CPI linemen work in a California neighborhood decimated by the Camp Fire. For many homes, all that was left was the chimney.

Rebuilding a Town

CPI linemen help California town begin again after Camp Fire

By Danita Cahill

It was still dark the morning after last Thanksgiving when a CPI crew of five linemen pulled out of Philomath in four white trucks. It was dark and rainy 10 hours later when they arrived in Paradise, California, a town decimated by wildfire.

The air was thick with fog and smoke. Their truck headlights pierced the heavy air, revealing the devastation surrounding them.

"We're used to trees blowing over in the windstorms," says Foreman Mike Terry, "but we're not used to anything like this."

"It was really sad," says apprentice lineman Austin Dalton. "Drive into this town, see house after house after house gone. These people come back ... Where do you begin to rebuild your life?"

The CPI crew was there to help residents begin to rebuild by restoring power after the 153,336-acre Camp Fire. The crew had only a two-day heads-up before the trip.

"Plan on being gone three weeks," the CPI director of operations told Mike.

"During major storm events, we try to get help from neighboring utilities," Mike says, adding that CPI crews reciprocate for other utilities. In this case, it was Pacific Gas and Electric.

Making up the rest of the CPI crew were linemen Cody Collier, Kurt Russell and Tim Moore.

Once in Paradise, the crew was directed to Tuscan Ridge—a burnt golf course turned into a base camp for utility workers. Heavy construction equipment moved the wet, scorched earth to make pads for semitruck trailers.

"They were trying to make it ready for where we were going to stay," Cody says.

The CPI crew joined other electric-company crews.

"Mutual aid was there fairly early," Mike says.

The Camp Fire started November 8 and wasn't fully contained until November 25—two days after the Philomath-based crew arrived.

PG&E camp organizers set up shower trailers, food trailers, sleeping trailers and medical tents.

Top, more burned out homes and cars amid the CPI crew truck. Above, CPI crew members, from left, Cody Collier, Tim Moore, Kurt Russell, Austin Dalton and Foreman Mike Terry in front of a damaged building.

"They built a town on a golf course," Kurt says.

The crew stayed in a 53-foot semi-truck trailer with 36 bunks inside. Each bunk had a privacy curtain. The CPI crew nicknamed its sleeping quarters "the submarine."

The CPI guys were up at 4:30 a.m. the first day for a "tailboard," or briefing. They were told the goal was to get the main line back up and get major infrastructures in place.

"We were starting from scratch," Mike says.

After their briefing, they met with their "bird dog"—lineworker lingo for supervisor.

"We got situated and went right to work," Mike says.

His crew did mostly overhead line construction. Among all the utility workers, hundreds of new poles and miles of new wire went up every day.

The CPI crew stayed 18 days, until the main infrastructure of four circuits in town was finished.

"We stayed until the need for help was met," Mike says.

The blaze killed 85 people. It was the most destructive fire in California history. At one point, the fire consumed the equivalent of a football field per second. In total, the wildfire swallowed 80 percent of the town—more than 13,500 homes, 500 businesses, and 4,400 barns, sheds and other structures.

All that remained of some houses was the chimney. Many commercial buildings were reduced to ashy piles of bricks. Gas and electric meters melted. Power poles burned to stumps.

Miraculously, a few scattered homes and businesses remained, nearly unscathed. One of those miraculous houses belonged to a man named Stu.

The CPI crew was assigned to rebuild a central line in an area called Central Park. When they took their initial look, they met Stu. He was standing in front of a house that had withstood the fire.

Stu sent his wife out of town with the rest of the evacuees. He stayed behind, raking pine needles for four hours, setting up sprinklers and wetting everything down with a garden hose. It was a dangerous gamble, but he succeeded in saving his house.

The National Guard had the town locked down, requiring a pass to get in or out, so Stu had to stay put. He had no running water, electricity, natural gas, cable or cellphone. Although Stu told the crew he was doing all right, they still brought him lunch and water each day, provided by PG&E. The CPI crew set around 25 power poles in Stu's neighborhood, just to get power to two houses.

Crew members say gratitude fueled their grueling 16-hour shifts in Paradise, away from their families during the holiday season. They were grateful they still had a home to go back to.

For Cody, the most gratifying thing was helping the 50 or so people who called Paradise home and joined the effort to get the infrastructure back up and running.

"They'd lost everything, and they were still working on the project," Cody says.

"It's amazing how during a disaster people will work together and get the job done," Mike says.

The crew wasn't sure they would be home for Christmas. They didn't want to miss the holiday with their families, "but we would have," Cody says.

On December 10, the CPI crew returned to Philomath.

Mike brags about his crew, their skills and the work ethic they proved in Paradise.

"These guys are great, and they were lucky to have us," he says. "I think they knew that." ■

#ThankALineworker

Every April, we recognize and appreciate the work that all of our lineworkers do to help keep the lights on. Join us Monday, April 8 for National Lineworker Appreciation Day and #ThankALineworker.

The Wasco School, built in 1916, was recently saved from demolition to serve as a community center.

New Life at the Old Wasco School

A stately century-old structure is transformed into a community center

By Drew Myron

In Wasco, a town of 400, there's a new sign of transformation: pickleball. The all-ages paddle sport is so popular the Wasco School Events Center is adding additional courts to keep up with demand.

"A friend asked if I wanted to join, and I said, 'Oh sure, tennis for old people,'" Carol Thompson jokes as she laces up for the game. "But it's really fun, and it's great to have this here at the school."

The game draws some of the largest crowds to the Wasco School Events Center, says Melissa Kirkpatrick, the center's director.

"Our Fitness Center has over 30 members," she says. "Pickleball is so popular we're adding another net."

There's new life at the 103-year old Wasco School, and pickleball is just the start. The former school includes a renovated auditorium, new commercial kitchen, community library, food bank, ball fields, fitness center, cleaned-up classrooms and office space.

Wasco School was built in 1916 at the corner of Barnett and McPherson streets, and was in operation for nearly a century. The two-story school is a historical fortress of Greek revival style. Built with fortified cement and covered with brick and stucco, the building was designed by Tourtellotte & Hummel. The architectural firm based in Boise, Idaho, created numerous Pacific Northwest landmarks, including the Idaho State Capitol, Hotel Astoria and the Baker City Tower.

Throughout the years, the school taught children of all ages, from preschool to high school. In the late 1920s, the graduating class swelled to 28 students. In 1956, high school students were transported to schools in Moro, and Wasco School was used only for younger students.

In 2009, fewer students meant consolidation. Wasco students were bused to Grass Valley, and the school was shuttered. In 2016, all area schools were consolidated into a single campus in Moro, known as Sherman County School.

Wasco School briefly operated as the Sherman County Annex Building, but as the building suffered from deferred maintenance, talk of demolition began. A small group of local residents mounted a campaign to save the stately landmark.

Above, Jessie Fuhrer, left, serves on the board of directors and has helped clean and paint nearly every room of the Wasco School. Melissa Kirkpatrick, right, is the center's director.

Above left, Carol Thompson enjoys playing pickleball at the former school that now features an auditorium, commercial kitchen, community library, ball fields, fitness center and gym.

Carol Olmstead, who attended Wasco School in the 1940s and lives just a block away, championed efforts to save the building.

"I went to school here, my mother went to school here, my stepfather was a custodian here," she says. "It's just a beautiful 100-year-old building. It's a real asset to Wasco. It's worth saving. I told everyone, 'I'll be the body at the door barring the demolition truck.'"

The calls for preservation were heard. In 2017, the county gave the city of Wasco the building and grounds, which are now managed by the center's board of directors. Sherman County provided $250,000 for renovations, along with $50,000 a year for five years. After five years, the Wasco School Events Center—a nonprofit organization fueled by one part-time director and a team of volunteers—must be self-supporting.

To reach that goal, Melissa, the board of directors and other volunteers have worked countless hours to repair, drywall, paint, refinish, clean, manage and maintain the solid but neglected structure.

The first job became the most important one: Fix the roof. Water had damaged the second floor classrooms. Next up was renovating the dilapidated library—a months-long project of sorting, clearing, cleaning and painting. The library now offers 5,000 new books.

The center's board is a hands-on group, with each member taking an active role to ensure the center's success. Members are Tom Lepinski, Carol Olmstead, Gail Macnab, Jessie Fuhrer, Linda Krafsic and Cal Mcdermid.

While renovation efforts have consumed the past two years, daily operations are in full swing with a host of programs and activities.

The center hosts dozens of events each year, including weddings, reunions, memorials, town halls, coffee hours, kids' gym, bingo, fitness classes and community dinners. Classrooms can be used as office space or artist studios and are available for monthly rental. Other rooms—such as the principal's office, auditorium, kitchen and gym—are available for as low as $10 an hour.

Last fall, the center was asked to provide space for a youth diversion center for teens awaiting placement in suitable homes. The project would require a workforce of dozens of medical and mental health professionals, along with administrative and support staff. More details are needed and no decisions have been reached, says Melissa.

"There are lots of variables," she says.

In the whirl of events and activities, Melissa says there's always room for more people to take part in the transformation.

"We need volunteers," she says. "Getting involved energizes you." ■

Wasco School Events Center is at 933 Barnett St. in Wasco. To volunteer, donate or learn more, contact Melissa Kirkpatrick at 541-442-5778 or wascoschooleventscenter@gmail.com, or visit the office Tuesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Jesse Harper checks Carol Evans' blood pressure during a trip to the American Red Cross to donate blood. Carol has been donating blood for 26 years.

The Gift of Life

By Craig Reed

Carol Evans was inspired to give blood when her brother-in-law needed blood during several heart surgeries.

Lucie Ferguson was inspired to give blood when her husband needed blood transfusions while dealing with leukemia.

Carol and Lucie, both Douglas Electric Cooperative members, have personal reasons for donating their blood. But they and many others realize blood is also needed by strangers who suffer from disease and injuries.

Those situations might include a hurricane causing injuries along the East Coast, a patient in the Midwest diagnosed with cancer or people injured in a traffic accident in the Pacific Northwest.

Thousands of situations such as these across the United States result in the need for blood. The American Red Cross and its blood donors do their best to respond.

Carol has been giving blood through the Red Cross donation center in Roseburg since 1992. In those 26 years, the 72-year-old has donated 84 times, giving a pint of her A-positive blood per donation for a total of just over 10 gallons.

"In this time of our lives, it's an opportunity to give," Carol says. "I think it is just paramount that we all do that in one way or another. Donating blood is something you have available to give all year long.

"It's something to make you feel younger. Just think of it as out with the used blood and in with the new blood that the body has to produce."

Lucie became a volunteer at the Roseburg Red Cross center in 2018, but was not a blood donor until two months ago. She says it just took her some time to get her courage up to go through the process, but she finally followed her late husband's advice.

"He would have told me to just buck up and do it," Lucie says. "I was motivated thinking of my husband, knowing how much blood he needed. That blood kept him alive longer than expected. I realize donated blood is a necessity for people in need."

Valerie Gordon, Red Cross' account manager for the donor recruitment department, says there is a severe blood shortage. Her job is to encourage communities and businesses to host blood drives to attract donors.

"We are below a three-day inventory right now," she says of the national blood reserve. "We like to have a minimum of a five-day supply."

She explains that harsh winter weather, the recent holiday season and high school and college students not being on their campus for blood drives during the holidays all contribute to fewer blood donations. She says 20 percent of donated blood comes from students.

A unit of blood is separated into whole blood, platelets and plasma, and each of those can go to a different person.

"We're asking anyone and everyone to come in and donate," Valerie says. "A donation can potentially save three lives. How else can you save three lives by giving an hour of your time?"

"I know people are afraid of needles, but it really doesn't hurt. The finger prick (to take a blood sample for testing) is nothing and the needle poke is not much of an ouch. Then you're fine and you're giving blood that can help others in need."

—Gloria Roberts

"It's a very noble thing to donate blood because you're able to help other human beings," she says.

Gloria Roberts of Roseburg, a volunteer at the Red Cross blood center for the past 20 years, has been a blood donor for longer than that. She's given 17 gallons.

"I know people are afraid of needles, but it really doesn't hurt," she says. "The finger prick (to take a blood sample for testing) is nothing and the needle poke is not much of an ouch. Then you're fine and you're giving blood that can help others in need."

Valerie says when people express a fear of needles, she takes a humanitarian approach.

"If you consider that it could be your own family member that needs blood, but there hasn't been enough donors and enough blood given, you may be more apt to step up and donate," she says. "

"It's just a prick on the finger and a poke in the arm that lasts just a few seconds. It's not that big of a deal.

The latest regional report for 64 counties in Oregon and Washington says 110,870 people gave blood donations for the fiscal year of July 2016 to June 2017. Those donations resulted in 198,448 units of red cells and 36,295 units of platelets.

Valerie adds that nationally, in addition to blood centers, there were 5,764 blood drives organized and promoted by 2,106 coordinators during the recent fiscal year.

Blood collected at the Roseburg center and at surrounding blood drives is shipped to a distribution center in Portland where it becomes available to help anybody in need across the United States.

Carol says she will continue to donate blood, adding she also likes getting her blood pressure, pulse and temperature taken prior to each donation.

"I just relax," Carol says. "You're in good hands, nobody leaves your side. They do a fabulous job of getting you through the process."

"The people here are very caring during your donation," Lucie adds.

Once the blood donation is complete, there is satisfaction in knowing that by giving of one's self, others in need are helped. That help, through a blood donation, can be given every 56 days, after the body replenishes its own blood supply. ■

Serviceman Eric Youngstrom fixes a broken crossarm in Sisters.

Crews Battle Elements to Restore Power

Late winter storm breaks records, triggers maximum response

By Courtney Cobb

Central Oregonians are no strangers to the perils of winter weather, ready to handle whatever Mother Nature deals them. The fairly mild 2018-2019 winter season did nothing to challenge that point of view until the morning of February 24. That's when winter storm forecasters predicted several days of snow.

The next six days tested the resolve of our members and put Central Electric's crews and support staff into nearly a week of maximum emergency response mode.

That fateful Sunday started with light rain, gradually turning to sleet and eventually snow. Two CEC servicemen started hustling around the cooperative's 5,300-square-mile service area in the early hours, chasing small outages. By mid-afternoon, conditions worsened and they alerted Operations and Engineering's leadership to start mobilizing crews.

The Conditions

Heavy snow burdened local trees, covered CEC's power poles with thick layers of white snow, knocked trees or tree limbs into spans of power lines stretching between poles, often bringing them crashing to the ground. The snow also caused buildup on lines, which triggered temporary faults that blow fuses and short circuits that can take entire sections of conductor off line.

"Imagine a power line the size of your pinky finger," Director of Operations and Engineering Brad Wilson says. "Now imagine that same pinky finger has turned into the size of your arm because it is encased by snow and ice. That is a lot of weight placed on a line stretching hundreds of feet."

For six days, crews battled the elements and treacherous roads to restore power.

How bad was it? Here's an excerpt from a post on CEC's outage page on their website a couple of days into the storm:

"For over 48 hours, CEC emergency response crews have been working to restore power to all members. A pattern has emerged where new outages occur, which offsets the progress achieved

Left and above, heavily laden trees filled with snow and ice caused widespread outages in the Sisters and Camp Sherman area.

Photos by Jeff Beaman

by other restoration efforts. Trees are bending under the weight of heavy snowfall on their limbs, which can extend into power lines. This has especially been the case in the Camp Sherman and Sisters areas.

"Crews are continuing to chase and fix problems, but they are also hampered by current travel conditions as well. Snow-clogged roads and shoulders make it risky and difficult to pull over at the location of a section of the system needing repair."

In many instances, CEC crews could not use standard line trucks to get into areas to make repairs. They needed to put materials and tools in snowcats and travel to the problem spots. Linemen also talked about the sheer depth of snow they walked through to reach poles or cut down trees.

Central Electric and contract crews from Potelco Inc. worked around the clock to restore power to members as quickly and safely as possible. Normally, the cooperative would call upon fellow cooperatives for assistance, but the storm was far-reaching across Oregon and into Washington.

CEC was unable to call upon fellow co-ops for assistance since they had their own outage restoration challenges, demanding they keep their resources at home.

The Sisters and Camp Sherman areas were most impacted by the storm due to the high number of large trees surrounding the power line rights-of-way. Crews spent hours cutting trees out of line, fixing crossarms and restringing power lines.

When giving an update to CEC's dispatch 72 hours into the storm, a linemen described the situation in Camp Sherman as follows: "Look out your window ... see how much snow you have? Now add 4 feet."

The Final Numbers

Between CEC and Potelco crews, at any one time there were 20 to 25 linemen working in the field to restore power.

In the six-day event, Central Electric had 143 outages that affected 7,265 members. Some members were without power as long as 48 hours. In the Camp Sherman area, several members saw even longer stretches due to the number of trees near power lines.

"We really want to take the time to thank members for their patience during this event," Brad says. "We also want to thank members for their kind words in the field, on social media, and calls into customer service. These really helped to keep crews going through some difficult conditions."

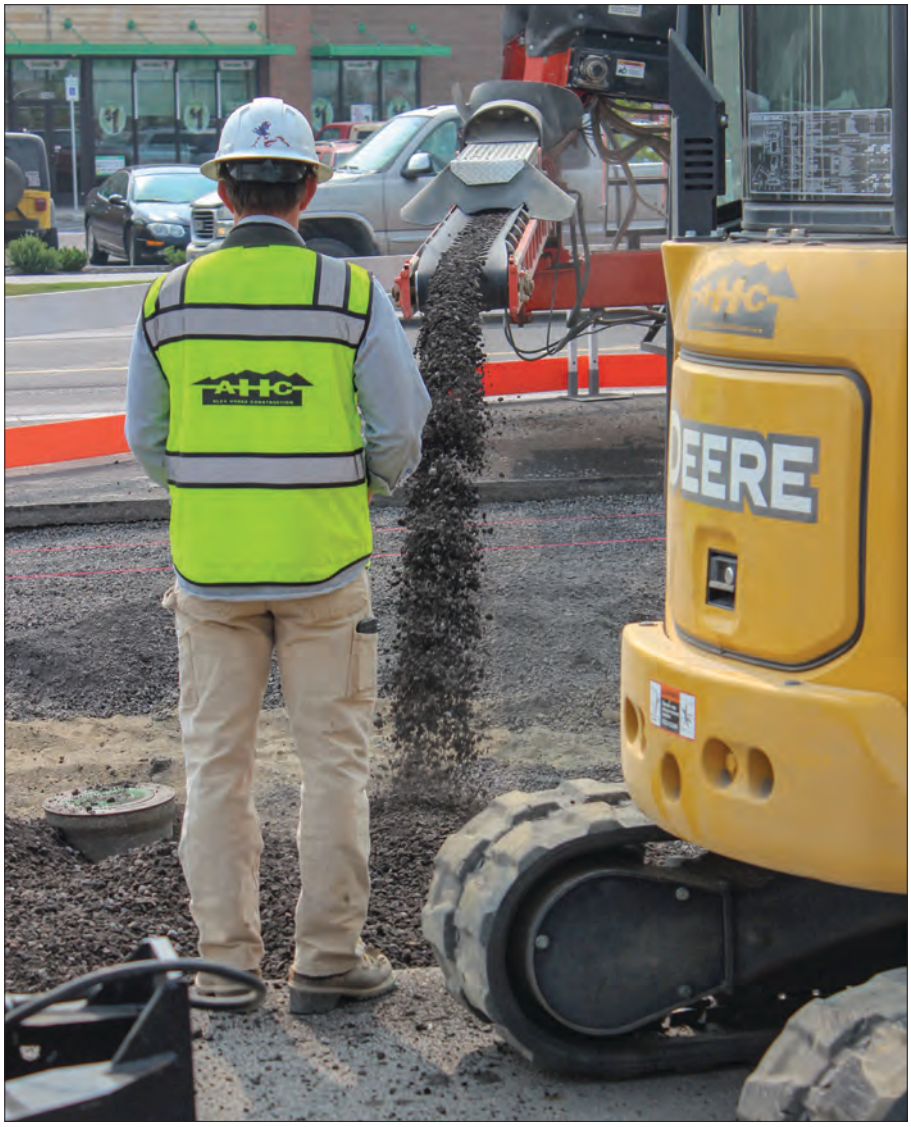
Brad also acknowledged the dedication and commitment of his crews.

"These guys were out there working hours on end, doing a great job under very difficult conditions," Brad says. "We are very grateful. We also appreciate their families back home who were dealing with the same hard conditions without their help. A line crew member's family deserves a lot of credit for being patient and understanding of the commitment required of their husband and father." ■

Highway Changes Brighten Up La Pine

Outlook is positive following numerous upgrades and additions

By Craig Reed



A bed of gravel is laid down before concrete is poured, giving the west side of Highway 97 through La Pine a new sidewalk. The beautification project includes new overhead lights, crosswalks with flashing beacons, landscaping and new pavement.

La Pine and Highway 97 have a new look for both residents and visitors traveling the roadway.

Sidewalks on the west side of the highway, overhead lights, crosswalks with rapid-flashing beacons to indicate the presence of a pedestrian, landscaping and pavement are all new to the highway that splits the rural community. A new drain system carries off stormwater.

The design, budgeting and documentation for this Oregon Department of Transportation project, in partnership with La Pine, started a few years ago. Construction began early last summer and wrapped up early this year.

"It looks lovely," says Ann Gawith, director of the La Pine Chamber of Commerce and a 40-year resident of the town. "La Pine was just a wide spot in the road. This project has removed that image and has made it look more like a town—a place someone would like to stop and explore. That is a good thing."

Dean McPike, a five-year resident of La Pine but a property owner in the area for the past 25 years, says the improvements are positive and help improve La Pine's image.

"People passing through will realize there is a town here rather than just a blur on the road," he says. "This project has put La Pine on the map, which hopefully will help the businesses recoup the losses they suffered during the construction."

The town and its business owners whose properties front the highway were given advance notice and explanations about the project by ODOT and city representatives. Brian Earls, a 38-year La Pine resident and the owner of a gas station, motel and RV park, says despite those early conversations, the construction was more disruptive than he could have imagined. He says his businesses were impacted last summer from June through August. The major problems were time delays and access to his properties.

The project was bittersweet for Brian and other business owners because their daily income was impacted, but now they have a newer, brighter, more welcoming look in front of their businesses.

"It took a real effort by many people to get this completed," says Brian, who has owned his properties the past 10 years.

Business owner Brian Earls says he likes the end result of the beautification project, but his businesses suffered financially during construction last summer. He hopes the new look will get travelers to stop.

LaPine Mayor Daniel Richer says the new look should make the community more attractive for travelers to visit. He hopes the wider sidewalks will encourage people to walk around the community and visit local businesses.

"From what I can see, everybody worked together, but it doesn't mean everybody was happy while the work was being done."

He says he likes the lights, the trees and the landscaping.

"I just wish we hadn't had to go through the heartache to get there," he says of the large revenue loss he suffered during what are his busiest months of the year. "I am happy with the look now. Any time it looks better, businesses should excel. It gives people one more reason to stop."

Joel Brader, a 30-year resident of La Pine and the 15-year owner of the Harvest Depot Restaurant, says his business was down 40 percent during construction. He says it was just a matter of waiting it out. He hoped his local customers and others would find his restaurant's back entrance because his two front entrances were severely impacted by the construction.

"As much as I fought it, it is nice," Joel says. "In the long run, we hope it is positive. The city now has a very welcoming look compared to how it used to be. The city has just had to deal with some growing pains."

Daniel Richer, a 13-year La Pine resident and the town's mayor, says the wider sidewalks should entice people to walk around town and do business with local merchants.

Besides giving La Pine a more welcoming look, officials hope the improvements will slow down traffic on Highway 97 as it enters the town. The project includes lowering the speed limit to 30 mph.

"The trucks haven't learned that yet," says Melissa Bethel, La Pine's city manager. "The truckers have to learn that going through this city is like any other big city. I'm optimistic they are going to slow down, making the city safer for pedestrians and bikes."

La Pine doesn't have its own police department, so it has to depend on the Oregon State Police and the Deschutes County Sheriff's Department to monitor traffic through town.

While this project only had enough money to upgrade the sidewalks and streetscape on the west side of the highway, city officials say giving the east side a similar facelift is planned.

Jake Obrist, La Pine's public works manager, says improving the east side was initially in the project plans, "but unfortunately we couldn't get enough funds to do both sides," he says.

Melissa and Jake say writing and applying for grants to complete the east side is a high priority for the city. Discussions are ongoing with ODOT to make that happen within the next few years.

Future plans also include development of La Pine Station, a hub for bus pickup, park-and-ride sharing, electric car-charging spaces, restrooms, a bicycle fix-it shop and, farther in the future, a food truck court.

City officials understand the economic impact on businesses during construction, but believe improvements will be beneficial in the long run.

"It's unfortunate, but necessary," Melissa says of the issues during construction. "This is not unique to La Pine. The beautification and aesthetic qualities this project has provided should enhance the town and its businesses." ■

For 35 years, Mark Steighner worked as a music teacher in Hood River. Now in his "retirement," he serves as artistic director and conductor for the Columbia Gorge Orchestra Association.

Multitalented Music Man

Mark Steighner conducts a musical culture in the Columbia Gorge

By Drew Myron

It's countdown to curtain, and Mark Steighner is calm. After weeks of preparation, a snowstorm has cancelled the Brahms concert. Undaunted, he moves onto next week's show—a collection of community choirs—then dives into rehearsals for a musical opening in two weeks.

"Just two weeks," he reminds the nervous actors, though there is little alarm in his tone.

With his soft eyes, slow voice and relaxed style, bystanders wouldn't know this is the commanding force behind nearly every music performance in the Columbia River Gorge.

Mark has composed, written and directed more than 65 theater productions, worked as a school music teacher for 35 years, and serves as the artistic director, conductor and composer for one of the oldest and longest-running community orchestras in Oregon. If you have attend a music performance in Hood River, there is a good chance Mark is at the podium or in the wings.

The Columbia Gorge Orchestra Association is the umbrella organization for the Sinfonietta Orchestra, Voci Choir, Jazz Collective Big Band and Stages Repertory Theatre. Mark leads them all.

When he took the baton as artistic director in 2005, CGOA offered three concerts a year. In 2018, there were 45.

"There's an amazing amount of culture, arts and performance in the area," Mark says.

CGOA has more than 200 musicians, from singers to instrumentalists.

"I keep adding," Mark says. "I think, 'We ought to do this, we ought to add that.'"

Mark is in rehearsals five nights a week and just added another group to the mix. This spring, he will debut the Choral Union Choir through Columbia Gorge Community College in

The Dalles, where he teaches music theory. The choir is open to students, staff and the general public.

Raised in Redondo Beach, California, Mark attended University of California at Santa Barbara, where he earned a degree in music with an emphasis on composition. Wanting to escape the fast pace of the city, in 1979 he landed a teaching job at Wy'East Middle School and moved to Parkdale.

With roots in teaching—his father was a high school English teacher and his mother a grade school teacher—Mark established his own teaching niche and put his skills to work at Hood River Valley High School, where he was the choral and instrumental music director for more than 30 years.

During his time at HRVHS, Mark and his students made 10 performance tours in England, commissioned more than 30 works from noted composers and took part in dozens of state music competitions. In 2015, he received the Outstanding Educator of the Year award from the Oregon Music Educators Association.

"I really feel a sense of responsibility as a musician and educator to keep our culture alive," Mark says. "We're quickly losing the culture that is shared and that is understood. It's important to preserve, to keep the arts alive."

The musicians agree.

"CGOA is, in my estimation, the best avenue in the Gorge for artistic expression and inspiration," says Elaine Thompson, who serves on the CGOA board and sings in the Voci Choir. "Mark is a mixture of genius and grace. Not a night passes at Voci practice that I am not amazed by his depth of musical knowledge and skills. Everyone in CGOA has a great respect and almost awe for Mark. He wears many hats, never seems to run out of enthusiasm for the arts and is a true visionary."

Mark's latest vision may be his biggest: a 600-seat professional performing arts center overlooking the Columbia River.

"All the venues in the Gorge are deficient," he says, citing small stages, limited seating and scheduling restrictions.

CGOA concerts are held in a variety of places, such as Wy'east Middle School Performing Arts Center, Hood River Middle School and local churches. Mark envisions a home for performing arts that will accommodate local performances and attract national talent.

To bring his vision to reality, in 2016 he founded the Performing Arts Initiative and assembled a board of directors to steer efforts to create a cultural showcase. The board consists of Columbia Gorge educators, business owners, and tech and art professionals. The group has completed a feasibility study, signed a land lease agreement and secured a $1 million donation toward the $25 million project.

Mark sees a sweeping masterpiece: a state-of-the-art facility that will turn the Gorge into an epicenter for the performing arts.

"This will be a landmark identity for the community," he says. ■

Mark spends nearly every evening in music rehearsals, earning praise from singers who call him a visionary with "a mixture of genius and grace."

Members of the Voci choir, pictured here in rehearsal, frequently perform songs Mark composed.

For more information about the Columbia Gorge Orchestra Association, go to www.gorgeorchestra.org. For more information about the Performing Arts Initiative, go to www.gorgeperformingarts.org.

Eric Sappington performs on stage at the Fairview Grange during a fall open mic session.

Fairview Grange Finds New Life

Group revives spirit of community; music and dance return

By Denise Porter

For a century, Tillamook County's oldest grange was a community hot spot for live music, dances, socials and meetings. When it was built in 1916, Fairview Grange Hall burgeoned with activity and membership.

Time marched forward and the digital era blossomed. Five years ago, the Fairview Grange was on the verge of collapse due to a lack of membership. The once busy dance hall became an empty, echoing reminder of a bygone era.

Today, music again fills the building, and the grange's leadership team is redefining what a modern-day grange hall can be for the community.

"That building definitely has a spirit and an energy about it," says Eric Sappington, the grange's current leader. "It wants to stay alive."

Eric recalls the day his personal grange journey began. He was walking down Tillamook's Second Street five years ago when his friend, Shelly Bowe, stopped to visit with him. Shelly was the founder of Food Roots,—a local organization dedicated to teaching gardening and small acreage farming. Shelly's job was to connect farmers and community members.

Her dream was to create a vibrant local food scene. That day she had something on her mind.

"I was literally walking down Second Street and she was like, 'Hey, would you be interested in coming to the grange for

a meeting? We need to save this building and group,'" Eric says.

As Shelly talked, Eric listened.

"Where is the grange and what are you talking about?" he asked her.

Eric was not a farmer. At the time, he had no idea what Shelly meant when she spoke of "the grange." Eric has since learned the National Grange was created in 1867. Local granges were fraternal and sometimes acted as a sort of union to speak for farmers.

Shelly knew Eric was both a carpenter and a musician, and that he was interested in growing the local art and entertainment scene. The grange building had a beautiful old stage—engineered 100 years ago—and the acoustics were from a time before electronic improvements.

The state grange association was going to revoke the Fairview Grange Charter due to lack of membership. Shelly and a small group of enthusiasts wanted to keep the building alive.

"She said, 'It can't be torn down and made into a parking lot. Just show up, please.'"

Eric found himself at the meeting—and got more than he bargained for.

"When I walked in and saw the stage and dance hall and that room, I think that was the big draw for me," he recalls. "I remember thinking, 'This is going to be a great space for open mics, puppet shows, for theater—for the community to gather.'"

About 30 community members arrived for the meeting, and when it was finished, the Fairview Grange had enough members to retain its charter.

"Walking in and seeing that place and the historical aspect of it, I got a really good energy off of that place—a really positive energy," Eric remembers. "I thought, 'This place is something special.' I was around all of these great people. We all were just kind of like, 'we have to do this.' I felt like the community needed it. It was going to take a lot of work."

Wishing to honor what the grange used to be, the new members tried to adhere to running their meetings in the time-honored grange tradition, which includes elaborate meeting rituals constructed more than 100 years ago.

Eric painting the outside of the building.
Photos courtesy of Neal Lemery

"I was literally walking down Second Street and she was like, 'Hey, would you be interested in coming to the grange for a meeting? We need to save this building and group,'"

—Eric Sappington

Eric says that wasn't working. Six months later, he became the Fairview Grange's Worthy Master, or president. As a group, the membership decided to stop with grange rituals and formalities.

Eric recalls the state grange association was supportive.

"The meetings started to get long," he says. "People started to lose focus and energy, and the rituals weirded people out. We started to put the rituals aside and said if these meetings are going to be effective, we need to focus on what we're doing and not just doing the rituals."

The group took stock of the building and determined a course of action for its future. Of top priority was to clean and restore the building and make it a place where people could gather in fellowship.

Eric led the charge, with the help of his friend Neal Lemery, also a grange member, other members and numerous local community partners.

In four years, the grange has new paint and windows, and has been thoroughly cleaned.

"Now it's finally getting back on track," Eric says with a laugh. "It is clean; it doesn't stink."

The large kitchen is looking good, Eric says with pride. The building is again available as a rental space for community gatherings.

The group is looking for ways to generate funds for improved heating and electrical work, including by reinstating one of the most cherished grange activities: live music and local food.

A popular grange event is Soup and Salad Supper, where community members gather for food and fellowship.

The first Saturday of the month the grange hosts an open mic for area musicians. Last month, 15 musicians performed for an appreciative crowd. The talent includes teenagers—and Eric is happy to see that.

He says the grange is slowly and steadily beginning to shine with a new glory. It's a welcoming place for the community.

"For me, this journey, it's all about community," Eric says. "The grange is about getting to know the people here and all walks of life." ■

For more information about the Fairview Grange, visit its Facebook page, or www.grange.org/fairviewor273/home. To rent the grange, call 503-741-9520. Please note the grange is an alcohol-free building.

Priorities for the New Congress

By Dan Riedinger

Every time Congress convenes, Mt. Wheeler Power has an opportunity to educate new lawmakers on issues that matter most to our members and the community we serve. The 116th Congress kicked off in January with more than 100 new members in the House and Senate.

Since then, co-ops have been working with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, which represents more than 900 not-for-profit electric cooperatives, to introduce ourselves to new members on Capitol Hill. Here are several priority issues we are bringing to lawmakers' attention.

Energy Policy and Infrastructure

The potential for energy and infrastructure legislation presents a significant opportunity as electric cooperatives work to meet the growing needs of their local communities. NRECA will work to ensure any infrastructure package focuses on more than roads and bridges, including opportunities to modernize the electric grid and expand rural broadband access. This is critical to ensuring rural America is not left behind in the 21st century economy.

Environment

NRECA will promote and encourage bipartisan support for renewable energy research and development programs—including programs that focus on finding a viable use for carbon capture, utilization and storage, which comprise a suite of technologies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from power plants. Cooperative renewables use has increased substantially in recent years, more than doubling since 2010.

Broadband

Expanded rural broadband access remains a priority for NRECA. As electric co-ops engage the new Congress, we will work to ensure all rural broadband discussions include the electric co-op perspective on the need to expand high-speed internet service in rural areas. According to the Federal Communications Commission, 23 million rural Americans lack access to broadband. That's why roughly 100 electric cooperatives are working to close the digital divide by bringing broadband to their communities, and more are exploring the option.

Tax Policy

The 2017 tax reform law included a provision that treated federal grants as income. Many co-ops rely on government grants to maintain and expand infrastructure and provide services to their communities. Because the change threatens the tax-exempt status of some electric cooperatives, America's electric cooperatives will seek to fix this unintended consequence of the tax law.

Grid Resilience

Protecting our nation's vast power grid is a national priority for electric cooperatives. Ensuring appropriate information sharing and preserving existing partnerships and structures are essential to these efforts. We will advocate for resources and technologies that meet the unique cybersecurity and recovery needs of small and medium-sized utilities to help protect our systems.

With such a large freshman class of lawmakers, educating them about electric cooperatives and the issues we care about will take time and perseverance. At the state level, Mt. Wheeler Power board member Sandy Green serves as a board representative to Nevada Rural Electric Association State Director Hank James, and board member Rick Hendrix serves alongside Utah Rural Electric Cooperative Association State Director Jeff Petersen. Sandy and Rick advocate for the interests of our members and their communities in the respective states.

It is imperative that our leaders stay aware of concerns and remain diligent. Issues such as last year's Question 3 require early education and member participation to ensure the co-op's best interests are heard.

"One of the most beneficial uses of our time is spent with federal agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service and the Department of Energy" says Mt. Wheeler Power CEO Kevin Robison. "There is a direct local impact of the regulatory rule-making."

Mt. Wheeler Power and its dedicated advocates remained vigilant during the Utah legislative conference, which completed its 63rd session March 14. The Nevada legislative conference wraps up its 80th legislative session June 3, and we will continue to fight throughout the session for all legislative issues that impact cooperatives. ■

Carlin STEM Club members at Rover Ruckus in Las Vegas. Standing from left: Alin Carl, Cierra Walter, Christopher George, Lizzie Faulk, Dustin Harris, Mckenzie Villareyna, John Gamble and local engineer Brook Demitropoulos. Kneeling: Quincy Doxey and Eon Stitzel. Photo courtesy of Carlin STEM Club

Carlin's STEM Program Enthralls Students

By Dianna Troyer

At Carlin Combined School, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) could easily stand for Science That's Entertaining and Magical.

Students have entertained themselves making gooey s'mores in solar ovens they built with a pizza box and foil. They programmed a robot that carried out their invisible commands. Tapping instructions on a keyboard, a flight simulator whisked them skyward.

"We get so excited about STEM and so do the students," says math teacher Janie Kimble, one of two teachers who lead Carlin's STEM Club for junior high and high school students. "Sometimes we pinch ourselves and can't help but giggle and laugh at seeing students' excitement."

Janie and science teacher Melissa Jones launched the STEM Club in 2015. Melissa is one of six educators recognized as a 2018 Nevada STEM Teacher of the Year. She bought a flight simulator with the $1,000 award that came with the honor.

"We're really fortunate to have support from teachers, administrators, businesses, parents and national STEM educators," Melissa says. "It fuels our fires and lets us know we're on the right track. We're passionate about giving students experiences that will open up opportunities for them."

Carlin STEM Club advisers Janie Kimble, left, and Melissa Jones at STEM Fest.
Photos by Lonnie Brown

The STEM Club has provided opportunities for students to tour a college campus, simulate a trip to Mars, go indoor skydiving, and understand the engineering behind Las Vegas shows like Tournament of Kings and David Copperfield.

"Providing students with those unforgettable educational memories keeps my passion high," Melissa says.

She attributes her enthusiasm for the STEM Club to memories of field trips with her Carlin High School

science teacher Steve Feasel.

"The best lessons aren't always learned within a classroom's four walls," she says.

Janie says she and Melissa were inspired to launch the club after Janie got to work closely with Department of Defense research scientists during a two-week Joint Science and Technology Institute for teachers and students in Maryland.

"It energized my passion to inspire students about STEM careers," Janie says.

The U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency's Chemical and Biological Outreach Division hosts the institute, and Janie returns every summer to mentor other teachers. In the past four years, six Carlin students have attended, and Janie says she's waiting to hear if local students will be accepted again this year.

When Janie told two colleagues who supervise the institute about Carlin's STEM program, they wanted to see what was developing in a tiny school of 300 students nestled in northern Nevada's remote sagebrush steppe. In February, they flew thousands of miles to participate in Carlin's STEM Fest.

The event attracted more than 400 people, including students, educators, parents and businesses involved with STEM professions.

Wells Rural Electric Company's booth featured careers at the co-op, including electrical engineering and working as a lineman.

"With community support, Janie and Melissa have created a STEM oasis out of a desert," says Darnell Gardner, director of strategic communications and outreach for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency in Virginia. "It was impressive that the community came to support the event despite the adverse weather. We came because we're committed to supporting teachers and inspiring their students to become a new generation of leaders who will consider STEM professions."

From left, John Gamble, Melissa Jones, Kami Simons, discuss strategy.

Darnell was joined by Jennifer Casey, STEM program manager at the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education in Tennessee. They set up a booth to show how viruses spread and how a biological threat from terrorists would be handled.

"Carlin's STEM Club offers unparalleled opportunities for students to engage in hands-on learning activities, hear from experts in the field and conduct experiments with their peers," Jennifer says. "The Fest ignited the students' curiosity and enthusiasm about STEM disciplines as potential careers."

STEM Club members exhibited a robot they built and programmed. Senior John Gamble and freshman Miranda Rainville explained how robots work and taught eager parents and students to drive them.

"The club has made me interested in careers dealing with software, mechanical and medical engineering," Miranda says.

Nine Carlin students competed in the state championship of FIRST Tech Challenge's Rover Ruckus in Las Vegas February 8-9. Teams were judged and awarded points based on how they designed, built and programmed a robot to perform tasks in an autonomous and driver-operated mode. They named their robot BOB for Bucket of Bolts.

"This was their rookie year, and they did great," Melissa says.

Carlin students designed their robot to lower itself and put an object in a specific area in autonomous mode. In driver mode, a student had the robot pick up materials and place them on a lander, then latched the robot to the lander.

"We made our robot strong enough to lift itself off the ground and pick up objects using its claw," says sophomore Christopher George.

The STEM Club received a $2,900 grant from Tesla's Education Gift Fund Investment, enabling students to compete in Rover Ruckus for five years.

This spring, STEM Club members will show their gratitude for the community support they've received when they present their projects to the school board, elementary school students and sponsors, including the Carlin Booster Club.

They plan to talk about their work in robotics and the club's aeronautics program. Melissa and Janie received a $2,000 grant from the national Voya Unsung Heroes competition in 2017 to pay for their program, "STEM Gives You Wings!"

Through simulations and other activities, the program introduces students to the science of aeronautics and flight through problem-based learning experiences. They learn about engineering design and examples of new aircraft technology dealing with reduced noise pollution and increased fuel efficiency.

"There are so many STEM careers available to students, many that never existed when we were their age," Janie says. "Our club's diverse activities give them hope that they can attain their lofty dreams of being a doctor, astronaut or scientist. The sky's the limit for their futures." ■

Touchstone Energy Films 'Americana' Commercial with Pahrump as a Backdrop

Hard hat travels country

By Vern Hee

There was a little bit of Hollywood magic in Pahrump a few weeks ago as a small team of cinematographers from Touchstone Energy Cooperative filmed the newest national Touchstone Energy commercial in and around Pahrump.

Touchstone chose Valley Electric Association to play a role in the filming of the commercial, which follows a lineman's hard hat as it travels across America. The team used volunteer employees from VEA as its actors.

Since 2016, Touchstone Energy has shot five national commercials for energy cooperatives throughout the country. Touchstone is a cooperative federation composed of more than 750, consumer-owned utility cooperatives in 46 of the 50 Untied States. The 2019 commercial is expected to air in the spring following the NRECA Annual Meeting in March. Ruralite readers will be able to find the commercial on YouTube.

"There were three other electric cooperatives besides VEA, helping us out," says Cyrus Crossan, Touchstone Creative and Brand Strategies Manager. They included Socorro Electric Cooperative, New Mexico; San Isabel Electric Association, Colorado and Tri-State Generation & Transmission from Boulder City, Colorado. The filming of this commercial took 10 days to complete, two of which were in Pahrump.

Cyrus has been across the country filming cooperatives. "I have been to 150 co-ops to date, and this was my first time to the state of Nevada," says Cyrus. "This is the end of our shooting season."

His team is small – just Rafael Fernandez, the Touchstone Digital Producer, and Cyrus.

Cyrus lives and works in Arlington, Va., at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association office. Touchstone is the creative side of the NRECA.

Journeyman Fleet Technician Joel Dean and son Ashton at Mountain Falls.

Photos by Horace Langford Jr.

Lineman Tony Cipollini is the focus of this scene in the Touchstone commercial.

Cyrus says the story behind the commercial was written by a student intern. The hard hat represents the essence of "Americana" and the multiple cooperatives around the country that have always been there for their communities and will be in the future.

None of the VEA employees used in the commercial had ever shot a commercial before. "The hardest thing about this project is probably the casting and trying to ensure that the casting is realistic," Cyrus said.

Candace Perkins, VEA Manager of marketing, helped round up talent for Cyrus. "We lucked out and were able to provide Touchstone with employees for all of the scenes that they needed filmed. Probably the coolest part is that we had two sets of fathers and sons appear in the commercial. Nico and Tony Cipollini, who are father and son, play a father and son in the commercial. The same goes for Joel Dean and his son, Ashton."

Other VEA employees who volunteered for the Pahrump shoot included VEA Working Foreman Tony Meza, Assistant Power System Analyst Hannah Mason, Fleet technician Joel Dean and his son, Ashton, Journeyman Lineman Ryan Farnsworth, Apprentice Lineman Matt Frechette, Apprentice Lineman Aaron Schneider, Power System Controller Nico Cipollini and Lineman Special Projects Tony Cipollini.

Joel and Ashton filmed the last scene in Mountain Falls. The two actually adlibbed much of their scene, which made Cyrus's day.

"We got a lot of good footage of them playing around, which adds authenticity to the commercial," says Cyrus. ■

Ginger Stumne is Nye County's hardworking Public Administrator. Driving her jacked-up truck, she arrives at all unattended deaths across Nye County's 18,000 square miles to safeguard left-behind belongings for the estate of the deceased.

Photos by John Glionna

A Thankless Job that Must Be Done

Public Administrator Ginger Stumne settles affairs of estates in Nye County

By John M. Glionna

At age 40, Pahrump native Ginger Stumne faced the kind of midlife personal reckoning that could stop a woman in her tracks.

She was a mother of three teenagers, struggling to survive on a high school education. When her parents sold the family's gym, she lost her job of 12 years.

She didn't even know how to file for unemployment benefits.

But it was worse, so much worse than that.

Ginger was also recovering from two successive abusive marriages that spanned 17 years. In front of their children, one husband stuck a .9mm handgun to her temple and pulled the trigger. The gun jammed.

Ginger fought to turn around a life that had brought little more than violence and heartache. She did it for herself, and for her children. In the end, she has become a role model that challenges them to seek a better life than she had.

Today, Ginger is the Nye County Public Administrator, a self-driven public servant who handles the personal and financial affairs of residents who die without executing a will. The work is often

thankless – and goes uncompensated by taxpayers. The county has no budget for the elected position, forcing Ginger to rely on a small percentage eked out from each settled estate, after a county judge has passed muster, of course.

That means Ginger and several volunteers must pay up front for the gloves, masks and hazmat suits they wear inside death homes, the residences of people who died without a family member present.

They work alongside sheriff's investigators, but because Nye County has no coroner, the job of tying up a deceased's affairs falls to Ginger. She turns off the electricity, secures any vehicles, cares for pets and monitors all financial affairs until family members show up. She covers court and document fees without knowing whether she will ever be reimbursed.

The job is stressful, but Ginger knows hard times and how to handle with life's grit. For years, the Nye County Public Administrator's office has been wracked by controversy.

In the 1990s, one administrator was arrested after he and his wife embezzled money and vehicles from estates they were tasked to protect. Years later, another quit after suffering a home invasion by thieves who knew he had access to large amounts of money.

Ginger was working as a volunteer when the county administrator suddenly quit in 2016 due to job stress. She then took over to fill out the woman's term.

Currently, Stumne has 40 ongoing cases, for which she receives no public funding. All her pay and expenses are taken out of the estates once they're settled.

The agency's bad reputation still dogs her: She's been accused without evidence of stealing money from the deceased. When she shows up at a home to remove items for public auction, neighbors have called the police.

She doesn't take it personally because Ginger is a fighter who has worked hard to recognize her own self-worth. And she can trace her personal growth back to that defining moment as a single mother without a job or prospects.

With the stakes high, she slowly transformed herself into a public servant. While working a series of marketing jobs to pay the bills, she volunteered as a sheriff's dispatcher, opened a licensed day-care center and later formed a nonprofit that advocated for senior citizens, U.S. veterans and the disabled. She helped at a hospice center and became a court-appointed advocate for children. She also became a legal guardian to a physically and mentally disabled couple who was brought to Pahrump after being abused in a California mental hospital.

If all that wasn't enough, she studied for her paralegal degree from an online course. She also got a notary public certificate and continues to take pre-law classes with the goal of one day becoming a probate lawyer. This semester, she's on the Dean's List.

All this from a mother who once had to tell her children she was too busy to stop at a McDonalds when in reality she was too poor to afford a burger and fries.

She wants to show her kids that as long as you want to improve yourself, age doesn't matter. "You can do it. Because there are more than just eight hours in a day," she days. "No one was going to hand it to me, so I worked. I worked hard. And if I feel good about myself, my kids will see that."

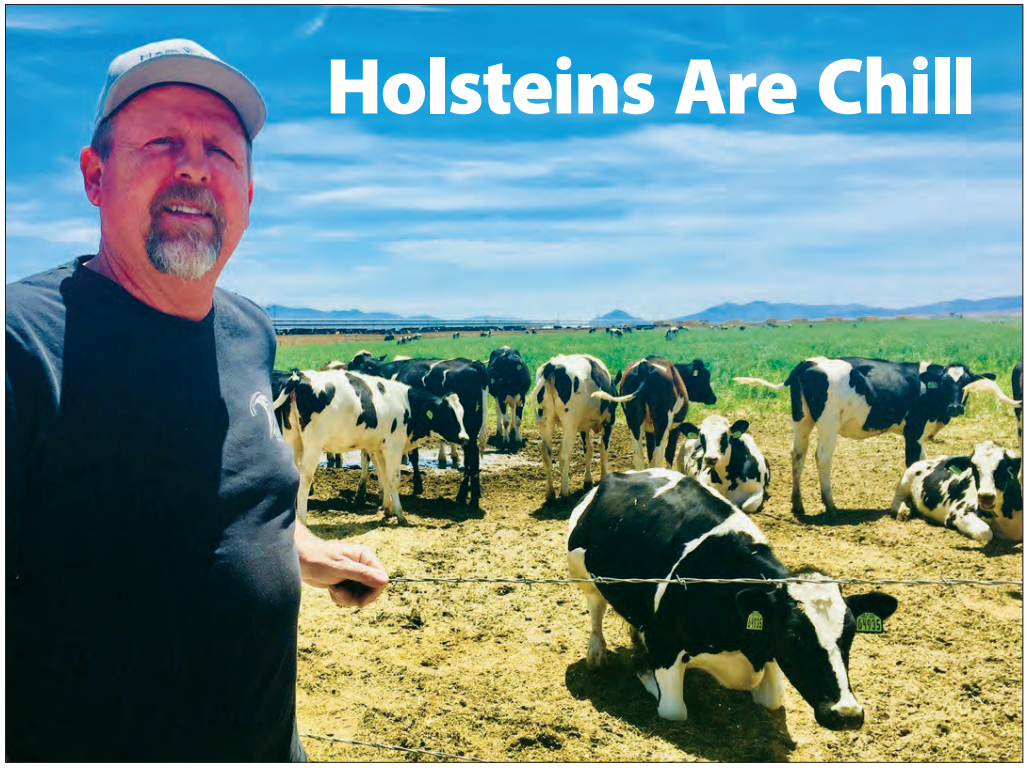
Once or twice a week, she dons her gloves and mask and enters the home that's been scene to an unattended death. Her case log in a typical year numbers more than 40. Friends and roommates of the deceased have threatened her, claiming that, even though there was no will, the deceased intended to leave money to them. But Ginger follows the law: If there's no will, the money goes to immediate family.

Not long ago, she bought a gun to protect herself. The purchase brought her back to painful times. She chose a .9mm because the gun fit well in her hand, but it was also the caliber her ex-husband once put to her head.

Ginger has turned around not only her career, but her personal life as well. For a while now, she's been living with her boyfriend, whom she knew back in high school. He's taught her that after years of working so hard, it's OK to take time and relax, to leave the office before 11 p.m.

Ginger's trying. But along with the relationship, volunteering and schoolwork comes her innate compassion to see that families aren't left to face death by themselves.

"I have to keep busy," she says. "That's who I am." ■



Holsteins Are Chill

Ponderosa Dairy Manager Ed Goedhart stands near a clutch of teenage organic milk cows. He says cows rarely let humans – or anything else – get too close because they have a larger sense of personal space than we do.

Photos by John Glionna

They're gentle, giving and social, but they need their space

By John M. Glionna

AMARGOSA VALLEY, Nev. – As Ed Goedhart approaches the barbed-wire fence, the clutch of Holstein dairy cows, all of them teenagers, eye him cautiously.

Then he comes too close for comfort. The nearest one slowly lumbers to its feet as the others take a few steps back. No panic, just guarded attention.

"You know how people have their personal space," he says. "Well, this is a good personal space for a cow."

At age 56, Ed is the dairy manager at the sprawling Ponderosa Dairy and it's his job to know the 10,000 dairy cows on whom his livelihood depends.

He's learned their likes and dislikes, quirks and habits. He knows, for example, that every pen has its own boss cow and that the animals rarely stare at one another face to face.

And another thing: They don't like to be yelled at.

You see, cows are chill.

"They're social, giving, gentle magnificent creatures, and will usually do what you ask," Ed says. "They just mosey along at their own pace."

This cow-whisperer's work requires an exacting schedule: Animals are milked twice daily at precisely the same time. They're fed three times a day and their diets cannot vary, or they will respond – with less milk.

It's like Groundhog Day, only with cows.

"Cows crave consistency," Ed says. "They want the same thing to happen at the same time every day. They want to eat the same thing at the same time and get milked at the same time, the same way."

Ed also knows the politics of milk. In 2010, he took on then Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid for what he considered unfair practices in the state's dairy regulations. He says the dairy business originated in the Netherlands and that many U.S. dairies are operated by the Dutch, who are jokingly known as the "milk mafia."

He spends most of his time among his mooing, cud-chewing and belching wards at the dairy opened by owner Ted DeGroot in 1994. He supervises 150 employees, many of whom live at the dairy. He has a salt-and-pepper goatee and speaks in a low, baritone voice. He and his office staff work out of a modern house that would fit on any suburban street, with tiled floors, rounded archways, a piano and a colorful painting of grazing cows that hangs over the fireplace.

His relationship with his cows is short-lived. Milking cows do not breed until age two and then – depending on their milk output (usually 75 pounds per day) – they will be kept at the dairy for another three years.

Then, as the industry saying goes, they "go to beef."

"McDonald's hamburgers," Ed says.

But until that time comes, he tends to their needs like a maître de at some exclusive cow resort. Imagine a big Heifer lounging next to Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz as she gets her nails done in the Emerald City.

It's not that much of a stretch. Cows at Ponderosa Dairy get two pedicures a year. They have their tails trimmed and their milking teats massaged with emollients known as "udder butter." Their pens are equipped with misters for the hottest days and special machines fluff up their hay beds.

Employees aren't even allowed to smoke around the cows, for fear it might taint their milk. "People can smoke in casinos," Ed says, "but not here."

The dairy's 900 cows raised

Organic cows graze on the open pasture at Ponderosa Dairy

to provide organic milk are put out to pasture, where they roam the fields in bands. "Every day, it's like taking a field trip for cows," he says.

Their diets are a precise mix of such ingredients as almond hulls, cotton seed, alfalfa, sorghum and corn kernels rolled to a flaky consistency. Added to that are fruit and vegetable leftovers from area casinos – everything from onions and carrot shavings to salad greens and watermelon. In all, the cows are fed 1.5 million pounds of feed per day.

"The fruit is like a cherry on top of a dessert," Ed says. "It gives things that extra taste they're looking for."

Experience has taught Ed that cows are simply not as dumb as people think. He's watched the organic-milk cows frolic in the grass the first day of pasture season, "running and jumping and acting happy and just plain goofy." He said cows will also not lay down on any green pasture that's part of their food source, resting instead on more barren ground.

The milk is hauled to market within hours of when the cows are milked — after the product is cooled in special machines.

He recalls two twin calves separated at birth who were reunited two years later. "They entered the pen and sought each other out," he says. "It was like humans separated as infants who recognized each other years later at a crowded party."

Ed has become attached to some of the animals, like the one known as "Cow #1" because it was the first one tagged when the dairy opened. The animal lasted 20 years, giving birth to 15 calves and workers gave it special care.

"Sometimes you get attached to your critters," said dairy worker Phil Lott. "That's what life is."

And cows can get frisky.

Ed remembers the weekend day he was lying on the couch watching baseball when his wife called out, "Hey, you've got cows in the backyard!"

"Of course, we do," he said. "The corrals are 50 feet away."

"No," she insisted. "They're in the backyard."

Ed looked up to see two cows on the back deck, "their faces smashed against the window, their mouths slobbering."

Someone had left a gate open, and the cows took advantage. Workers quickly rounded up 200 animals, but three hovered around a bull in a nearby pasture. The male later charged Ed's truck and caused $5,000 in damages.

As with the characters in Groundhog Day, the crazy days go on and on.

"Unlike most businesses, we run 24 hours a day, every day of the year. We're open holidays, weekends and weeknights. We never close," Ed says.

"The cows won't let us." ■

Clint Morrison, plant manager of Behlen Manufacturing Co. in Baker City, speaks during a public hearing of the Joint Committee on Carbon Reduction February 25 at the Baker Community Events Center. Morrison said the emission plan will drive up fuel costs and is essentially a new tax.

Few Believe Cap-and-Trade Legislation Will Have Positive Impact on Rural Oregon

By Andrew Cutler

It won't work.

That is the prevailing opinion by local officials and residents of House Bill 2020, the proposed cap-and-trade bill under consideration in the Oregon Legislature.

House Bill 2020 is designed to create a mandatory, statewide greenhouse gas emission-reduction plan. The emission specifically targets companies that discharge more than 25,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents each year. Carbon dioxide equivalents are a calculation used to measure how much greenhouse gas is entering the atmosphere.

Bill supporters contend it will help the environment and curb climate change. Opponents insist the plan will boost fuel prices, hurt the economy, and drive people and businesses out of state.

The proposed legislation could be especially acute for Ash Grove Cement, one of the biggest employers in Baker County. Company officials assert the proposed bill will create an unfair trade playing field with China.

"Our plant cannot remain competitive if additional costs are imposed that are not imposed on our competitors," said Terry Kerby, plant manager for Ash Grove Cement.

Ash Grove Cement is a 137-year-old company that employs 116 people at its Durkee plant and carries an annual payroll of $13 million. Ash Grove Cement is also the third-largest property taxpayer in Baker County.

In submitted testimony, Curtis D. Lesslie, vice president of environmental affairs for Ash Grove Cement, warned the proposed legislation will not significantly affect climate change and will create job losses.

"The unintended consequence of this policy will be a net increase rather than a decrease in global carbon dioxide emissions," Lesslie wrote. "Every time a ton of Chinese cement is used in Oregon, instead of Oregon-made cement, the environment sees roughly 760 pounds of (carbon dioxide) that would not occur if that ton of cement were made in Oregon.

"Those 116 jobs in Durkee will be lost permanently if the carbon polices under discussion are applied to Oregon cement operations."

Clint Morrison, plant manager of Behlen Manufacturing Co. in Baker City, said the emission plan will drive up fuel costs and is essentially a new tax.

"Why would we look to impose another tax on fuel when we are already high compared to the rest of the country?" asked Morrison,

who referred not only to transportation but also income and property taxes that are higher than neighboring states.

Morrison said the proposed bill will not "reduce emissions as it says it will."

Longtime North Powder rancher Cheryl Martin—who said her family first came to the Baker Valley in the 1860s—said the emissions plan misses the mark.

"It will do so much more damage to the citizens than just cripple us financially," she said. "It is riddled with regulations."

Sandi Fuller, plant manager of Marvin Wood Products in Baker City, also said the proposed legislation as written could have a negative impact on her company.

"We have a small carbon footprint, but as one of the larger private businesses in the county, we will be impacted by increased utility and fuel costs," she said. "We ship our product by truck to our locations in Minnesota and Tennessee, so an increase in fuel costs would be significant role in remaining competitive. Oregon is not a highly populated state and is a small contributor to the global carbon emissions problem. The additional costs to individuals and businesses will not be offset by the gain in improved environmental quality."

On the other side of this issue, Susan Fouty—a water resources specialist who lived in Baker County for 17 years—said she supports the emissions proposal.

"I appreciate the concerns related to rising costs," she said. "However, as a water resource specialist, I have been aware of the problem of drought. Climate change means these droughts will be more extreme in the future."

An overflow crowd of approximately 300 people filled the Baker Community Events Center for an hour-long hearing with the Joint Committee on Carbon Reduction. About 25 people testified to the committee by video connection, with most expressing concerns about the bill and the harm it would do in Eastern Oregon.

Fouty said costs of using fossil fuels "are not cheap and have only appeared cheap because real costs of those fuels have been pawned off on us as health issues, polluted soil, water and air and even more extreme weather and rising economic losses."

However, Baker County Commission Chairman Bill Harvey said the proposed bill affects everyone.

"There is nothing in there we can find that is good for us," he said.

Don McGinn, managing partner of McGinn Brothers' Trucking and Northwest Beef Express based in Haines, said he wonders if the technology is available to support the bill's intentions.

"We need to work on cleaner air, but we have to have the technology first," he said.

According to the Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon emitted about 65 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents in 2017. By way of comparison, total global emissions were about 37 billion metric tons. That means Oregon accounts for less than two-tenths of 1 percent of global emissions.

When Oregon Department of Environmental Quality Director Richard Whitman was asked by the Joint Committee on Carbon Reduction what impact on global carbon would occur if Oregon were to reduce its emissions to zero, he responded, "Oregon's portion of global carbon emissions is, I'll use the wordminuscule.'"

Most who have spoken out believe amendments are needed to this bill. Sen. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, and Rep. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, agree. Finding a balance between the negative impact on local jobs and businesses with reducing carbon emissions will not be easy or pain-free.

OTEC is following this important issue closely and remains committed to informing members of developments that would affect the cost and reliability of electricity.

OTEC can use your help. Go to www.oreca-action.org to make sure your legislators know you are watching. ■

For news and contact information for senators and representatives, go to www.oregonlegislature.gov.

OTEC Partner Agencies Prepare for Wildfire Season

By Susan Parrish

Eastern Oregon's wildfire season typically starts in late June, but rural and municipal fire departments and state and federal agencies in Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative's service area begin planning and training for the next fire season in the fall after fire season ends.

"It's becoming less and less fire season, but more a fire year," says Sarah Bush, a forest fuels specialist for the Malheur National Forest in John Day.

The Cornet-Windy Ridge Fire near Durkee in 2015 consumed an estimated 96,762 acres. The fire was caused by lightning.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Forest Service

Training for Wildfire Season

In the spring, the final push to prepare for the year's first wildland fire begins. Extensive annual training is required for all returning firefighters and new recruits, regardless of the size of a community or its location.

"All of us are doing continuing education and fire refreshers as wildland firefighters," says Mitch Williams, wildland fire protection supervisor for Oregon Department of Forestry in Union County.

Refresher training includes topography, weather, fuels and putting up a fire shelter, says Gary Timm, Baker County's deputy director of emergency management and fire division manager.

Gary coordinates training with federal and state agencies and 12 local fire departments. The annual Wildfire Academy provides 40 hours of classroom training. Agencies and fire departments from around the region will attend this year's academy in Sumpter.

Every April, agencies and fire departments gather to participate in wildfire simulations. Baker County Fire Service test performance day provides training on structural fires. One component focuses on wildland/urban interface. Firefighters respond to protecting a home from a mock wildland fire. Smoke machines make the exercise more realistic.

"Our training is no different from anywhere else in the state as far as requirements," says Jerry Hampton, Haines fire chief and Baker County fire defense chairman. "Our training hours have to be kept up for certification."

In June, new firefighters must participate in Guard School—a weeklong training that includes both classroom instruction and hands-on application. Firefighters practice using a Pulaski—a combination axe and adze—to create fire breaks by digging soil and chopping wood and a Hazel Hoe—or adze hoe—to dig trenches. They use drip torches to start back burns.

"They'll practice putting in a hand line to stop the fire from spreading when you can't bring in an engine," Sarah says.

In Grant County, Guard School is at Lake Creek Camp on U.S. Forest Service land.

In Union County, about 100 entry-level firefighters will attend a weeklong training starting June 17 at Eastern Oregon University. The interagency training is a partnership with ODF, USFS, Bureau of Land Management, Washington Department of Natural Resources and local rural fire departments.

Some Eastern Oregon wildland firefighters are prison inmates. Every spring, Gary and ODF staff conduct wildland fire training in Powder River Correctional Facility in Baker City and Snake River

Correctional Facility in Ontario. When inmate firefighters are dispatched to an incident, some dig fire lines and others provide fire camp support by making meals for fire crews.

Updating Equipment and Fire Plans

Fire departments and agencies continually update equipment and gear.

"We're always updating our fleet of engines and equipment," Mitch says. "Each station does that each spring."

Fire crews must bring their own water supply. Union Fire Chief Tod Hull's department bought a 2,500-gallon tanker last year and a 2,000-gallon tanker the previous year. The new tankers can be driven off road and get closer to a fire.

"We can dump 2,000 or 3,000 gallons of water into the porta-tanks so we can keep fighting the fire," Tod says.

Last year, Gary worked with the Haines Fire Department to put in a water well—a fill station—to make it easier for fire crews to access water in the Haines service area.

To make a plan of attack in case of wildland fire, most counties gather local, state and federal agencies to develop a community wildfire protection plan, which considers topography, fuels resources and more to assess wildfire risk. Baker County typically updates its plan about every five years.

Recruiting New Firefighters

Rural fire departments rely solely on volunteer firefighters, but the number of rural firefighters has dwindled.

Eight years ago, Union Fire Department had 26 volunteer firefighters. Now it has only 10. Volunteer firefighters must be at least 18 years old.

"We're not getting the volunteer response we used to get," Tod says. "All departments are looking for more volunteers who are willing to train."

"Volunteering takes many hours to get the certification," says Jerry Hampton, Haines fire chief. "It takes dedication."

Chris Cook, a wildland fire supervisor for ODF in Grant County, has 21 employees on eight engines, but fire crews ramp up during the summer when local residents and firefighters from outside the area join the ranks. Many wildland firefighters are young adults, including college students and graduating high school seniors. Many are from Eastern Oregon.

Smoke rises into the sky from the Canyon Creek Complex Fire outside of John Day. The 2015 fire destroyed 43 homes and nearly 100 barns, workshops and other structures. The fire burned through 110,000 acres of private and federal forest and cost $31.5 million to put out.

Sarah says USFS starts recruiting as early as October.

"We're working on securing an AmeriCorps crew of 18- to 24-year-olds to help us with fire suppression from the end of April through August," Sarah says. "It helps us grow our capacity to manage wildfire."

When a wildfire starts in rural areas, agencies and fire departments work together.

"The fire really doesn't care whose property it starts on," says Ron Smith, the John Day fire chief and the district chief for the Grant County Fire Defense District. "We have a well-oiled machine to share resources."

How severe will the 2019 wildfire season be? Although 2018 was not a big wildfire year in Eastern Oregon, 2015 was a devastating fire year, particularly in Grant and Baker counties. Many factors—such as spring rainfall levels and summer lightning strikes—contribute to the severity of wildfire season. Especially in the spring, officials don't attempt to predict the outlook of fire season.

"In November, I can tell you what the 2019 fire season will be," Ron says. ■

OTEC Requirements

In accordance with industrial fire precaution levels set by the U.S. Forest Service and the Oregon Department of Forestry, Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative line crews take necessary precautions during fire season.

According to Pat McCluskey, OTEC's southern division superintendent, when fire restrictions are in place through the U.S. Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management, the cooperative must have its 250-gallon water truck on hand when line work is being conducted on USFS or BLM land.

When higher fire levels are in effect, the water truck is required to be onsite at all times, and there is a required fire watch after work is completed.

From left, The Trail Youth Executive Director Kristen Zuray, Programs Director Tonya Guinn and Operations Director Wendy Laxton want teens to have a safe place to hang out.

A Local Place to Call Home

Doughnuts, warm coffee and patience win the hearts of local youth

By Anne Herman

Picture several teens out on a trail on a cold, dark, rainy day. Some are there because they have no place else to go. They feel discouraged and lost. Letters carved into a bench nearby read, "society's trash" and "worthless."

Then a car pulls up. Smiling women offer doughnuts and specialty coffee. In the trunk, they have white chocolate and raspberry flavorings for the coffee, and they're taking orders. It's all free.

"Why are you doing this?" asks one of the teens.

"Because we want everyone to know they are loved and valued," one of the women replies.

The young man tears up.

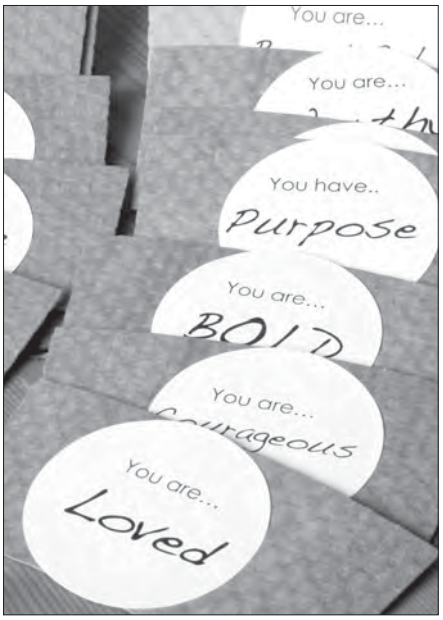
"I never heard that before," he says.

Kristen Zuray began walking the trail and talking with kids about five years ago with her husband, Josh. Along the way, Tonya Guinn and Wendy Laxton joined the team. They say it took about six months to gain the kids' trust, but they kept showing up every week with doughnuts and coffee.

"After a while, they knew they could count on us," Tonya says.

As they created trusting relationships with the youth, the kids' stories came out. Some of them were homeless, living on the trail because they had nowhere else to go. Some were using drugs.

Kristen, Josh, Wendy and Tonya formed a nonprofit, The Trail Youth, and developed a network of support services for the kids. The organization's website, www.trailyouth.com, offers resources for



The Trail Youth Coffee Home building was renovated by "Returning the Favor with Mike Rowe," a program that helps organizations that support their communities. Above, right, coffee sleeves have encouraging messages meant to inspire and share cheer with customers.

food, shelter, jobs, transportation, social services, medical and mental health care, and addiction counseling.

Word got around.

Kristen says one boy told her he needed help getting to rehab. They were able to get him into rehab in Shelton that same evening.

"Knowing the needs of the person, you can just wrap your arms around them," Tonya says.

One young man they helped came back to show the women his badge when he got a job.

The Trail Youth team took to staging celebrations right there on the trail. They would put up a tent and celebrate Christmas or someone's graduation, complete with a cake.

"We'd celebrate anything," Kristen says.

They decided to upgrade to a permanent shelter. In the summer of 2017, they found a vacant building next to Scott's Dairy Freeze in North Bend. They applied for a grant from King County's Best Start for Youth program, and got it in October. They leased the building in February 2018, expecting renovations to take about a year.

About the time they signed the lease, Kristen got a phone call from New York. The caller said he was from a small startup social media company, and they wanted to make a documentary about The Trail Youth.

Tonya and Wendy knew the truth. The small startup was actually the popular Facebook Watch show, "Returning the Favor with Mike Rowe." It gives unexpected gifts to organizations doing good work in the community. While Kristen's friends were working hard to keep the secret, Mike and his crew remodeled the building in just a few weeks.

"I thought it was a scam," Kristin says. "I thought, 'Whatever. I'll just play along with it.' "

The contractor on the project made up a story that the building was overrun with dangerous black mold. He told Kristen not to enter the building no matter what.

During the remodeling, producers wanted to film Kristen inside the building. Worried by warnings about mold, Kristen actually had to be pushed inside. There she found a beautiful, finished coffee house and a room full of friends.

Teens now have a place to go for free coffee, hot chocolate or soda. It's a warm, cozy, safe space.

Although the target age group is 13 to 19, everyone is welcome.

"We welcome all youth, not just the troubled or homeless," Kristen says.

"We're about removing labels and restoring value," Tonya adds.

They say their goal is for the youth to take ownership of this place because it is their place. The Trail Youth offers mentorship, leadership training, barista training, free music lessons and open mic events.

The group is committed to spreading its message to everyone. The coffee house, open to the public from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m., puts a sticker on each cup of coffee served. They say things like "You are loved," "You have purpose," or "Don't forget to dream."

Trail Youth sell bags of coffee with "You are valued" on the label.

"Our mission is to remove negative labeling and put positive labeling onto people—everyone," Kristen says. ■

"I'm not upset with the power company. They're heroes."

Two Oregon electric co-ops took a heavy blow this winter, but picked themselves up with true grit, a relentless spirit, constant communication and a lot of help

By Ted Case

In late February, a weekend snowstorm walloped Douglas and Lane counties, nearly leveling the infrastructure of two electric cooperatives that serve those areas. The significant accumulation of wet, heavy snow snapped giant Douglas fir trees like matchsticks, leaving a snarl of power lines across roads that were largely inaccessible.

Todd Munsey of Douglas Electric Cooperative summed it up: "We have seen thousands of downed trees, hundreds of broken poles and miles of wire lying on the ground."

Lane Electric reported widespread outages, with more than 8,000 members without power as trees continued to topple to the ground, cutting off access to Highway 58—a crucial route of transportation for many members, including those who live in Oakridge.

The Bonneville Power Administration—whose high-voltage lines help power the system—also experienced significant destruction to its system.

What followed for both Douglas Electric and Lane Electric was the best of the cooperative spirit.

Outside crews assisted, equipment was dispatched, and members of the cooperative who were without power hunkered down and made the best of a difficult situation, knowing their cooperative was working day and night to restore the power.

Through it all, electric co-op leaders constantly communicated with their members via social media and the press, updating the situation no matter how painful the news.

Douglas Electric member Debra Kohler told KVAL-Eugene, "I'm not upset with the power company. I'm not complaining. They're heroes. I can't believe they've done what they've done. If my kitchen worked, I'd be cooking and bringing them food."

On March 10, after 14 days of outages, Lane Electric announced its restoration was complete. The co-op thanked the 10 electric utilities that sent crews, along with other contractors who assisted during the effort.

At press time, Douglas Electric continued to make progress in some of its most inaccessible areas. The American Red Cross shelter at Elkton High School had been serving dinner to 100 people each night, but was expected to close sooner than expected because many who were visiting it for services had their power restored. ■

One of many broken transmission poles litters a right-of-way west of Elkton.

Photo by Matt Yates

Apprentice Lineman Jeremy Sacket checks a transformer for damage.

Photo by Joy McMullin

A broken pole carrying both transmission and distribution lines complicated the repair.

Photo by Matt Yates

Structures with both transmission and distribution lines were brought down during the late February storm.

Photo by Matt Yates