

Two years ago, the group began partnering with OSU Extension in Tillamook to bring art classes to 4-H youth. During the school year and summer, Art Accelerated instructors teach youth in several mediums.

"We continue to partner with civic-minded people and organizations," Christine says of the web of volunteers and board members working behind the scenes to make Art Accelerated grow. She includes the OSU Extension staff in that grouping.

"They handle the enrollment and background checks for the adult volunteers," she says.

Recently, a group of teenagers completed a full-sized wall art piece that will be mounted on the building next to the Art Accelerated Third Street studio. Starting the project and seeing it through to completion was "really great for them," Christine adds. "Our students have learned and grown so much."

Art Accelerated's missions includes providing local artists with a venue to both instruct and sell art they produce in their classroom and retail space in Tillamook. Yet Art Accelerated is still always on the move, bringing art to the community through paint nights at local restaurants and monthly downtown art walks, Christine explains.

A popular Art Accelerated event is a monthly poetry open mic held at Yo Time Yogurt in Tillamook. Poets and writers gather in fellowship and eat yogurt while listening to each other's works.

Christine says she would love to see more adults walk through their studio doors this year.

"Add art to your life," she says. "There's the self-satisfaction learning a new skill, but also it's a chance to meet people who share some of the same interests." ■

Art Accelerated is at 1906 3rd Street in Tillamook. For more information, call 503-809-9172 or visit www.artaccelerated.org.

Upcoming Classes at Art Accelerated

4-H Art Expression/After School Classes

- Monday art, third grade and up: January 14, 28 and February 4, 11, 25
- Wednesday art, kindergarten through second grade: January 16, 23, 30, February 6, 13, 20

Adult Classes

- Tuesday afternoon studio workshop, $5 per class or five classes for $20; 12:30-2:30 p.m.
- Adult acrylic class, January 19, 26, February 2, 9, 16, 23
- Writer's monthly group classes begin in January. Watch website for date and time.

Fundraiser/Paint Night

- Storming the Museum, March 2, 6-8 p.m. Guided painting night of JMW Turner's steamboat off Harbour's Mouth. $50 per person includes all painting supplies, canvas, food and drink. This event helps make low-cost workshops available to children and adults.

Let Me In; It's Cold Outside

Pets need extra TLC during the winter

By Christina Sawyer

Did you know small pets can suffer from hypothermia and frostbite? This is true even for breeds such as huskies and Samoyeds, which are better suited for the chilly temperatures. All pets need adequate shelter. It's a common misconception that dogs and cats will be fine if left outside in the cold. Shelter from the elements is something we all require, even our furry friends. Protecting our pets from the cold winter weather takes some planning and a change of routine.

Indoor accommodations are best when the temperature drops, but if that's not possible, a sturdy shelter protected from wind, rain and snow and some type of padding will help your pet maintain body heat. An old blanket might not be the best option for pets that are prone to chewing. You might try a bed of straw.

Be particularly gentle with elderly and arthritic pets during winter. The cold can leave their joints extremely stiff and tender, and they may become more awkward than usual. Stay directly below these pets when they are climbing stairs or jumping onto furniture;

consider modifying their environment to make it easier for them to get around. Also, watch stiff and arthritic pets if you walk them outside. A bad slip on the ice could be painful and cause a significant injury.

Heat lamps, space heaters and other devices might be fire hazards around animals. Pet supply stores sell heated mats. If you follow directions carefully before use, items like this can provide comfort for your pet.

Your pal won't be able to get enough water from licking ice or eating snow. A pet-approved heated water dish is a must. Increasing your pet's food intake should also be considered. The additional calories will help them maintain body heat. A higher percentage of protein will also keep their fur in top shape.

An outside shelter should be kept clear of snow and ice. Keep fur on your pet's foot pads trimmed short to minimize or prevent ice buildup. If you have a more fashion-forward pet, they may tolerate a pair of dog boots, which provide great protection. If you notice your pet limping or dancing, check for frostbite.

Take precautions to keep driveways and walkways free of ice. This is often accomplished with salt or deicers. If your pet's path is covered in either of these products, you might notice chapping and irritation to their paws. Pets may lick this irritated area. Ingestion of the salt or deicer can cause gastrointestinal irritation. To avoid this problem, make sure you wash your pet's feet with warm water after a walk.

Just because it's cold outside doesn't mean we get to stay home. Preparing our vehicle to start up during subzero temperatures requires antifreeze. Even in small doses, this product can be fatal to pets. Keep it out of reach, and thoroughly clean up spills immediately.

You might be tempted to take Fido or Fluffy with you when you leave the house. It is important not to leave them in the car in cold weather. A parked car in the winter can act like a refrigerator, holding in the cold and causing your animal to freeze to death.

If your pets are left to find warm shelter on their own, it might be more dangerous than the cold itself. Cats have been known to find warmth near the warm engine of a car just parked. Preventing a tragedy can be as simple as honking your horn or pounding on the hood before starting the engine.

If the shelter you have found for your pet is inside your garage, take a few extra minutes to survey the area and make sure there aren't any hazards they might be tempted to get into. Oil, chemicals and fertilizers can be harmful to animals. Do not start your car in a closed garage. Carbon monoxide poisoning is deadly for humans and animals alike.

A winter storm with blowing snow can quickly cause a dog to lose their scent and become lost. Make sure your dog is always leashed when out on walks and behind a locked gate while at home. Pet ID tags are an inexpensive way to help your faithful companion find his way home if he does get lost.

Your pet will naturally develop a longer coat as the mercury drops. As tempting as it might be to shave them to avoid the extra hair in the house, it is not recommended, unless they won't be venturing outside for any reason, even a quick bathroom break. If your best friend has short hair, there are a variety of coats and sweaters available. These can provide coverage from the base of the tail to the collar.

Bathing your pet during colder months may require a dip in the family tub. Use warm water and throughly dry them before allowing them to venture outside to prevent dangerous exposure. Of course, if the idea of wrestling your pet into a bubble bath causes you distress, there are professionals who can do this for you.

Cold weather can be hard on pets, just like it can be hard on people. Protecting pets during the cold is an important part of being a responsible pet owner. ■

Signs of Frostbite and Hypothermia

Frostbite happens when an animal's body pulls all the blood from the extremities to the center of the body to stay warm. An animal's ears, paws or tail can get cold enough that ice crystals can form in the tissue and damage it.

The tricky thing about frostbite is that it's not immediately obvious. The tissue doesn't show signs of damage for several days.

If you suspect your pet may have frostbite, bring her into a warm environment right away. You can soak her extremities in warm water for about 20 minutes to melt the ice crystals and restore circulation. Don't rub the frostbitten tissue, however, because the ice crystals can do a lot of damage to the tissue. Once your pet is warm, wrap her up in some blankets and take her to the veterinarian. Your vet can assess the damage and treat your pet for pain or infection if necessary.

Hypothermia is when the body temperature drops below normal. It can happen when animals spend too much time outside during extremely cold situations. If your pet is in poor health or has circulation problems, this may occur more quickly. The first signs may include shivering, weakness and lethargy. Animals may even show signs of depression. Heart rate may slow and breathing may become labored. Muscles will stiffen and they will stop responding to stimuli.

If you notice any of the above symptoms, you need to get your pet warm and take them to a veterinarian.

Winter is Coming

As the long, cold winter settles in over northern Nevada, an unseen threat lurks just out of sight: high bills. Heating is one of the most expensive household costs each year for people in this area, and Wells Rural Electric Co. members typically see an increase in their monthly bills as temperatures start to drop. However, there's no reason to fear the cold. Here are six simple, inexpensive measures that can help you conserve energy and money during the cold season.

1

DON'T SET & FORGET

While programmable thermostats are convenient and help conserve energy, "set it and forget it" is bad advice. Consider turning your thermostat down 10 to 15 degrees while you sleep or if you're leaving the house for eight hours or more. Doing so can save roughly 10 percent on your heating bills each year, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

2

PJS FOR DAYS

Winter is the perfect time to put those soft sweatshirts, comfy sweatpants and warm blankets to use. Rather than cranking up the heat, turn the thermostat down and bundle up around the house. While you're at it, consider a set of flannel sheets and an extra comforter for your bed. Let your clothes and sheets keep you warm so your heating system doesn't have to.

3

FREE SUN FOR EVERYONE

Nevada is one of the top states in the nation when it comes to solar resources. That makes perfect sense for southern Nevada and its sweltering heat, but northern Nevada is excellent too. Despite the cold winters, there is still an abundance of sunny days. Make sure your home is set up for solar gain, and take advantage of those rays by opening your south-facing windows during the day.

Photo by Ethan E. Rocke

4

HEAT YOUR SPACES

Space heaters are a leading cause for winter bill complaints. The energy required to heat an entire home with them can be expensive. However, they are great at what their name implies—heating a specific space. You can save a lot of energy by turning down your thermostat and using space heaters in the parts of your home you occupy most.

5

DODGE THE DRAFTS

Cracks and crevices are among the greatest threats to an efficiently heated home. Make sure doors and windows are closed and correctly sealed. Use caulk and weatherstripping to close off leaks and prevent cold drafts from entering and precious heat from escaping. Also, look into your heating system's ducting to make sure everything is sealed tightly.

6

BE A FAN OF FANS

Ceiling fans can actually be more effective as heating devices than cooling devices. Setting your fan to rotate clockwise and using the low setting can help your home stay warm. Your fans will gently push hot air back down. And don't forget to replace air filters every six months to keep your heating system running at optimal performance.

Store owner Gus Khoury (left) and his nephew and store manager Jehad Khoury outside their new market in Carlin.

Photos by CarolLee Egbert

‘Big Enough to Serve, Small Enough to Care’

Carlin residents excited to have new grocery store

By Dianna Troyer

For Carlin residents, having a grocery store is a luxury they lost a few years ago and only recently regained.

With a collective sigh of relief, they have been shopping at Khoury’s Fresh Market since it opened in October.

“We love it,” says Carlin resident Mary Anderson of the new store at 730 10th St. “When I’m cooking and don’t have an ingredient, it’s so convenient to drive to Khoury’s instead of leaving it out or having to ask a neighbor.”

The town’s previous grocery, Scott’s Market, closed nearly two years ago. To shop for food, residents drove 20 miles to Elko.

Last March, two brothers, Sam and Gus Khoury of Elko, broke ground in Carlin, opening their fourth grocery store in Nevada. They run two stores in Spring Creek and one in Winnemucca.

The stores share the motto, *Big enough to serve, small enough to care.*

“They found a lot for sale and knew a store was needed here because people were tired of driving to Elko for groceries,” says Jehad Khoury, Sam’s son.

Jehad and his cousin, Jamil (Gus’ son), manage the 16,000-square-foot store and 30 employees.

The store also rents movies and sells wine, and staff post updates and specials on the market’s Facebook page.

Mary’s husband, Roger, says the deli has become a gathering place for a lot of locals.

“It’s clean, bright and has great food,” Roger says. “If you ask for something they don’t have, they’ll try to get it.”

Several times a week, Roger meets his brothers, Rick and Danny, and their spouses at the store’s deli and dining area where a dozen tables and chairs are set up for customers.

“We’re retired, so in our spare time we’ll have coffee or a sandwich here and visit,” Roger says. “I see people here I haven’t seen for years.”

Retirees like the Andersons are not the only regular customers. Gold mine employees heading to their early shifts north of town stop in for breakfast at the deli after it opens at 4 a.m.

From 3 to 10 a.m. every morning, a deli employee makes breakfast sandwiches, burritos, bagels, croissants and English muffins.

Khoury’s cashier Randi Smith.

“They usually sell out,” says LaTeasha Anderson, who works in the deli. “People can call in orders too.”

Carlin Mayor Dana Holbrook often drops in around 5 a.m. for breakfast on his way to work at Barrick Nevada, a local mining company.

“People who work at the mines are glad it’s open early for breakfast,” Dana says. “Contractors coming in to work at the mines for a few months live in their camper trailers and like having a nearby grocery store.”

The produce section at Khoury’s Fresh Market.

Dana says his family is grateful the store fills custom orders.

“Our family tradition is to have turkey on Thanksgiving and prime rib the night before or after,” he says. “We preordered it, and they cut it to the size we needed.”

The store is among the 10 largest employers in the town of 2,300.

Along with customers, employees are grateful the store opened.

“I love working here because the Khourys treat employees well,” says cashier Becky Ray.

Jehad points out the store’s energy-efficient features, which include lighting, windows and cooler shades that cover produce at night. The shades keep produce fresh and reduce the amount of energy needed to maintain ideal temperatures in refrigerated display cases.

“The employees are helpful and friendly, and the produce is really fresh,” Mary says.

The store has become not only a place to buy food but a destination for retirees and families.

“Besides seniors coming in regularly to have coffee, families with children stop by for lunch or snacks,” Jehad says. “The cheeseburgers and fried chicken are a favorite. The school and businesses have bought our meat and cheese trays for staff meetings too.”

“It always seems busy when we’re here,” Roger says. “They’re off to a good start. ■

Caples Country

From Death Valley to Goldfield, Indian Springs to Pyramid Lake

By John L. Smith

GOLDFIELD – Wherever Nevada's arid mountain ranges turn a dozen shades of tan and gray throughout the day as the desert light and shadow dance in the distance, you'll find yourself in Caples Country.

Don't know Caples?

Chances are good you'll recognize his work.

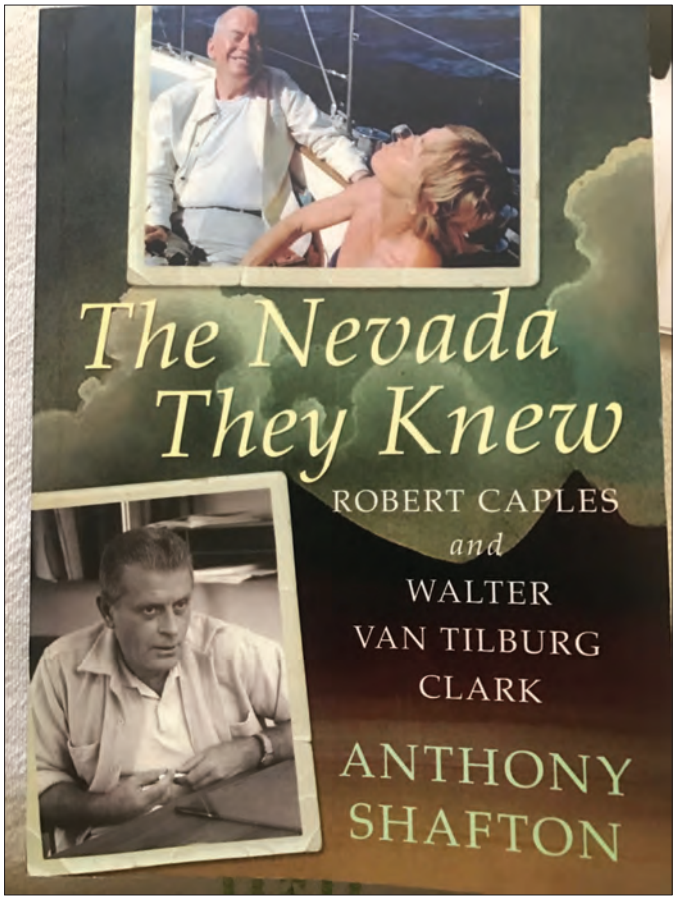
Robert Cole Caples was Nevada's leading artist in the 20th century. Born in New York City in 1908, he showed an artistic hand early and found himself as a teen-ager in Reno after his parents divorced. Although he lacked much formal training and did not stay in school, even Caples' early sketches grabbed the attention of the locals. He drew divorcees and businessmen in the Biggest Little City, but it was when he took to the road that the real Nevada with its mind-altering vistas began to reveal itself.

Caples roamed the state in search of the right light and color, made charcoal sketches of native Americans around Pyramid Lake during the Great Depression for the Federal Art Project, painted dramatically shadowed, almost cubist landscapes not of precise locales, but of the vast expanse as he felt it. It's no wonder Caples biographer Anthony Shafton calls him, "Nevada's virtuoso of mountain paintings."

Robert Cole Caples charcoal sketches of native Americans remain coveted to Western art collectors.

His Indian charcoals remain coveted to Western art collectors. For Caples, the chance as a young artist to sketch the Paiute of Pyramid Lake meant freedom itself.

"For the first time I was being paid to do something I truly enjoyed," he recalled in an interview. "I was traveling all over the desert, and I was being welcomed by people I had admired at a distance but had not thought I could ever speak with them. For me, meeting the Indians was as if I was on the road of ages, welcomed to walk with people who had known the desert since the beginning of time, because these people were truly people of the silent land."



Caples teamed with Walter Van Tilburg Clark in the 1930s to produce "The Nevada They Knew."

Caples meandered through Death Valley with sketchbook in hand and found himself awed by the expanse and the silence. As legend has it, he trekked across Death Valley hatless and in tennis shoes, sketching with an improvised ink made of iodine from a first-aid kit. He made 100 drawings, some on scraps of paper. (Death Valley also provided color for the writing of his close friend Walter Van Tilburg Clark, who drew on Caples' experience for his own novel that continued to grow like the landscape itself.)

In 1939 at Goldfield, Caples sketched mine-pocked hillsides and buildings that had once bustled with life. In his fascinating memoir/biographical study, "The Nevada They Knew: Robert Caples and Walter Van Tilburg Clark," Shafton relates a Goldfield anecdote about a 10-year-old local boy named Robert who stumbled upon the artist, then 30, at work and stayed to watch him sketch. Caples let the child shadow him for several days as they talked about painting and drawing.

More than three decades later, the boy's mother published a warm reminiscence of the artist and the child.

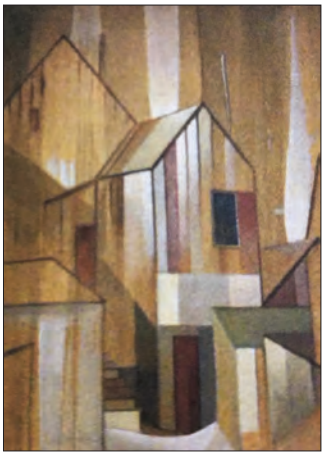
Her son "never mentioned his new friend," she wrote in the Reno Gazette-Journal. "I was surprised, when in the mail shortly after, came a letter to Robert and a package. It held expensive artist paint brushes of all sizes. The letter of four pages, written with a brush in brown, told him how to use, clean and care for them. A little picture of a house, a cloud and a mountain illustrated his instructions."

Although Caples dropped out of high school and was largely self-taught, he taught art classes for the Works Project Administration program in Reno and encouraged young artists throughout his life whether he was drawing houses in Tonopah, capturing sandstorms in Death Valley Panamint range, or painting St. Mary's in the Mountains Catholic Church in Virginia City.

Always he kept moving, shifting his focus, chasing the desert light and shadow. As art collector and Caples authority Russ Lindsay has observed, "His wanderings mirrored a complex internal journey to find a direction in his work. During the 1940s and 1950s Caples' painting matured as he began to portray not just landscape, but elegant, haunting scenes that reflected Nevada's mountains and dramatic atmospheric effects."

Caples married five times, served in the Navy during World War II and worked almost constantly.

He may have occasionally gotten lost in Nevada, but he certainly could find his way to the altar. (Remember,



Caples was Nevada's leading artist in the 20th Century.

throughout much of the century Reno advertised itself as the quickie divorce capital of America.) Introduced to Las Vegas with the marriage to his second wife, Shirley Behr, the couple became enchanted of Indian Springs, the desert oasis located 45 miles from Fremont Street. Shirley was determined to turn the former Paiute corn patch and outpost into an artist's colony with Caples at its center. It was at Indian Springs, too, that Caples friend, the Nevada author Clark, worked on the manuscript that would become his sprawling novel of youth and art set in Reno, "The City of Trembling Leaves." Other artists made their pilgrimage to the place with Shirley playing the gracious hostess. During Shafton's research for his affectionate tale of Caples and Clark, he found a gem of an anecdote about the Indian Springs time first unearthed from a Nevada Test Site newspaper by a graduate student.

"Mrs. Caples spent thousands of dollars to create an exciting garden spot in the desert," academic Phyllis Skelton wrote. "... Two native Mexicans were imported to build authentic desert homes from adobe ... The Caples had parties for almost any occasion, and all of the activity this family generated added a new excitement to life in Indian Springs." With Shirley "picking up the tab," artists brought their children, who were taught by a musician and astronomer, and with a plentiful supply of native clay available Caples developed his skill at the potter's wheel and mixed paints from native plants. He called his makeshift studio "The Lizard."

The parties and the painting were interrupted by the start of the war, and Indian Springs was transformed into an airport and training base for the Army Air Force. By 1942, Caples was off on another Nevada road, north to Austin, where he painted modernist landscapes that accentuated light and shadow, and then into the Navy – drawing and creating all along the way.

Long after he left Goldfield and Tonopah, the images he absorbed there fed his art. Caples' 1960 "Tonopah Houses," for example captures the weathered tans and browns of the buildings he first glimpsed two decades earlier in the mining town. For an artist of his aesthetics, it was a paradise of pigment.

As much as anything, the restless Caples chased Nevada light throughout his long residency. He left the state in 1958 for Connecticut and remained there until his death in 1979. Late in his life he looked back at his days on the desert with great affection.

"I so love Nevada that 10,000 Connecticuts couldn't budge its well-remembered mountains from my spirit," he said.

Caples created, as author and art historian Marcia Cohn Growden observed, "elegant, haunting landscapes that portrayed no place in particular but were precise distillations of the desert, mountains and dramatic atmospheric effects experienced in the desert." Although Caples was sometimes compared to Edward Hopper, Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood, he described much of his brush work more simply, allowing that it was a blend: "Chunks of shadow, pieces of mountain, clouds and stuff."

In a land of boom and bust whose history is often cast aside in the name of change, his name has become almost as weathered as some of the native Americans and former boomtowns he once painted. But he deserves to be remembered in no small part because of the way he was able to capture Nevada's vast outback and some of its people.

Even as the light of his own life and celebrity faded, Caples said, "I believe in light. I am in love with light. Light is the center of all life and all meaningful experience." ■

John L. Smith is a native Nevadan. Contact him at jlnevadasmith@gmail.com.
On Twitter: @jlnevadasmith.

VEA CEO Reviews Priorities in Tour of Communities

At Sandy Valley (Dec. 10 upper left) and Amargosa Valley (Dec. 11 above), CEO Angela Evans meets with members and provides updates on VEA initiatives.

During stops in communities throughout Valley Electric Association territory in December, CEO Angela Evans provided updates on key initiatives and discussed the Cooperative's mission and vision under new leadership.

Members asked questions on topics ranging from solar energy to service reliability to high-speed broadband, to Energy Choice and renewable portfolio standards. The visits began Dec. 5 in Pahrump and ended on Dec. 14 at Fish Lake Valley.

Angela was named permanent CEO in October after serving from May until October as interim CEO. Previously she had served as Chief Operating Officer of VEA. Board members said they have been impressed with the speed at which changes at VEA were identified and implemented by Angela.

"Immediately I felt that it was important to understand the direction the Board shaped for the Cooperative and to begin developing a collaborative relationship with the Board," said Angela, referring to the early days of her tenure as interim CEO. "Our consumer-members look for transparency and trust in a person selected by the Board to implement the objectives of the Board. My relationship with members is equally critical, and I have sought to build bridges with members."

While in the interim role, Angela directed a thorough review of the Co-op's operations, which included re-evaluating priorities, strategies, finances, budget, staffing, the scope of work being performed by external consultants and operational expenses. The Board approved business improvements Angela identified and implemented for the second half of 2018, which reflected revised priorities and significant reductions in operating expenses.

Angela said several priorities needed to be addressed:

Fiber-to-the-Home construction. While still pursuing a strategy of connecting high-speed internet, the deployment of "fiber to the home" is being scaled back. Construction plans for 2018 had included the build-out of large areas of Pahrump, a huge capital investment and commitment.

"We determined that a more tactical approach would be to scale back the fiber build-out and concentrate on areas that will generate revenue," said Angela. While 90 percent of the backbone structure is in place, extending the fiber to reach individual areas can cost more than $100,000 each. It is difficult to justify such costs with members.

VCA targeted fiber installations in Mountain Falls and Winery Road areas in Pahrump and the town of Beatty beginning in June. Focusing on those areas, where the homes are in in close proximity, holds down construction costs and allows for a faster return on investment.

"For some members who prefer fiber over fixed wireless broadband for high-speed internet service, fiber will arrive later than we had hoped, but it is still coming," said Angela. "We regret the delay, but we also believe it is the correct way to deploy our resources."

In response to a question, Angela said the Board is studying rate structures, and a broadband rate adjustment is under consideration.

Utilization of external consultants. As a significant area in reducing expenses and refocusing resources for broadband infrastructure construction, VCA has reduced

Amargosa Valley (above) and at the Fish Lake Valley (left) on Dec. 14.

its dependence on outside contractors. Engineering and construction work is now being handled in-house. "We have really been impressed with our linemen volunteering to be part of the solution," said Angela. During a town hall meeting at Beatty on Dec. 12, members complimented district employees Danny Rogers and Dillion Leiper for their work with the community.

District 3 Director Rick Johnson agreed and added that Angela had made a smooth adjustment from COO to her new role as CEO. He said he has been impressed with the speed at which she has brought change to the organization. "She is a very experienced utility executive, and she has done a great job these past six months."

Power Purchase Agreement. Valley Electric managed to keep energy rates stable during the recession of 2008 and the decade-long recovery by managing the Co-op's power purchase contracts. "In order to protect our member-consumers during the recession, power supply costs were pushed into the future," said Angela.

However, the cost of extending contracts resulted in the escalation of baseload energy supply contracts pricing that were effective in 2018 energy pricing.

"Eventually you have to pay the piper," said Angela. In June, the Co-op used $60 million in proceeds from the 230-kilovolt transmission sale to get out of the contracts and keep energy rates stable. The new power deal started delivering lower priced power in June.

Internal controls reduce expenses. During the review of cooperative expenses, a number of cost-savings opportunities were identified. More than $5 million in annual cost savings were implemented during the last half of 2018, and approximately $6 million more will be trimmed in 2019 for an annual savings of $11 million.

"We have a good understanding of how the Cooperative looks today and how the future is shaping up," said Angela. Costs are being adjusted accordingly.

During the Dec. 11 meeting at Amargosa Valley, District 2 Director Dave Hall said the Board has benefited from the collaboration between the new CEO and the Board. "Valley has a history of being at the forefront of technology," said Dave, and Angela is committed to technology.

Recreation Center. It was not the Board's intent for VEA to lead the development of the community center. The development of the center should involve the community. As such, it is being driven by a group of community leaders who are in the process of assessing community needs, establishing a trust, and developing funding and operational strategies for the community venue. VEA will continue to support the committee's work. Meantime, VEA pledged to contribute funds and property at the right time and when members are in agreement.

Focusing on Core Values. Though strategies and priorities can change, Angela said the Cooperative needed to identify core values – Safety, Integrity, Cooperative Social Responsibility and Excellence – and make certain they are front and center in the Co-op's culture.

Reliability. VEA always has been committed to reliability, and members in Fish Lake Valley said system improvements during 2018 in Esmeralda County have made a big difference in their area.

Planning for the Future. The Board's strategic planning exercise in June included the assessment of the current business environment and defining the cooperative's mission and vision. VEA's mission is to improve the quality of life in communities and the vision is to empower VEA communities to achieve their potential. Angela then led the executive staff through a rigorous planning session that was linked to the Board's plan and intended to create tactical actions in the implementation of the Board's strategic objective.

During the Dec. 5 meeting at Pahrump, Board member Dave Dawson said Angela "believes that the Cooperative's focus should always be on member-consumers and delivering to them the most affordable, most reliable services whether that service be electric or communications.

"That is why we hired her." ■

Each year, high school students representing the Northwest converge at the College of Idaho campus for the Idaho Youth Rally. OTEC will select students from its service territory to attend this summer.

Photos by Jeff Marshall

Scholarships Send Sophomores to Idaho

Students learn leadership and team-building skills at rally at College of Idaho in Caldwell

By Susan Parrish

Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative is funding a scholarship opportunity for high school sophomores to spend a week at the College of Idaho to develop leadership and team-building skills.

Students from Baker, Grant, Harney and Union counties will be selected to attend the 32nd annual Idaho Consumer Owned Utilities Association's Youth Rally in Caldwell July 15-20.

Eighty-two students representing utilities from Oregon, Idaho, Washington, Montana, Wyoming and Alaska attended the 2018 rally.

Students participate in activities and classes to promote positive relationships; build skills in leadership, teamwork and perseverance; and learn about electrical/energy utilities, government and drug awareness.

In its commitment to the community, OTEC already provides a variety of scholarships and educational programs for students. OTEC offered Idaho Youth Rally scholarships many years ago. When student interest dwindled, the co-op's participation became dormant. OTEC recently decided to resurrect the program and offer it exclusively to high school sophomores.

OTEC will pay all expenses for students. As with all other OTEC scholarships, the program is funded from interest earned on unclaimed capital credits.

"We're pretty excited to reactivate the program," says Sandra Ghormley, OTEC director of member services. "This program aligns with other scholarship programs we offer that support our local youth.

"It's a tremendous opportunity for young people to learn leadership skills and learn what their local co-op is about. The kids do a lot of fun things, but in the process, they're learning to be leaders in their communities."

Jeff Marshall, who works at Clearwater Power Co.

in Lewiston, Idaho, and helps organize the rally, is a big believer in the positive impact the camp has on those who attend.

"It's the best thing I get to work on all year," he says.

The camp is different from a band camp or basketball camp, Jeff says, because the only commonality is that all students live in rural areas. For most students, it is their first time staying on a college campus and sharing a dorm room with someone they've never met.

"The students meet rural kids from other states who live in similar environments far away from the city and realize they aren't alone," Jeff says.

A chaperone who volunteered at the camp for 19 years told Jeff, "Going to camp was the best weeks of my career."

Sandra says the camp has life-changing potential.

"This youth rally can really be a moment of change in a person's life, both for the students and chaperones," she says.

Shannon Milliman attended the Idaho Youth Rally 23 years ago when she was a student in Soldotna, Alaska.

"I went to this youth rally long ago and made some of the most memorable, lifetime memories," she says.

While at the rally, Shannon participated in a talent show and first tried stand-up comedy. She now performs a one-woman comedic play she wrote called "Not So Supernova."

"My growth as a human being is an example of what this rally can do for you," she says. "You can explore your strengths and talents in a way you might never have and find that being an active part of your community can make this world better."

Shannon offers advice to sophomores considering applying for the camp: "Take the risk. Polish your writing skills. Represent your best self and apply. You will have an opportunity to refine parts of yourself you didn't know needed refining. You will be stronger, bolder, more adventurous and more educated as a citizen. You will find that leadership, cooperatives and community education are connected—and you are the link to all of it."

Sandra says OTEC's renewed involvement in the Idaho Youth Rally is a continued focus on commitment to community.

"Our involvement in the Youth Rally is another example of OTEC fulfilling its mission—to safely provide reliable electric and related services that support the economy and quality of life of our members," she says. "We're your neighbors and your friends and basically want the same thing: to make our communities better. The Youth Rally demonstrates OTEC's commitment to the communities we serve and our members." ■

Apply online at www.otecc.com. View 2018 Idaho Youth Rally photos at www.facebook.com/ICUAYouthRally

Rally activities and classes promote positive relationships and build skills in leadership, teamwork and perseverance. Students have a chance to learn about government, drug and alcohol awareness, and the electrical/energy industry.

Bryson Stitzel hones his welding skills at Baker Technical Institute in Baker City under the watchful eye of instructor Ryan Butler.

Trading in College for Trade School

Cove graduate uses Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative scholarship to attend BTI

By Lisa Jacoby

A shower of sparks skids across the concrete floor as Bryson Stitzel hones his welding skills at Baker Technical Institute.

Bryson, 19, graduated from Cove High School in June 2018 and wanted to be a welder. A Cove staff member encouraged Bryson to apply for a $2,500 trade school scholarship from Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative. Bryson was selected by the cooperative's board of directors from a pool of candidates across OTEC's service counties: Union, Baker, Grant and Harney.

Bryson took welding classes in high school and wanted to further his skills to become certified as a professional welder.

"I was going to go to Walla Walla Community College. Then someone told me about this," he says, waving a hand around the welding lab at BTI.

BTI is a career and technical school in Baker School District 5J. It is available to secondary students and adult learners throughout the region. Ryan Butler teaches classes during the school day at the BTI School of Welding and offers professional welding courses in the evenings.

During the week, Bryson works on a farm in the Cove area. At 3 p.m., he heads to Baker City, where he works with Ryan for four hours.

New students enroll at the start of each month.

"Students can come in at any age and ability," says BTI President Doug Dalton.

Bryson was awarded OTEC's first trade school scholarship in 2018.

Bryson is working on shielded metal arc welding, with pretests on all welds as he works toward industry certification.

Once Ryan deems him ready for a test, Bryson will weld for an independent certifier for a certification with the American Welding Society.

"It is the gold seal for welding," Doug says.

Bryson is learning overhead and vertical welding techniques, which are considered the hardest to master.

"If you certify there, you certify for everything," Bryson says.

First he has to put in the hours of practice.

"It's a lot of hand-eye coordination," he says. "It's not easy."

Although he is not certain where he will end up in his welding career, Bryson has a few ideas.

"I might go off on a pipeline somewhere, but I don't know yet," he says.

He does know why welding appeals to him.

"You don't do the same thing every day," he says.

OTEC will award four trade school scholarships in 2019. OTEC members and immediate family interested in attending a trade school may apply for a scholarship at www.otecc.com. Up to $2,500 will be awarded toward the cost of attending an accredited trade school. The qualifications for this scholarship match the chosen trade school's qualifications. OTEC accepts trade school scholarship applications throughout the year. Scholarships are funded by interest from member-owner unclaimed capital credits and do not affect electric rates.

In addition to the trade school scholarship, in 2018 OTEC awarded 26 college scholarships to high school seniors and returning college students, along with two lineman scholarships. Since the launch of the cooperative's scholarship program in 2000, OTEC has awarded 430 scholarships to local youth with a total overall investment of more than $1.3 million. 2018 was the first year the co-op awarded trade school scholarships. ■

About Baker Technical Institute

Baker Technical Institute provides Career Technical Education programs focused on developing the next generation of skilled workers, technology innovators, entrepreneurs and community leaders in rural communities.

Headquartered in Baker City, BTI offers education and training leading to certification in high-wage, high-demand careers such as agricultural sciences, building trades, heavy equipment operation, natural resources/environmental sciences, engineering, health services, welding and manufacturing.

"BTI partners with regional employers and industry experts to provide the most relevant training that will allow students to be competitive and be a part of a trained workforce that will help the rural communities in Eastern Oregon grow and thrive," President Doug Dalton says.

BTI's classes fill several niches: high school students who want to get a jump start on a career-connected skill, adults seeking a new career or advancement and lifelong learners interested in learning a new skill. Students at Baker High School and Baker Middle School have access to these courses for free. Community members can take advantage of courses on a tuition-based schedule.

BTI's regional presence continues to expand rapidly with courses like its heavy equipment program, which provides operator training via a state-of-the-art platform—a combination of CAT simulators and equipment seat time, based upon best practices for learning how to run equipment developed in partnership with national industry leaders. BTI has made this training mobile with a fully equipped trailer with simulators and computer lab. Recent trainings have taken the trailer to Spokane, Salem, Pendleton and Boise. Future courses are planned for Seattle and California. BTI also provides training for tribes in the Northwest as they look to increase the skills of their workforce in heavy construction.

In addition to technical instruction, BTI courses teach career success skills such as customer service, critical thinking, career research, responsibility and ethics, along with business and entrepreneurial skills that are needed for employees to be successful wherever they may go.

"We're providing an environment for people to find their passion and explore careers," Doug says.

For BTI course offerings, visit bakerti.org or check the school's Facebook page.

Lucky to be Alive

La Grande line crew helps rescue Prineville man

By Andrew Cutler

Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative linemen Al Dockweiler, left, and Blake Eckstein, along with Dan Patton and Seth McKern (both not pictured) are recognized during a La Grande City Council meeting for their role in helping save a hunter's life.

Blake Eckstein was eating lunch when the call came in.

It was late August, and the day began like a thousand others for the Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative journeyman lineman. This day, though, was going to be different.

Blake was summoned to join the rest of his line crew on what would ultimately become a life-saving mission. In a secluded piece of forest east of Ukiah, a man was fighting for his life.

The man, 70-year-old Eddie Voelker of Prineville, started an elk hunting excursion a day earlier and set up in a tree stand 20 miles from Ukiah. He fell out of the stand and became entangled in his safety harness, hanging upside down. Eddie stayed there—more than 30 feet off the ground—for most of a day until two hunters discovered him.

That discovery kicked off an intense rescue effort that involved multiple agencies, including the La Grande Fire Department and local search-and-rescue personnel. When they reached Eddie, officials realized his condition was dire and they might have difficulty getting him down. That's when they called OTEC.

What rescuers needed was a bucket truck to bring Eddie down quickly without injuring him further. On-scene rescue personnel were worried that after hanging upside down for so long, Eddie would suffer from compartment syndrome, a condition that occurs when excessive pressure builds inside an enclosed muscle space in the body.

After dangling from the tree stand, all of Eddie's blood was confined to his upper body and skull. That meant medical personnel needed to ensure his heart continued to beat as blood was restored to the rest of his body when he was pushed upright.

To make matters worse, Eddie disturbed a nest of bees which swarmed around him as he dangled above the ground. He says he suffered hundreds of bee stings.

"I knew I was hurting," Eddie says. "Actually, the hurting wasn't bothering me as much as those darn bees. They just kept after me."

Blake, along with OTEC journeyman linemen Al Dockweiler and Seth McKern and line crew working foreman Dan Patton, responded to the emergency. Blake and Al drove the bucket truck. Seth and Dan arrived at the scene in a pickup.

None of them expected a situation as critical as it was.

"I thought it was more like getting a cat out of a tree," Blake says. "Al and I were driving together, and we didn't talk about it that much because we didn't think it was really that big a deal."

Dan says when he and Seth arrived, they instantly understood Eddie was in serious trouble.

"I had my tools and was ready to climb up there," Dan says. "But rescue personnel on the scene explained the medical condition and about making him upright. With his medical condition, they didn't want us going up."

Blake says he realized

the severity of the situation as soon as they reached the remote gravel road that led to the scene. There they were met by the hunters who found Eddie: Steven and Joseph Royston of Stayton.

"They met us and said, 'We need to hurry, you guys got to follow us,'" Blake says.

The trip to the site was about 3 miles.

The four OTEC linemen instantly went to work, each man focusing on his particular skill set. Dan and Seth had already cleared out an area for the bucket truck. When Al drove in, he turned around and set the truck in place.

"As soon as Al pulled up, I backed him all the way as close to the tree as possible," Dan says. "Blake got right up and put his harness on and was in the bucket. There was no doubt in our minds about how it was going to go."

A search-and-rescue member joined Blake in the bucket as he went up to get Eddie.

Blake says when the bucket pulled in close to Eddie, he realized the man was beginning to choke because of the rigging placed on him by the search-and-rescue personnel.

Blake and the emergency personnel knew they were almost out of time.

"At that point, we cut everything they had off of him and just grabbed him," Blake says.

Blake also had to cut the steel cabling that was wrapped around Eddie's feet from the tree stand. He then pulled Eddie over to the bucket and laid him down.

"As soon as I picked him up, he was out," Blake says.

Blake came down on the bucket, and medical personal swarmed Eddie. At one point, his heart stopped but emergency medical technicians were able to get it started again. Eddie was then transported from the scene by LifeFlight to a Walla Walla, Washington, hospital.

Emergency crews rescue Eddie Voelker, 70, after he had been hanging upside down for most of a day.

Photo courtesy of Umatilla County Sheriff's Office

As soon as he arrived at the hospital, Eddie was placed in a medically induced coma and doctors operated on him to relieve pressure on his brain. Three months later, he was back home.

The actions of the OTEC crew proved heroic, but their effort was based on years of training and preparing for just such incidents. Teamwork also played a big role.

"You look at the guys you work with and the training you spent years going through, and it comes down to what you do in that moment," Al says. "But it is not just training but being comfortable with the guys you work with."

Blake agrees.

"I think we are prepared to get someone down as fast as possible," he says. "All our guys are prepared when someone calls and someone is hurt."

Al says the operation went like clockwork.

"When we got there, we got the truck set up," he says. "I no sooner had it in park and Dan and Seth were getting the outriggers down and Blake was already getting his harness on."

Dan says teamwork and training proved to be the keys.

"When it comes to the height part, the brute strength and being able to flat out handle a situation, that is what we've been doing for 15 to 20 years," he says.

Matt Haggerty, OTEC's superintendent for the La Grande district, says he was not surprised at the fast actions of his team.

"Pole-top rescue is something most of these guys have 10 to 15 years of training in," Matt says. "OTEC provides training each year. A training scenario is set up using a mannequin, and a lineman must climb the pole and bring the mannequin down safely. This intense training ensures our linemen are well-equipped to handle these types of emergencies almost like it's routine business."

Matt says he is glad the fire department reached out to ask for OTEC's help.

"There is a lot that could have went wrong if they had not gotten us involved," he says.

The efforts of Matt's team did not go unnoticed. In November, the La Grande Fire Department honored the OTEC employees involved in the rescue at a La Grande City Council session.

"Without their assistance, the outcome could have been tragic," said La Grande Fire Chief Les Thomas.

Dan, Al and Blake do not see their actions as heroic but as just another day on the job. The three men, though, say they are proud of their work that day.

"It just feels good that he is all right," Blake says.

Eddie says he is lucky to be alive.

"The doctor said to me, 'You know, if you were 30 years old I could see you surviving,'" Eddie says. "'If you were 50, I figure you had a good chance. But you are 70 years old, you should have never survived.'"

Eddie says he is thankful for the emergency personnel and the OTEC crew that saved him.

"I am a lucky camper," he says. "Everyone contributed to me being here right now. Everything worked out right." ■

District's new Headquarters to Open in February

By Dianna Troyer

A new headquarters envisioned a decade ago will soon become reality for Lincoln County Power District No. 1 employees and customers.

In early February, employees will move into a 4,300-square-foot, energy-efficient administrative office. The new building is three times the size of the district's current workspace and will connect via a breezeway to a 1,500-square-foot operations building that houses the district's electrical systems and grids.

"We first considered it in 2008, but several factors made the directors delay it," says General Manager Dave Luttrell. "We didn't want it to impact rates for existing customers. It was worth the wait. With new technology, it will be even more energy efficient than it would have been 10 years ago."

The new headquarters will be at the east side of Highway 93 near Cathedral Gorge State Park northwest of Panaca on 17.5 acres the district bought in 2005.

"Our new location will be more accessible to customers than our current office and will accommodate future growth," Dave says.

The current office was built at Caselton shortly after the district was established in 1935. Its location was chosen because it was near the mines it served.

Board member Bob Rollins and his wife, Linda, look at plans for a new administrative building to replace the one built under his grandfather's direction in 1937.

"Our existing buildings are located on a hillside and couldn't be significantly enlarged," Dave says. "Additional buildings couldn't be added."

The district has made many improvements to accommodate growth in recent years, including upgrading its accounting system, launching a website and expanding supervisory control and data acquisition systems.

Anticipating future growth, the board approved construction of the new headquarters last winter. After choosing an architect in the spring, the project was opened for construction bids in the summer, and construction began in the fall.

"We finally reached the point where we simply outgrew our building," says Bob Rollins, a board member whose grandfather, J.H. Buehler, served as the district's first board chairman.

"Grandpa would have been impressed and pleased with how the district has grown," Bob says. "He would have loved this new building. He had foresight and realized how electricity was needed for economic growth."

A mining engineer at Bristol Silver Mines, Bob's grandfather and others formed the district to obtain power from Hoover Dam for mines in the area.

Once transmission lines were built and a power contract was finalized, electricity began to flow for the first time to Lincoln County in 1937 to only nine customers. Since then, the district has evolved to provide all of the power for Lincoln County and its roughly 4,000 customers.

"While still working at Bristol, Grandpa served on the board for more than 12 years without pay and lived here in Caselton," says Bob, who lives in the same area.

Moving into the new office and operations building is phase one of a

A rendering shows the administrative office and adjacent operations building.
Images courtesy of Lincoln County Power District No. 1

long-term expansion. During the next 18 to 24 months, the warehouse and maintenance shop at Caselton will be moved to the new location.

"The gradual development enables the district to extend the costs over about three years," Dave says.

Winter De La Mere Architects of St. George designed the building's stucco and stone exterior to blend aesthetically with the landscape and meet the latest building and energy codes.

"The exterior walls have been optimized to include 2 inches of continuous insulation wrapping the entire building," says project manager Dennis Patten. "This adds an additional R-12 to the typical R-19 batt insulation, but more importantly, it greatly reduces thermal bridging to the building interior."

In addition to the continuous insulation, lighting is efficient with LED fixtures and electronic controls.

"The heating, ventilation and air conditioning design includes energy efficient 16-SEER heat pumps," Dennis says, referring to the seasonal energy efficiency ratio. "The pumps will also benefit from the high-performance walls and energy-efficient lighting."

Watts Construction of St. George is the builder.

"They're doing an excellent job managing the construction and the quality of work being performed by the installers," Dennis says. "It's first-rate."

Throughout the project, architects worked with the power district staff to coordinate materials and finishes.

"We're confident these buildings will benefit the community and will provide service for many years," Dennis says.

To decorate the new building, the district is asking local residents to submit photos showcasing Lincoln County's residents, events and natural beauty. Twelve will be selected and enlarged to 24 by 36 inches. Photos may be submitted via a link at www.lcpd1.com.

The district is also seeking photos of former board members, especially those who may have served before the 1950s.

"We're hoping the new headquarters will meet the needs of our customers for the next 80 years," Dave says. "We're excited about our future." ■

An open house for the public to tour the new office will be announced in February.

The headquarters building under construction in September.