

# Keep on Truckin'

Condon family understands the importance of work and community

By Jody Foss

It's been said that a family that plays together stays together. But how about a family that also works together?

Watkins Trucking, started in 1988 by Rick and Leah Watkins of Condon, is a family business. Sons Jason, 33, and Jared, 27, work alongside their parents to keep their three grain trucks loaded and on the road. The company hauls grain for Mid Columbia Producers from its elevators in Morrow, Wasco and Gilliam counties to barges in Arlington, Biggs and The Dalles.

The family recently added three new endeavors: Countryside Dispatch Inc., Countryside Transport and Watkins Excavating LLC. With four businesses to keep organized, there is always plenty of work to do.

When Rick and Leah met in

1982, they were both driving truck during the harvest season. They married in 1985.

"I am grateful that 30-some years ago my parents had enough ambition and drive to start the business," Jason says. "I feel fortunate that they struggled through and made it happen, and were able to give my brother and I an opportunity to come work for them. I have a tremendous amount of respect for my parents for it, too. I remember when I was younger it wasn't always easy."

Jason started driving with Rick when he was 19. After graduating from Condon High School in 2004, he attended Eastern Oregon University in La Grande for a year. He met his wife, Shaina, in 2007. They married in 2012. Jason and Shaina have two children: Cami,

6, and Tucker, 4.

Jared graduated from Condon High school in 2011. His wife, Delaney, graduated the previous year. The couple have three children: Jack, 8; Grey, 6; and Blair, 2.

In November 2017, Shaina brought up the idea of starting a freight brokerage. She had previously worked for a freight brokerage and was able to answer Leah's questions about the ins and



outs of the business.

“My stepdad, Jack Ingram, played a huge part in my desire to be a broker, working for him at WI Logistics driving truck starting in 2005 and then working in the office in 2013,” Shaina says.

Leah was interested. After meeting with the director of the Port of Arlington, she and Shaina approached Delaney with the business idea. She came on board.

“I was excited about this business opportunity and was honored they wanted me to be a part of it,” Delaney says.

At the beginning of 2018, the Watkins were awarded a startup grant from the Port of Arlington to get Countryside Dispatch

Inc. off the ground. With the help of the grant, Leah and Shaina attended a five-day freight brokerage seminar in Phoenix and were awarded certificates for master brokers.

“There were many truck drivers in the class,” Leah says. “There were also some people who knew nothing about the transportation business. Our experience in the transportation industry helped us to be better freight brokers. When we talk to carriers we can say, ‘We know because we have done it.’”

Leah brought her expertise in bookkeeping and running a business to the table. Delaney came on board with computer skills and experience in insurance and public relations.

“With the three of us together, we are a full circle of what it takes and what we need to get things done,” Shaina says. “The best part is that we are family and we really do work very well together.”

Jason, Shaina, Delaney and Jared have all coached kids’ sports and are involved in the Condon Youth Baseball Organization. They follow in the footsteps of Rick and Leah, who helped build two new Little League fields.

“It’s really rewarding to watch the Watkins grandchildren play on the fields that Rick and I helped develop,” Leah says.

For the Watkins family, it’s not just about work. It’s about community.

The family helped organize the annual Four-Wheeler Rodeo, sponsored by the Gilliam County Fair board, of which Leah is a member. Leah and Shaina serve the community as volunteer emergency medical technicians. Jason and Shaina serve on the Gilliam County Volunteer Fire Department.

Leah has served as a 4-H leader and school board member, and is a founding member of the Condon Education Foundation and the Condon Booster Club. Delaney served on the Chamber of Commerce board. Shaina and Delaney currently serve on the Condon Childcare board.

“I love that we get to do all of this together and teach our kids the value of being community volunteers,” Delaney says.

Recently, the Chamber of Commerce voted Watkins Trucking and Countryside Dispatch outstanding business of the year.

“They are truly what makes Condon so special,” says K’lynn Lane of the chamber. “They work hard and are the first ones you call when you need a hand.”

Jason acknowledges his parents’ dedication.

“My parents wanted to create a better life for my brother and me, and I want to create a better life for my kids,” he says. “It’s all about the future. It’s a collective thing. It takes all of us to make it work.” ■



The Watkins family stands with its new flatbed truck and trailer in Condon. PHOTO COURTESY OF CONDON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

# A Facility for the Future

By Rodger Nichols

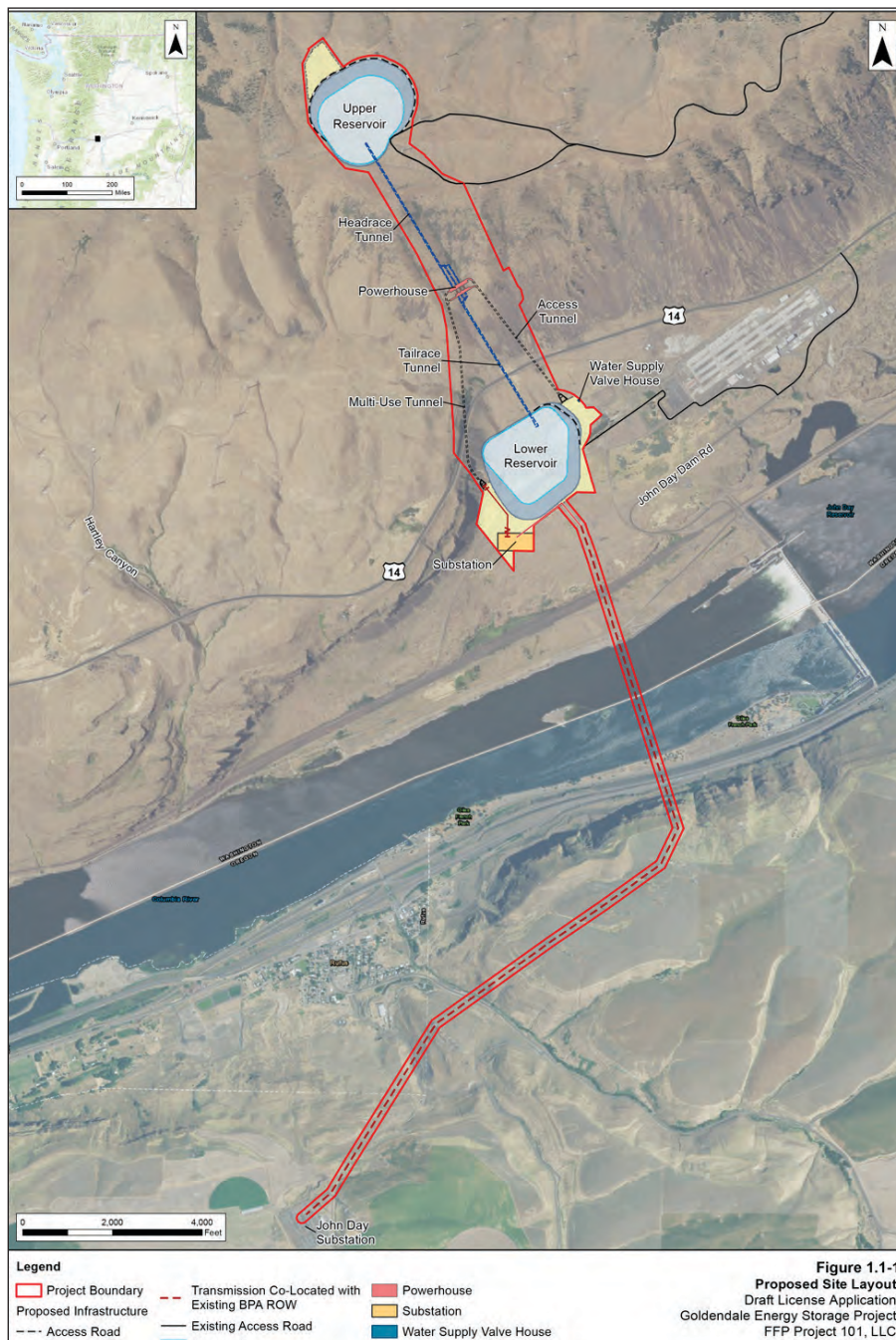
A proposed new project near the John Day Dam could offer the Columbia Gorge and beyond a tremendous long-term economic benefit and support renewable power production both directly and indirectly.

The project would create a hydroelectric pumped storage facility. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission defines the concept as follows:

“Pumped storage projects move water between two reservoirs located at different elevations (i.e., an upper and lower reservoir) to store energy and generate electricity. Generally, when electricity demand is low (e.g., at night), excess electric generation capacity is used to pump water from the lower reservoir to the upper reservoir. When electricity demand is high, the stored water is released from the upper reservoir to the lower reservoir through a turbine to generate electricity.”

The key word is “excess.” Yes, it takes more energy to pump water uphill than is gained by generation as it flows back down through the turbines—about 20% of the energy flowing into the system is lost. But the process can capture and store energy that would otherwise be wasted. For example, many solar panel farms in California generate more energy than can be used during the day. That excess energy can be saved in the upper reservoir during the day. At night, when the solar panels can't operate, water can be let down through turbines to the lower reservoir and generate electricity into the system.

The concept has been used since the 1890s in parts of Europe, and there are several working systems in the United States. The emphasis in recent years has been to support solar and wind power renewables subsidized by generous tax-credit benefits.



**A pump storage map outlines details of the proposed Klickitat County project.**

COURTESY OF ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

The problem with many renewable energy sources is that the sun doesn't always shine, and the wind doesn't always blow. Utilities that use those variable resources must balance them with customer demands, which reach peak amounts in cold Northwest winters.

Customers depend on their electrical service to provide a steady supply of electricity, not a supply that varies with wind or sunlight. To keep that flow constant, utilities use power plants that provide a constant output. That category includes hydropower from dams, power plants that

burn fossil fuels or biomass, nuclear plants, geothermal energy and pumped storage. All can generate that steady flow, independent of the weather or time of day.

There are disadvantages for each. Plants that burn anything generate pollution and greenhouse gases and affect fish runs. Geothermal and pumped storage projects are expensive.

Klickitat PUD in Goldendale, Washington, has identified a geographically ideal spot for the project and has been advocating the idea for more than a decade. Because of the cost—somewhere north

of \$2 billion—the PUD does not have the resources to pursue the project itself. The PUD received preliminary approval for the concept and kept the idea alive until major investors could be found.

Contractor Rye Development and utility National Grid took an interest in the project in 2018. Both companies have deep pockets. National Grid serves multiple states in the northeast United States and nearly all of England as well. In December, the companies filed a 500-plus page draft license application with FERC. A 90-day public comment period ends March 12, and the companies will respond. Once FERC determines the application is complete, the agency will evaluate the details and decide whether to issue a license.

Rye and National Grid are bearing the costs of construction and operation. Klickitat PUD customers will not have any rate increases due to the project. In fact, once the project is licensed, Rye and National Grid will reimburse KPUD for all costs related to keeping it alive all these years. The PUD has received a \$1 million grant for further studies from the state of Washington. Those funds will be passed through to consultants, and the PUD will be reimbursed for administrative costs.

The location has been identified as one of the best suited in the United States. The facility would be on part of the old Goldendale aluminum plant site, with two 60-acre ponds, each 170 to 180 feet deep. One pond would be on the plant site and another 2,400 feet on the bluff. Large tunnels will be drilled inside the bluff: one for water being pumped upward and one with turbines to generate the water being released from the upper pond. All the works would be underground. Only the ponds would be visible on the surface.

The site has many advantages. Geographically, it provides 2,400 feet of vertical change in a short horizontal distance. The property has a single owner. There are major electrical transmission lines already on the site from serving the aluminum company. There is a nearby source of water in the Columbia River for the initial fill. There are no problems with water rights, either, because Klickitat PUD gained significant water rights to the Columbia River



**Washington Senator Maria Cantwell, flanked by Klickitat County Commissioner Dave Sauter, left, and Klickitat PUD General Manager Jim Smith, visits the 2,400-foot-high bluff at the proposed pumped storage site on a windy day in September 2019. PHOTO BY RODGER NICHOLS**

when the aluminum plant shut down. That's important for the initial fill. Beyond that, the facility will only need to add a modest amount of water each year due to evaporation.

The proposed timeline for the project would be to have a permit by 2022. Main construction would take four years, and operational startup would be in 2028.

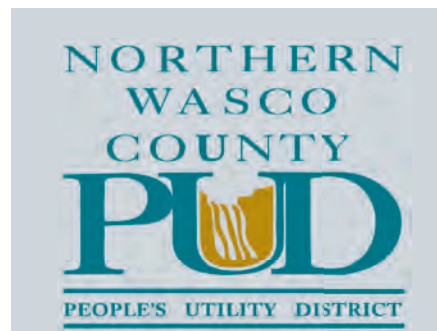
Goldendale Mayor Mike Canon calls the FERC filing “an incredible achievement,” and cites those “who have worked so hard for so long to bring this about.”

Taxing districts in the county would have an estimated \$14 million in revenue, but the financial impact to the region goes far beyond Klickitat County.

Construction would bring 3,000 temporary jobs for several years and 30 permanent jobs on completion. There's not enough housing in Klickitat County for that many, and the hope is many workers would choose to live in The Dalles and boost the local economy.

The region would benefit directly from those well-paid jobs. Indirectly, the project would provide up to 1,200 megawatts for 12 hours of steady power production that could offset the fluctuations of new wind and solar projects. That, in turn, adds

more jobs and more welcome tax revenue. Wasco County has no wind or solar projects in operation, though several are proposed. The pumped storage project could help those projects come to fruition. ■



## Community Calendar

- ▶ Gorge Roller Derby, double header, February 8. Doors open at 4 p.m., but begins at 5 p.m., The Dalles Readiness Center.
- ▶ The Dalles City Council meets the second and fourth Monday of each month at 5:30 p.m., with the exception of August and holidays, at City Hall.
- ▶ The Board of County Commissioners meets the first and third Wednesdays of each month at Wasco County Courthouse.



# For the Good of All

In today's political climate, society often seems fractured and divided. That's not always the case for local governments.

### Photos and story by Rodger Nichols

Cooperation for the common good isn't lost on local officials in Wasco County. One of the best examples is a significant addition planned for Columbia Gorge Community College.

CGCC President Marta Yera Cronin praised the level of local cooperation.

"Something that became immediately evident to me upon my arrival last July was that one of the major strengths of this community is the level of collaboration between agencies," she says. "I had never before experienced collaboration to such an incredible degree. Clearly, it is what really moves the needle community-wide."

The story begins in 2013, when Oregon state Reps. John Huffman of The Dalles and Mark Johnson of Hood River secured a \$7.32 million allocation from the state for an advanced technology center

at CGCC's Hood River campus, if the college could raise a matching amount. Despite concerted effort, the college did not find a funding source for a match of that size. In 2015, however, legislators renewed the allocation and set a timeline with an expiration date.

Last year, as the new deadline approached, local governments found ways to work together to meet the goal.

A key piece of the economic puzzle was income from the local Enterprise Zone, a program that rewards companies that invest locally by not taxing improvements on the land for as long as 15 years. In partial return for lost tax revenue, companies seeking Enterprise Zone tax deals must negotiate payments with local Enterprise Zone sponsors. Locally, the zone has been jointly administered by Wasco County and the City of The Dalles until recently, when the zone was expanded and the Port of The Dalles joined the administration of newer agreements.

In the past, funds from this source have been used to pay off bonds issued to extend The Dalles city water out to the Discovery Center, to build a practice fire tower for Mid-Columbia Fire & Rescue and to improve curb appeal for schools in North Wasco County School District.

The latest 15-year tax abatement agreement was with Design LLC on behalf of Google for its newest construction. The city, county and port agreed to allocate a significant portion of the payments from Google to pay off revenue bonds issued to raise \$3.5 million toward the required match. In February 2019, the college issued a full faith and credit bond obligation to complete the match.

With the total \$14.6 million secured, the college will build a 24,000-square-foot skill center. It's designed to give students hands-on practical training in skilled professions—initially construction trades, maintenance and repair on aircraft, and HVAC installation.

This skill center furthers CGCC's idea of "middle college" by offering dual enrollment in both high school and college. As early as 2016, some students received their CGCC two-year diploma and their high school diploma in the same week.

The college also will add a student housing complex. In a survey last year, nearly three-quarters of the students who responded said finding affordable housing in the area was a challenge. More than 90% said having on-campus student housing would make CGCC more attractive to prospective students. But the real motivator for housing was the shocking discovery that 10% of students surveyed said they were staying in a shelter, a car or on the street.

None of the bonds issued for the local match will cost local taxpayers a dime. Enterprise Zone funds will cover \$3.5 million, while tuition and student housing rental revenue will pay off \$3.8 million. The state's share of \$7.32 million is part of a statewide bond issuance. The college is not obligated to repay that.

There has been marked cooperation all along. Both North Wasco County School District and Mid-Columbia Fire & Rescue have projects that could use some of the zone funding, but each sent letters of support for the college project as the highest local need. The Port of The Dalles will provide bridge funding of up to \$1.5 million if needed during construction. In all the cases, the public agency votes to do so were unanimous.

Other agencies are involved as well.

Mid-Columbia Economic Development District



specifically highlighted development of the Columbia Gorge Community College Student Housing and Skills Center in its annual ranking of needed projects.

The Federal Aviation Administration, which tests and licenses aircraft mechanics, has been supportive.

"They came from Portland twice to walk us through the process of setting up an approved school," says CGCC Outreach Coordinator Dan Spatz.

The Columbia Gorge Regional Airport, jointly owned by the city of The Dalles and Klickitat, supports the project because it will eventually provide skilled mechanics as the airport.

Construction hasn't yet begun. The college is still in the design phase of the project, with construction beginning later this year and completed by 2022. In a nod to college history, the training facility will be known as the Treaty Oak Regional Skills Center. Prior to 1989, CGCC was known as Treaty Oak.

"I don't think I have had a conversation with a person who did not agree that this skills center is really needed to train workers for the fastest-growing industries in the Gorge and will have a profound impact on the local economy," Marta says.

An added benefit to having student housing available, she says, is the ability to serve students in the outlying areas who may not be able to commute or to take online classes.

"It's all about improving the community," says Wasco County Commission Chair Steve Kramer. "It's a win-win-win for everybody." ■

**Columbia Gorge Community College will add a skills center and student housing to its campus, thanks to cooperation from a number of local entities.**

# In the Spotlight



Biologists count deer at night to assess the health of herd

## By Craig Reed

The beams from spotlights pointed out the windows on both sides of the pickup can reach out to about 200 yards.

The pickup slowly moves along the forest road. The spotlights continue to shine across open areas and into the trees in hopes of lighting up the eyes of wildlife.

When those eyes reflect the light, the pickup stops. Binoculars are used to identify the animal in the spotlight beam. The goal is to count

blacktail and whitetail deer and identify them as bucks, does or fawns.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologists carry out this task in March and November. The biologists drive the routes and count after dark because that is when most deer are up and feeding after being bedded down through the day.

“We don’t work at night for the fun of it,” says DeWaine Jackson, ODFW’s west region wildlife research supervisor. “Working at night is the most obvious time to collect the data

we need for deer management practices.”

To not be confused with illegal spotlighting and poaching, the ODFW rigs sport an amber flashing light on the cab roof, flashing hazard lights and a tailgate-sized “Deer Survey” sign on the back when working. The Oregon State Police and the Douglas County Sheriff’s Office are also notified in advance of the deer survey routes so officers can explain the situation if they receive calls about spotlighting.

Many routes are in Douglas Electric Cooperative service territory, so residents are asked to double check what they see before calling in about what they might have perceived as an illegal spotlighting situation.

“We’re trying to display that we’re doing something of an official nature,” says Tod Lum, the Douglas District wildlife biologist. “Most poachers don’t want to attract attention. But if there are concerns, the public should call 911 and report what they’ve seen.”

The dispatcher can tell them

*“We don’t work at night for the fun of it. Working at night is the most obvious time to collect the data we need for deer management practices.”*

—DEWAINE JACKSON



**LEFT:** Jay Potter, left, an Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife wildlife technician, and Tod Lum, the Douglas District wildlife biologist, prepare a pickup for a nighttime deer spotlighting survey. PHOTO BY CRAIG REED

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** A deer is caught in the spotlight while the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife staff conduct their annual count. PHOTO COURTESY OF ODFW

if ODFW is out spotlighting. Don’t approach a vehicle that is spotlighting because if it is not an official activity, there’s a good chance they are armed and doing something they shouldn’t be doing, Tod says. Report the situation with as much information as possible, including the vehicle license plate and description.

Tod says these deer surveys are important to better understand deer health. He has traveled the survey routes since joining the Roseburg ODFW office 17 years ago.

“We’re trying to document the presence of deer, their numbers over time,” he says. “In the fall, we’re specifically looking to determine buck and fawn ratios.”

The survey is also to see if deer numbers have increased after 90 cougars were removed from a 1,500-square-mile area east of Interstate 5 from Douglas County’s southern border to its northern border. The cougars were removed because of livestock losses, but deer could also benefit.

“We’re still working on the numbers to determine that benefit for deer,” Tod says.

DeWaine says the survey data gathered on blacktail deer is important to determine bag limits during hunting season, buck and doe harvest rates and the type of weapon that can be used at specific times among other regulations.

Tod admits that at times residents may be alarmed at

passing spotlight beams.

“The silver lining is that landowners care about the resources,” he says. “I’m happy to report that attitude is out there and is prevalent.”

Veril Nelson, a rancher east of Sutherlin, says it is important to support the work of the ODFW biologists. He says most of the deer he sees on his property are in his headlights at night.

“There is more wildlife out at night than in the daylight hours, so it’s understandable why they spotlight at night,” Veril says. “Those counts are important in order to manage the population.”

Steve Denney, a resident of the Lookingglass Valley, says he understands the nighttime activity is important.

“Those deer counts are necessary to set hunting seasons and to determine habitat issues,” he says.

Tod says the surveys from

the past few years indicate blacktail deer have slowly recovered from a major die-off several years ago during a summer of severe drought. At that time, hundreds of deer coming to stagnant water were bitten by midges that carried epizootic hemorrhagic disease.

“Over 300 deer that we know of died,” Tod says. “The disease killed both blacktail and whitetail.”

Official spotlighting counts show improved numbers in both populations.

“What we’re doing is scientifically based,” DeWaine says. “By spotlighting, we’re trying to gather and provide the information that will benefit all of our constituent groups. From a research point of view, the data train is important for the agency to be able to look at changes in deer trends across different landscapes and in different habitats.” ■

# New Crew on Board

Columbia Power adds youth and talent to its staff



Garrett Warner, left, is new to his position at Columbia Power Cooperative. Jack Jewell has been on the co-op's line crew for three years.



## Stories and photo by Jody Foss

It's 8 a.m. at Columbia Power Co-op. After the morning meeting, the crew will head out to various jobs of the day.

Longtime lineman Gary Warner's son, Garrett, recently joined the ranks. Three years ago, another local young man from Monument, Jack Jewell, joined the crew. Together, they add personality and skills to the Columbia Power team.

"We are excited to have both of the guys working for us," says Manager Troy Cox. "They will be going through our apprentice program to get their journeyman card."

Jack lived on Cupper Creek until he was 5, when the family bought part of the family ranch from his uncle. Since then, Jack has lived on the ranch on the North Fork of the John Day. He graduated from Monument High School in 2014.

Jack was thrilled when the Columbia Power Co-op job opened. He was hired full time in April 2016.

"It was an opportunity to stay home and stay where I was raised," he says. "I love the outdoors, hunting and fishing, and I love working with the animals. It's just a quiet place to live, not a lot of people. I like coming home and being home every night."

Jack has always worked with his parents on the ranch, raising hay and Charolais cattle.

"It's what we raised when I was little, so that is what I stuck with," he says.

Shortly after Jack's high school graduation, his father, Arlot, was diagnosed with cancer. After a

five-and-a-half-year fight, Arlot died September 14, 2019.

Before his father died, Jack married his wife, Teawna, on the family ranch.

"That is why we didn't wait," Jack says, "so my dad could be there."

Jack and Teawna plan to build a house next year on the family property across the highway from the main house.

"It is pretty surprising that I had an opportunity to stay home," Jack says of his co-op job.

He had been helping his mother, Carrie, with the cattle and hay production when the job came up.

"I didn't know a lot about electricity and power lines before, and I have learned a lot," Jack says. "The guys teach me a lot. They are a lot of good people to work with."

Jack enjoys that every day is a little different. They might be doing "hot work," making new lines or rebuilding lines.

"It's different almost every day," he says. "We usually ride in three trucks so we get to drive with different guys on the crew."

Jack says Troy and Josh Hamilton have been helpful teaching him about plumbing supplies and pumps.

"I learn something new every day," he says.

The co-op's newest employee, Garrett Warner, grew up hanging around the co-op and knew the linemen his father worked with.

By the time he graduated from Monument High School in 2016, he had already decided he wanted to do line work. He took a brief detour first.

"I went straight to work logging with my stepdad, Chad Engle," he

says. "I had to wait until I turned 18 to go to lineman school."

Garrett attended Northwest Lineman College in Meridian, Idaho.

"It was a nice experience being in town for a little bit, but I got tired of it quick," he says.

He did line work for two major contractors for Idaho Power for two-and-a-half years.

"I caught word that there was a three-month position open at the co-op for groundwork," Garrett says. "They weren't sure if it was going to turn into full time or not. I knew this is where I wanted to be. It was a good step to get my foot in the door, so I applied for it."

Garrett started his job at the co-op August 1, 2019.

"After three months, they asked me if I wanted to stay," he says. "I told them I had enjoyed it so far and that I thought I would keep enjoying it. The budget worked out, and I was hired."

In Boise, Garrett did mainly underground utility work.

"I have been doing a lot of overhead here and getting that experience under my belt," he says. "We never really know what we are going to do day to day. We might be reading meters, and the next day we might be going out building lines so it's kind of nice to get a little change up."

Garrett says he is happy to be back in Monument.

"This is always where I have wanted to be," he says. "It's the opportunity to hang out in the middle of nowhere. The community is small and everyone is friendly. And it's nice I get to work with my dad for a little while." ■

# Gluten Free Never Tasted so Good

Photo and story by Courtney Cobb

A homegrown business, Josie's Best Gluten Free strives to make gluten-free products with a classic taste and texture.

CEO and founder Josette Johnson's journey started more than 20 years ago when she was diagnosed with food allergies in her late teens.

"There was just nothing good to eat, and what was OK to eat was really hard to make," she says.

One of Josette's favorite things is having waffles or pancakes with her family on Sunday mornings.

"I would cook myself a pancake I could eat on a Sunday morning, and then I would cook some for my husband because the stuff I ate was kind of weird and he didn't like it," she says with a laugh. "I was like, 'OK, there has got to be a way that we can do this and have the same meal.'"

Josette started experimenting, and developed the pancake recipe consumers can now buy online and in stores. It is the same recipe she made in her home in suburban Boston.

The family made its way back to Central Oregon by way of California. Josette's husband is a Central Oregon native, and the couple wanted to raise their children in the area.

## Products Designed for All

Josie's Best Gluten Free offers a variety of products for consumers, made in a facility free of gluten and eight other common allergens.

"This is important because a lot of people have different allergies," Josette says. "If you are gluten-free, you might also be nut-free, and also soy-free or dairy-free."

With the mixes, consumers can add eggs and milk, or make it vegan.

The company offers four products: The Pancake, The Crepe, The Waffle and The



For the 2019 holiday season, Josette offered customers a locally made spoon with her mixes. PHOTO BY COURTNEY COBB

Muffin & More all-purpose blend. Josette says the Muffin & More opened up many doors to consumers and stores because the mix can be used for rolls, breads, cookies, brownies, pie crusts and more.

"It's really fun and versatile," she says. "I probably use that one the most because I use it for all my baking in general."

The blends come in 18 ounces and 5-pound packages for consumers, as well as 5-pound and 25-pound options for restaurants or food service.

"On Amazon, we have some multipacks, but those are special there," Josette says. "You can buy them at all the Market of Choice stores in Oregon, Newport Avenue

Market and Food 4 Less.”

The product is available at Whole Foods, Locavore, CE Lovejoys and the Camp Sherman Store. Several boutique stores and small grocery stores around the country stock the brand. Consumers can order directly from the website, [www.josiesbestgf.com](http://www.josiesbestgf.com).

Many restaurants within and outside Central Oregon use Josette’s mixes, such as The Original Pancake House, McKay Cottage and Tumalo Coffee House.

Seeing her products on the shelves is still a thrill.

“My kids, when we are in a grocery store, will shout out, ‘My gosh, there is your stuff,’” she says with a laugh. “I try not to let myself bask in that too much, but it is really awesome.”

### An Entrepreneur in Central Oregon

Josie’s Best Gluten Free is a small business. Employees include Josette, her husband, a part-time person to help with social media and Amazon, and occasionally Josette’s three children. She says her kids are more often cheerleaders than employees.

Being an entrepreneur in the Sisters area has been a good experience for Josette. She says the community is very supportive, and many people have reached out to help.

“There are a lot of people I can bounce ideas off of,” Josette says.

She says consumers’ participation in her business matters. She encourages buyers to tell the grocery store how much they loved it, or review the product on Amazon or social media.

“That’s truly how our business has grown,” Josette says, “organically, through people like that.”

Josette says she would like to introduce several new products to consumers in the next few years, and offer tutorials on how to use the mixes.

“On social media, we have a narrative where we take requests for recipes,” she says. “We do little tutorials to be genuinely helpful to people with food allergies and making them food that’s yummy with classic tastes and textures.” ■



**Josie’s Best gluten-free mixes can be used to make a wide variety of food.** PHOTO COURTESY OF JOSIE’S BEST

### Light and Airy Dinner Rolls

These are light with a crunchy crust. They are gluten free and vegan.

- 2 cups warm water
- 1 packet rapid rise yeast
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 2 teaspoons apple cider vinegar
- ½ cup olive oil
- 3 cups Muffin and More mix
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh rosemary, optional

Dissolve sugar in water and sprinkle yeast on top to proof. Yeast should be foamy in about 5 minutes. If you have fresh yeast, you don’t need to worry too much about it proofing.

Add apple cider vinegar and olive oil to yeast mixture. Whisk to combine. Add Muffin and More mix, salt and rosemary. Mix well. You will have a thick, sticky batter.

Scrape down the sides of the bowl. Cover the bowl with a wet dish towel. Place in a warm location to rise for at least 1 to 2 hours.

After the batter rises, heat oven to 400 F. You will have a very foamy batter. Gently scoop into well-greased muffin tins for rolls and into a well-greased loaf pan for a French bread-type of loaf.

Bake 15 to 20 minutes until cooked through, depending on the size of rolls, loaf, etc. Remove while slightly warm and enjoy.

Source: *Josie’s Best Gluten Free*



Central Electric Cooperative members share their views on a variety of topics including customer service, handling of outages, and rates.

## CEC Member Satisfaction Reaches All-Time High

Central Electric Cooperative members who participated in the co-op's 2019 member satisfaction survey expressed a resounding satisfaction with the co-op.

Of the 2,735 respondents, 78% indicated they were "highly satisfied"—an all-time high showing a 3% improvement from the last survey—and 15% were "somewhat satisfied," combining for a 93% satisfaction rate, which ranks 18% higher than the national average for electric cooperatives.

The number of participants in CEC's survey also reached a new high, with a 39% increase from 2016.

"We greatly appreciate the higher level of member participation," says CEO Dave Markham. "The feedback helps paint a more accurate picture of our members'

attitudes to how the co-op is meeting their needs. The results reinforce the value of our efforts and further motivate us to provide members with the quality service they deserve."

Independent research firm DHM Research of Portland administered the 46-question survey online from September 15 through October 15. The survey was open to every CEC member. On average, the survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete and let members anonymously rate the co-op.

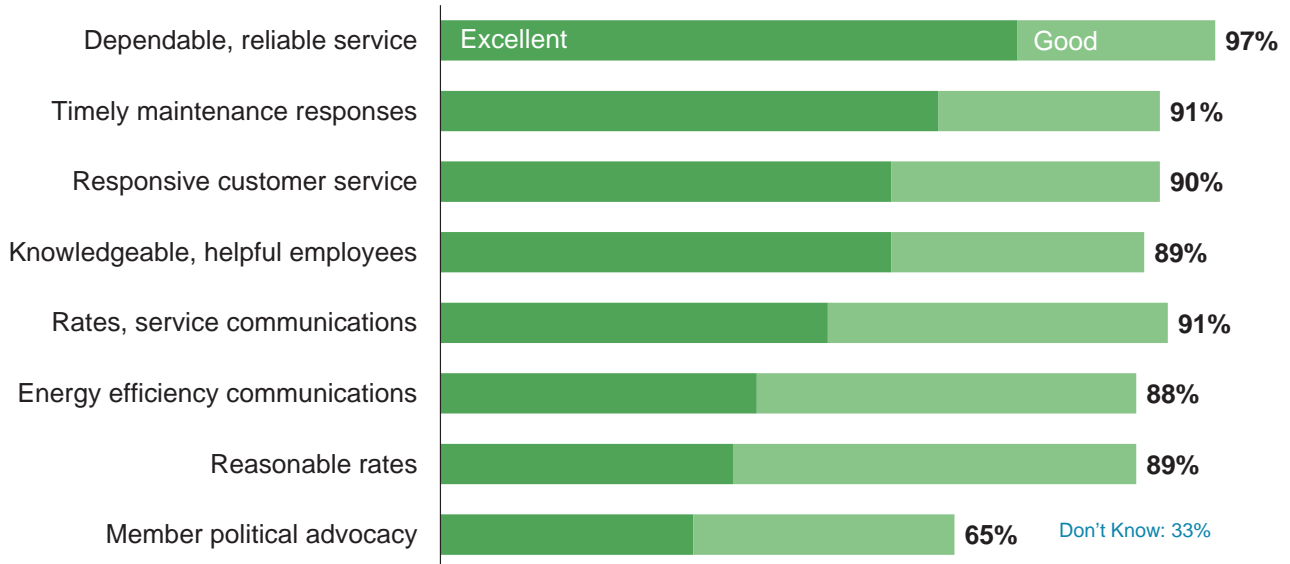
Members rated the cooperative on customer service, handling of outages, billing and payment practices, rates, energy efficiency and preferred methods of communication with the co-op. Members

also generated more than 1,300 comments, taking the opportunity to express opinions on a range of topics.

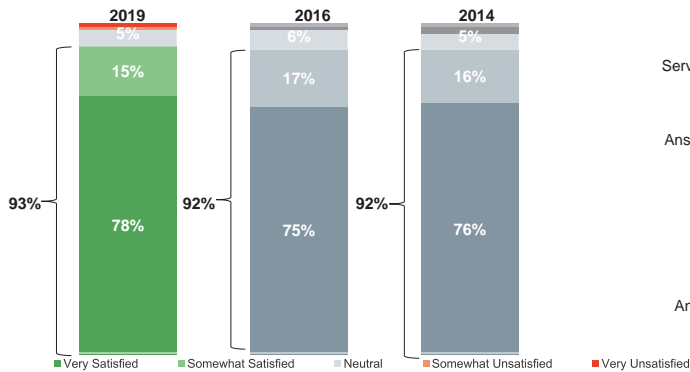
Members gave favorable ratings in dependable, reliable service (98%); reasonable rates (88%); keeping members informed of changes affecting service or rates (92%); timely responses to outages (91%); knowledgeable and helpful employees (89%); and keeping members informed about energy efficiency (88%).

"Overwhelmingly, members ranked reliable service and reasonable rates as issues most important to them," Dave says. "The results only reaffirm CEC's ongoing investment to fortify its electric system for the future. I am also proud to say CEC's rates are still well below the state

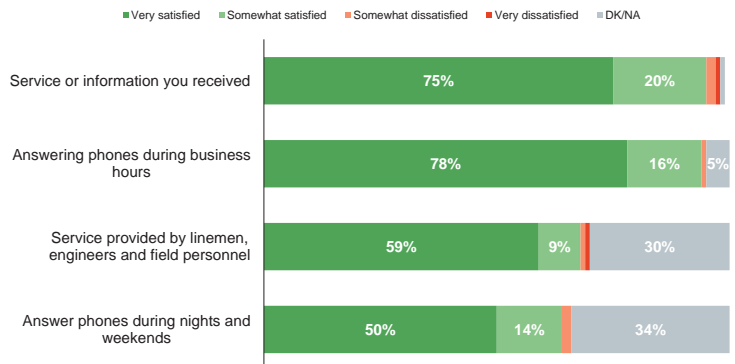
## How Good a Job is CEC Doing Providing Services?



### Cooperative



### Satisfaction with Interpersonal Customer Service



and national average.”

The survey also sought to gain insight into members’ attitudes toward improving energy efficiency in their homes. Members were asked to rank, in order of importance, five potential benefits of energy-efficiency improvements. Topping the list was members’ desire to see a lower electric bill, followed by improving the comfort in their homes. Reducing adverse impacts on the environment, getting a return on the

investment and improving the resale value of one’s home rounded out the list.

Central Electric solicited members on their preferred form of communications with the co-op. Predominately, 85% of members use email or phone to contact CEC, while others opt for in-person interaction with customer service representatives. Members also expressed some interest in the co-op using voice technologies, such as Alexa and Google

Assistant, as another tool to communicate with them.

To all who participated in the survey, thank you. Central Electric has administered the satisfaction survey to members since the 1980s. Throughout the years, the survey has played an instrumental role in affording members a venue to express their sentiments on how well CEC provides service. The next survey will be in 2021. ■



Delilah delivered eight puppies at the Wild Rivers Animal Rescue in Gold Beach.  
PHOTO COURTESY OF WILD RIVERS ANIMAL RESCUE

## Adopt and Rescue at Animal Shelters

By Miranda Thompson

Walking into an animal shelter pulls at people's heartstrings. Innocent dogs and cats return gazes, some confused and some scared, others overly excited for a visitor. All eagerly await their home.

Eugene, a sweet-tempered kitten born

around February 2019, lived at the South Coast Humane Society for about six months. Eugene lost both eyes due to a respiratory illness. Kaleigh Brown of Brookings decided it was time to adopt a new cat after another cat of hers died. Kaleigh was apprehensive about Eugene's difficulties, especially when introducing

him to four other cats and two dogs in her home. Would the other pets bully him? How would he adapt to strange new surroundings?

Yet Kaleigh was drawn to Eugene and once she held him in her arms, she knew she had to try to rescue him and welcome him into her home.

Eugene showed Kaleigh just how smart and amazing he is when he instantly found the dog bed, which he loves. He knows where the litter box is, and he listens to sounds. When Kaleigh taps his food bowl, he knows it's time to eat.

At the South Coast Humane Society in Brookings and the Wild Rivers Animal Rescue in Gold Beach, whether animals were lost and never found, abandoned, abused or saved from euthanization they are welcomed with open arms and will receive proper treatment, nourishment and compassionate loving care.

Both are now nonprofit no-kill rescue centers, but that wasn't always the case at Wild Rivers Animal Rescue, formerly known as the Curry County impound. Resident Catherine Powers saw a need for an animal rescue in Gold Beach and transformed the impound into a compassionate animal rescue. The rescue averages of 10-20 adult dogs, 14 puppies and 20-40 cats at any one time.

This past summer, a timid, sweet dog showed up at the doorstep of Wild Rivers Animal Rescue in Gold Beach. Delilah, as they named her, was injured, but staff had no idea the extent of her injuries or what caused them, according to Kim Schlack, Wild Rivers' board president. Their best guess was that she was hit by a car. A short time later they discovered Delilah was pregnant. Delilah recovered with the care of the staff and volunteers and delivered eight pups. Two pups appeared to be stillborn. Astonishingly, the staff at the center coaxed the pups back to life.

South Coast Humane Society in Brookings was started by volunteers in 1992 and is managed by Jenifer Alcorn. Prior to moving to the area three years ago, Jenifer volunteered with the Animal Compassion Team (ACT) in Fresno, California, and has brought ideas north. One important change was developing a socialization plan between animals at the shelter. At maximum capacity, South Coast can hold 150 animals—about 35 dogs and 115 cats. However, Jenifer does not like to overcrowd the facility as it leads to behavioral issues and reduces the amount of quality time volunteers can spend with each animal. By the same token, Jenifer



**Eugene spent six months at South Coast Humane Society before being adopted**

PHOTO COURTESY SOUTH COAST HUMANE SOCIETY

will not turn animals away for any reason. She believes taking in all rescues provides love and support for not just the animals, but the community as well.

To help animals find their forever home, South Coast Humane Society holds quarterly adoption events with PetSmart. They also recently started a program called "Adoption Sleepover." This program provides prospective adopters an opportunity to bring a dog into their home for 48 hours. This allows a meet and greet to see how the pet does in a home, lets them meet other pets and family members and helps ensure a good fit. Jenifer estimates the program has a 70% success rate.

Rescue centers are nonprofit and not typically subsidized by the county or state. Both South Coast Humane Society and Wild Rivers Animal Rescue are funded primarily from donations, fundraisers and grants. That makes community support pivotal to their success. In September 2019, The Rotary Club of Brookings-Harbor put on its annual "Raining Cats & Dogs" fundraiser. The \$5,000 grand prize

winner was Rick Gray of Brookings, who generously donated his winnings equally between the two shelters. In December 2019, Superfly Martini Bar & Grill in Brookings sponsored South Coast Humane Society for the annual ChariTree event. This fundraising event raises money for charities and nonprofit organizations by auctioning decorated Christmas trees.

Each shelter additionally supports its efforts by operating thrift stores. Wild Rivers Rescue sells logoed merchandise and holds dog washes each month for a suggested donation. They also offer vaccinations with wellness clinics once a month and discount flea medications. South Coast Humane Society holds a spay and neuter clinic three times a month, and on the third Saturday of each month they hold a wellness clinic focused on minor issues such as skin conditions and infections. They also offer a variety of vaccinations and treatments for dogs and cats, and microchipping, a tiny tag that can be implanted in your pet to electronically identify them if they are lost or stolen.

A shelter can't succeed without volunteers. While each shelter has paid staff, volunteers are essential. There are a variety of ways to volunteer, from hands-on work with animals and office tasks, to organizing fundraisers or helping in the thrift store and more. There is a need for volunteers of all kinds. A shelter may put a call out to the community asking for help with a specific event. For example, Wild Rivers Rescue asked for volunteers to help comfort the animals during the fireworks display at the Port of Gold Beach because the noise causes distress and confuses animals. This past year, approximately 20 people showed up to sit with and calm the animals. ■

*Whether you can give by volunteering or donating, our local shelters welcome all help! If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, adopting a pet or need information about the services they provide, please contact your local shelter.*

*South Coast Humane Society-Brookings  
828 Railroad St.  
541-412-0325*

*Wild Rivers Animal Rescue-Gold Beach  
29921 Airport Way  
541-247-2514*

## SURPRISE VALLEY



Halle Havel, left, and Sadie Greer enjoy a summer morning on the shore of Lake Cottonwood.

# Summer at the Lake

**Photos and story  
by Toni Bailie**

Cottonwood Lake, a blue gem rimmed by tall Ponderosa Pine, is 28 mile drive from Lakeview, Oregon.

This is home to Camp Cottonwood, which got its start in 1949 when a group of volunteers established a summer camp Lake County youth.

At the dock, Hunter, John and Andrew Greer proudly

display their catch of fish.

The boys are staying at Camp Cottonwood, where the Greer-Anderson family reunion has been held for the past 10 years.

In the early years, Sheryl Smith's mother, Norma Anderson, and aunt Zola Partin were cooks for 4-H campers. Sheryl, 72, came to Camp Cottonwood at age 9 with a group of Girl Scouts. They swam in a pond called the Big Muddy, which became a lake after a dam was built on the creek.

"I remember singing

around the campfire, hiking to Cougar Peak and the smell of pine trees," Sheryl says. "At our annual family reunion, we have had thunderstorms, rain, even snow. We like the privacy. There is something for all ages—kayaks, basketball, hide-and-seek and community bonfires.

Last year, Don and Ilana Bach were married here, with a Chesapeake Bay retriever giving the bride away."

For many years, Phyllis Kerr was president of Cottonwood Camp Inc. She says Lakeview

High School shop students built cabins to replace the original platform tents. With a grant from Readers Digest, the 4-H club painted the cabins red.

"My husband, Roy, towed the cabins up with a lowboy," Phyllis says. "At first there was just a cook shack, and we ate meals outside. Then we added a dining hall."

Phyllis spearheaded the effort to keep the camp up to code.

"I took care of things up there," she says.

Originally they had an



Sleeping arrangements at Camp Cottonwood have evolved from the early days. Cabins have replaced tents on wooden platforms.

old cooler building with wet gunny sacks on top. This was replaced by a freezer and refrigerator in the cook house. After catching bats in gallon pails in the kitchen, they had to bat-proof the building. Then a bear ambled into camp, so they made a rule that garbage cans had to be kept inside.

"I fell in love with Cottonwood," Phyllis says. "It's such a beautiful spot. I wanted to keep it for the kids of Lake County. It was worth working for."

Campers sleep in cabins equipped with bunks. Besides outhouses, there are flush toilets and a big shower room. The large kitchen and dining hall has a fireplace and a variety of board games. For group activities, there is an outdoor pavilion and a large fire ring. The small lake invites anglers to try their luck and swimmers to splash on a hot day.

Through the years, Camp Cottonwood has hosted adult and youth camps, family reunions and church retreats. Kristy Reese, FFA adviser at Lakeview High School,

*"I fell in love with Cottonwood. It's such a beautiful spot. I wanted to keep it for the kids of Lake County. It was worth working for."*

enjoyed 4-H camp as a child. Now she helps host the FFA District Leadership gathering, which has been held at Camp Cottonwood for 20 years.

"We have 75 to 80 students and 8 to 12 advisers," Kristy says. "We all enjoy fun competitions, canoe races, opening and closing ceremonies."

Joanne McCreith has scheduled events since the early 1990s. Every summer, she attends the Lakeview Ministries campout.

"It's the high point of the year," Joanne says. "I bring my 9-year-old granddaughter. She lives in Portland and really likes the camp. The kids play in the water, adults sit by the lake to visit, and we have a Saturday night service and group campfire."

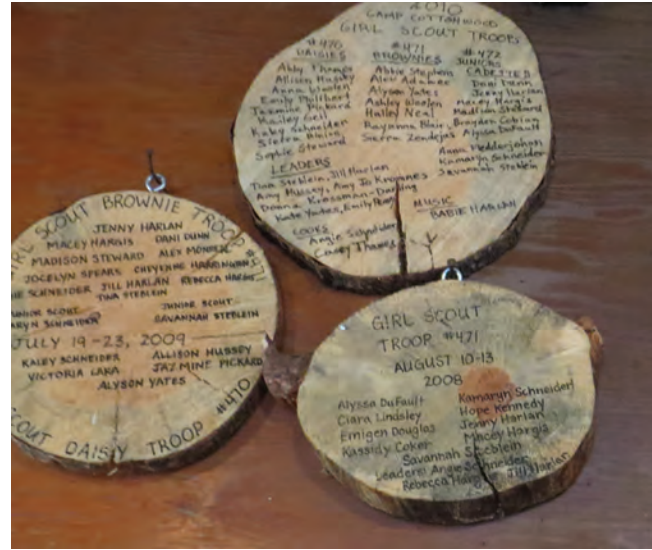
Margot Dodds served as

camp host during the 2019 season, checking campers in and out.

"It was a privilege to spend three months living in such a beautiful place," Margot says. "I met a number of people who have come for years. One family celebrates wedding anniversaries for three different couples who got married at the camp. Several people came as Girl Scouts before any cabins were built, and returned for their 50th high school reunion. There's a lot of history at Camp Cottonwood and a lot of devoted volunteer time that keeps it going"

The board members who oversee camp operation are Daniel Tague, Carmen Tague, Mo Plato, Joanne McCreith, Evan Reese and Kristy Reese.

The camp is maintained by fees and donations. The Lions Club built a cement-block



Wood "cookies" commemorate some of the campers who have stayed at the camp.

—PHYLLIS KERR

bathroom building and provided funds from their annual auction to put foundations under four cabins. Ten years ago, when heavy snow collapsed a cabin roof, the Lakeview shop class built another cabin.

Camp Cottonwood is open from mid-June to mid-September. Last year, 12 groups reserved the camp for family and class reunions, church gatherings, cross-country track team and Lake County Search and Rescue.

"We would love to have more kids' groups," Joanne says. "We no longer have Girl Scouts in Lakeview, and the Boy Scouts go on wilderness outings."

Fees for using the camp are \$150 a day for up to 25 people, with a \$7.50 charge for each additional camper. A \$200 cleaning fee is waived if a group participates in the annual work day or helps with maintenance projects. ■

To make a reservation, contact Joanne McCreith at 541-326-1147 or [jmccreith@icloud.com](mailto:jmccreith@icloud.com), or Carmen Tague at 541-905-6956, email [carmen@andersonengineering.com](mailto:carmen@andersonengineering.com).



Wine host Brittany Jensen pours wine in the tasting room at Sweet Cheeks Winery & Vineyard. PHOTO BY GREG REED

# A Valentine's of Wine & Chocolate

By Craig Reed

Six local wineries and tasting rooms in the Lane Electric Cooperative service area will be provide romantic backdrops and dinners for your Valentine's Day.

## SWEET CHEEKS WINERY AND VINEYARD

27007 Briggs Hill Road  
541-349-9463

It's your choice of cheeses, chocolates and wines at your choice of two Sweet Cheeks tasting rooms on Valentine's Day.

Sweet Cheeks has two tasting rooms: one at its winery and vineyard near Crow, the other on downtown Eugene's East 5th St. Both rooms are open from noon to 9 p.m. on Valentine's Day. On the 19th, the 5th Street tasting room will host a chocolate and wine pairing workshop.

Sweet Cheeks was established in 1978 when Dan Smith planted a vineyard that eventually grew to 40 acres. He supplied his grapes to local wineries.

In 2003, Dan bought a building scheduled for demolition in Junction City and relocated it to his vineyard. After a major renovation, the building opened in 2005 as the winery and tasting room.

Dan died in 2018, and his family is carrying on his wine legacy. His wife, Beth, is president and CEO. Her daughter, Katie Brown, is the marketing director. Dan's granddaughter, Jessica Thomas, serves as general manager.



Romance is in the air at Noble Estate Vineyard and Winery. Noble Estate will serve wines, chocolates and sweets on Valentine's Day. PHOTO COURTESY OF NOBEL ESTATE

## SARVER WINERY

25600 Mayola Lane  
541-935-2979

Live music is in the air and chocolates are on the menu, plus designable charcuterie boards are available at the Sarver Winery tasting room.

"You can build your own cheese and meat plates," says Carly Miller, the winery's event coordinator.

Chris and Erin Sarver own the business that started in 1984 when Bob and Betty McKinney cleared the property at the southern end of the Willamette Valley. The McKinney's planted the lot with pinot noir and pinot gris vines.

The 35-acre vineyard ended up with five varietals, producing estate wines from each. The winery also buys grapes from Washington and Southern Oregon for the production of several other wines.

## NOBLE ESTATE VINEYARD AND WINERY

Noble Estate Urban Tasting Room  
560 Commercial St.  
541-338-3007

A Noble Night of Passion is scheduled at the Noble Estate Urban tasting room from 5 to 9:30 p.m.

Henry Cooper and Friends provides live music, Pillage Pizza serves food, Brutto ma Buono delivers chocolates and the winery serves numerous Noble wines, including a semi-sparkling Passion rosé.

"We usually have a full house," says Amy Shadell, the winery's manager.

Owner Mark Jurasevich established Noble Estate Vineyard and Winery in 1999 with a planting of pinot noir. The 10-acre vineyard is off Gimpl Hill Road, southwest of Eugene. Mark produced the winery's first commercially available wine in 2000.

## KING ESTATE WINERY

80854 Territorial Hwy.  
541-942-9874

Let your joy bubble over this Valentine's. Seasonal entrees and sparkling wine are served at King Estate Winery, according to Connor Morey, the winery's food and beverage director.

"A sparkling wine like blanc de gris is perfect for your special evening," he says.

Reservations for the King Estate restaurant are encouraged. There is inside seating for 80 guests. The last seating is at 8 p.m., and guests receive a take-home chocolate dessert.

King Estate Winery is an organic winery southwest of Eugene, near Lorane. The winery was founded in 1991 by Ed King Jr. and his son, Ed King III.

The organic vineyard totals 465 acres, plus another 30 acres of fruits, vegetables and flowers that are used in the restaurant.

*Continues on page 8*

## Valentine's

Continued from page 5



The Silvan Ridge Winery tasting room overlooks a vineyard and has a more casual Valentine's experience. PHOTO BY CRAIG REED

### SILVAN RIDGE WINERY

27012 Briggs Hill Road  
541-345-1945

Heart-shaped pizzas from a wood-fired oven and a variety of wines are matched at Silvan Ridge Winery.

"This is more casual, if you don't want to fight the traditional dinner crowds on Valentine's Day," says Angela Jaquette, the winery's general manager.

The tasting room, with inside seating for 140, is family friendly. The winery will release a new wine the week of Valentine's.

The winery's 5-acre vineyard was established in 1979 by Doyle Hinman. In 1993, Carolyn Chambers purchased the vineyard and winery. Two years later,

Carolyn's daughter, Liz Chambers, took over management of the business' daily operation. Liz became the sole owner in 2012. In 2013, Liz's daughter, Julia, joined the business. Julia and her husband, Andrew, became the owners in 2018.

### IRIS VINEYARDS

82110 Territorial Hwy.  
541-242-6588

Iris Vineyards introduces a new rosé this Valentine's Day. It will be available to all who celebrate the holiday at the Iris tasting room this year.

The tasting room, which overlooks the vineyard, maintains its normal hours of noon to 5 p.m. on Valentine's

Day. Charcuterie and cheese boards are available, and visitors are welcome to bring their own picnics to enjoy with Iris' selection of wines.

Twenty minutes southwest of Eugene in the eastern foothills of the Coast Range, Iris Vineyards has 50 acres in production. The winery specializes in producing pinot noir, pinot gris and chardonnay. Iris Vineyards also makes several other wines.

Richard Boyles and Pamela Frye own and operate Iris Vineyards. Prior to the planting of their vineyard in 1996, the two learned about the industry by visiting wineries in the Willamette Valley and in Washington. While working in Europe, the pair toured vineyards in France, Germany and Switzerland.

Iris' first vintage was released in 2001. ■



Becky Cornforth, left, and Edie Moro at Goldson Grange, where they strive to give community members a place to meet. PHOTO BY CRAIG REED

# GRANGE POWER

A rural institution from bygone era still has purpose in today's modern world

By Craig Reed

Granges are grassroots organizations that bring members of rural communities together.

Members discuss community concerns, they schedule social events and plan community service projects.

The Blachly-Lane Electric Cooperative service area includes three granges: Goldson Grange, Long Tom Grange and Triangle Grange.

Oliver Hudson Kelley, a Minnesota farmer and

activist, developed the grange concept in 1867. He believed farmers—a scattered and independent group—needed a national organization to represent them. Grange members lobbied on behalf of rural residents, focusing on schools and education in those early years. The Extension Service, the Rural Free Delivery program for the distribution of mail and the Farm Credit System also came about thanks to lobbying from the grange.

Today, granges don't have the memberships they had decades ago. There are fewer rural residents and technology

has made communicating much easier. But granges still exist under the leadership of older generations.

Those granges hold monthly meetings and offer a wide range of programs and activities for all ages. The buildings are available to rent for gatherings such as town meetings, potlucks, reunions, dances, weddings and other special events.

## Triangle Grange

The grange in the Triangle Lake community was organized in 1915 with an initial membership of 38. Membership grew to as high as 90, but is now at 20.

“Our community needs the grange facility,” says Maxine WorthyLake, the Triangle Grange master. “Other than a church, there is no other gathering place for events like weddings or funerals. Originally, the grange was focused on agriculture and a place for farmers to gather, but now it is about helping the community.”

Triangle Grange holds a Mother's Day breakfast and a Father's Day breakfast, a chicken barbecue on the Fourth of July, a Halloween party and bible study classes for elementary school children each Tuesday evening during

the school year. Grange and community members also use the building to collect, fill and distribute food boxes to area residents in need.

The grange's monthly meeting is at 4 p.m. the second Monday of each month.

*For more information on Triangle Grange, call Grange Master Maxine Worthylake at 541-964-3094.*

### Long Tom Grange

Established in 1936, the grange earned international attention in 2004 when it released a spoof nude calendar featuring 12 of its male members.

The calendar was such a financial success that similar calendars were produced in 2005 and 2007. The three calendars raised \$650,000, which was donated to the Junction City School District and used to buy books and supplies, and to restore the library and shop.

"Initially, people thought we were ruining the community," says Grange Master Chuck Cook. "But after we made \$220,000 with the first calendar, it was viewed as a success."

"We became an international buzz," says grange member Danuta Pfeiffer. "Since then, our grange became one of the fastest-growing granges in the state."

Long Tom Grange, located alongside Ferguson Road a few miles northwest of Junction City, has 40 memberships.

"For any organization to be successful, you have to have people in there who are movers and shakers," Chuck says. "We are fortunate to have several of them who are very active. We



**Long Tom Grange members actively prepare for disasters. This group is trained as emergency responders, and another group of members plans to take the training.** PHOTO COURTESY OF LONG TOM GRANGE

have a number of people who put their hearts and souls into the grange. It takes a team, and we have a team."

Life-long member Robin Pfeiffer, and his wife, Danuta, are two of those active members. Robin's mother, Signe, was one of several women who started the grange's annual Daffodil Festival. The 2020 festival—on March 21-22—will be the 49th year for the fundraising event.

During the past few years, Long Tom Grange has emphasized emergency preparedness to be ready for natural disasters such as snowstorms, floods and earthquakes. Grange members put together emergency grab-and-go bags that provide food, water, candles and first-aid supplies for several people for a week. The kits sell for \$38 each and are available at the B&I Hardware and Carquest stores in Junction City and at Pfeiffer Winery, 25040 Jaeg Road.

Ten members of the grange have taken emergency responder training and another

10 will soon take the training. The grange sponsors CPR and first-aid classes in its building and pays the fees for members to earn certification.

The profit earned from selling the emergency bags will be used to buy a defibrillator for the grange.

"We're hopeful all granges will start their own preparedness programs," Danuta says.

The grange plans to hold ham radio operator classes and to eventually have a ham radio station. Neighborhood's are being encouraged to map out a preparedness program.

"We have purpose," Danuta says. "Our meetings are purpose driven. We want to keep our community safe. If that big earthquake hits, we're not going to get any help any time soon, so we need to be able to help each other. That idea is taking hold."

Danuta says the grange wants to provide opportunities to meet and serve the community, to beautify and showcase the community, to

raise money for education and charitable projects, and to have fun while doing so.

*For more information on Long Tom Grange, call Grange Master Chuck Cook at 541-554-6788.*

### Goldson Grange

Located west of Cheshire and alongside Highway 36, Goldson Grange was chartered in 1937. Grange Master Edie Moro leads a membership of 30.

"Our mission has changed a little bit, but it is to give rural residents a place to meet and have social events," Edie says. "With town so far away, the grange serves that function, giving the community a gathering place."

"The grange also helps distribute information through workshops and meetings," she adds.

Yearly grange activities include a car show in June, participation in the 52-Mile Garage Sale along Highway 36 in late June, an ice cream social with board games in August, a Veteran's Day breakfast on November 11 and a holiday craft bazaar in November. Every other month, grange members plan and hold a craft-making event for children.

"The grange is open to other activities," Edie says, adding the building is available for rent. "We're open to suggestions."

Goldson Grange holds its monthly meetings at 6 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month. The meeting includes a potluck and a guest speaker who talks about a local concern. ■

*For more information on Goldson Grange, call Grange Master Edie Moro at 541-998-8852.*



# Increase Your Winter Efficiency

Combat high winter bills by improving energy efficiency and conservation

With winter's cold temperatures come increased electric bills. Klickitat PUD wants our consumers to know what to expect, how the PUD keeps on track during winter weather and how you can help decrease your winter bill.

## **Weather Impacts Electric Bills**

When temperatures plummet, higher electric bills generally follow. Klickitat PUD urges customers to conserve energy. By alerting customers to weather-induced higher bills, Klickitat PUD hopes to avoid unexpected surprises.

## **Consistent Meter Reads**

Klickitat PUD strives to keep the time between meter reads consistent by keeping

within one to two days to the meter reading schedule. This keeps the number of billing days consistent.

The PUD recommends customers with self-read meters provide these reads consistently each month to avoid fluctuations in the number of days.

## **Heat Loss Factor Increases as Temperatures Drop**

The colder the weather, the more heat you use. Even a difference of just a few degrees in sustained colder temperatures can boost electricity use as heaters have to work harder to keep spaces warm.

Going from 40 degrees to 30 degrees, heat loss might be 10%, whereas going from 30 degrees to 20 degrees, the heat

loss might be 20%. This happens because heat loss through insulation, doors and windows is not proportionate and increases faster at lower temperatures.

## **Heat Pump Efficiency Decreases With Low Temperatures**

At around 37 degrees, many heat pumps reach what is called the balance point. At or near this temperature, the heat pump must run constantly to produce enough heat to maintain a comfortable, consistent indoor temperature.

The utility provides a list of tips for conserving energy in the winter to help customers save money on electricity bills. We encourage customers to call the utility if they have any questions or

concerns. Klickitat PUD is happy to work out payment plans to relieve temporary hardships and reduce the stress of higher-than-normal bills as a result of winter use.

Here are some low- or no-cost tips from the PUD for saving energy.

- Lower your thermostat when you go to bed or leave home. Use an Energy Star programmable thermostat. Every degree lowered can decrease the heating portion of your electric bill by 2% (assuming you have electric heat).

- Make it a habit to shut off lights, computers and other devices when not in use. Consider plugging electronic devices into an energy-smart strip.

- Close your fireplace damper when there is no fire. Leaving it open is like having a 48-square-inch hole in your house.

- Change furnace filters monthly to eliminate restricted airflow and increase energy efficiency.

- In winter, open south-facing drapes and blinds during the day to let heat in. Close all window drapes and blinds at night. Windows can cause some draft. If you keep your drapes closed, that will help insulate the cold from coming inside.

- Caulk or weatherstrip around windows to keep drafts out. Seal heavy-duty plastic film to the inside frame of your windows.

- Doors and windows may have cracks and cause a draft. You can stuff rags or towels in the cracks to keep the draft out.

- Water heating is the third-largest energy expense in your home. Set your water heater to 120 F, which is comfortable for most uses. Turn down your water heater temperature or set to vacation mode if you are going to be away for more than a week.

- Repair leaky faucets.

- Run only full loads in your dishwasher and clothes washers, and wash

clothes in cold water.

- Use the air-dry feature on your dishwasher. Use a clothesline to dry clothes when weather permits.

- Unplug laptop or cellphone battery chargers when not in use. Many draw power continuously, even when the device is not plugged into the charger.

- Set your refrigerator between 36 and 39 F.

- Vacuum the refrigerator condenser coils regularly to increase efficiency. Consider using jugs of water to occupy the empty spaces in your fridge. It takes more energy to cool an empty refrigerator than a full one.

- Use a microwave or toaster oven for cooking and heating small portions.

- Use zonal-heat systems—baseboard, ceiling or wall heat—to your advantage by heating only rooms in use. ■

*Find a complete list of conservation tips at [www.klickitatpud.com/conservation](http://www.klickitatpud.com/conservation).*

## A Blanket of Protection

With an adequate level of insulation, you can create not only a comfortable living environment, but lower your utility bill. Insulation is your home's first line of defense against summer heat and winter cold.

### How Insulation Works

Heat flows naturally from a warmer space to a cooler space. By forming a barrier between air inside a home and air outside, insulation keeps heat inside during cold weather and outside during warm weather.

The effectiveness of insulation is measured in "R-value"—the insulation's ability to resist heat transfer. The higher the R-value, the better the insulating properties.

R-value varies with the type of insulating material, its thickness and its density—the number of fibers per square inch. Check the label for R-value and the insulation's fire-resistant properties, and to make sure the material meets standards of the federal government or the American Society for Testing and Materials.

### Types of Insulation

Insulation usually comes in four types: batts, rolls, loose-fill and rigid foam boards. Each fits a different part of your house.

It can be made from a number of materials, including fiberglass, cellulose (shredded paper), polystyrene, rock wool, silica, polyurethane, vermiculite, perlite, calcium silicate, diatomaceous earth and foamed plastic.

Fiberglass—the predominant insulating material used in the United States—has an R-value of about 3.1 per inch. Fiberglass or rock wool batts go between the studs in walls or the joists of ceilings or floors. Rolls or blankets—usually made of fiberglass—are convenient to use on an attic floor.

The R-value of cellulose—which is blown into attics and finished walls—depends on the thickness of the application, but can exceed more than 3 an inch. However, cellulose settles over time, reducing the R-value.

### Where to Begin

Check the insulation in your attic, ceilings, exterior and basement walls, floors and crawl spaces to see if it meets the R-value levels recommended for your particular area.

Consider an energy audit, which can help determine your insulation needs. Ask Klickitat PUD for recommendations, or consult your local building inspector or a reputable insulation dealer.

According to most energy experts, the best place to start adding insulation is in the attic. Measure the thickness of attic insulation. If there is less than R-22—7 inches of fiberglass or rock wool, or 6 inches of cellulose—you probably should add more.

Insulate floors over unheated spaces—such as crawl spaces and garages—and foundation walls.



Olivia Flack pins an opponent during a match in South Africa as a member of the Oregon Cultural Exchange Wrestling Program.  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF OLIVIA FLACK AND CHARLI STEWART

# A Worldly Wrestling Experience

Central Oregonians Olivia Flack and Charli Stewart take wrestling skills to South Africa

By Craig Reed

Teenagers Olivia Flack and Charli Stewart took more than the usual road trip last summer. They flew about 10,000 miles as members of Oregon Cultural Exchange Wrestling Program's first girls' team with a complete lineup. Wrestlers traveled to South Africa in late July for a three-week visit.

Olivia is a senior at La Pine High School. Her parents are Aaron and Kate Flack. Aaron is the head wrestling coach at La Pine High School.

Charli, a Sunriver resident, is a junior at Bend High School. Her parents are Kerri Stewart-Willerton and Paul Willerton.

For both girls, the trip was their first outside the United States

Eight girls and 12 boys, including Carmelo Farfaglia, a sophomore at La Pine High School, made the long journey. The wrestlers qualified for the team by winning trials in their weight classes or being selected for an open weight spot.

The teams wrestled in several tournaments in the Johannesburg area, but the wrestlers also had time to be tourists.

Wrestling in the 135-pound weight class, Charli finished the trip with a 24-1 record. Olivia wrestled at 105 pounds and finished with a 14-1 record.

"It was a really cool opportunity," says Charli. "It is definitely the best thing that has happened to me so far in my 16 years of living. Wrestling brings you so many opportunities."

Olivia says the trip gave her a chance to see a different culture. The Oregon wrestlers visited several

schools and towns, including shanty towns where people lived in tiny shacks.

Visiting Kruger National Park—one of the largest game reserves in Africa—and seeing numerous animals was another highlight of the trip for the Oregon team.

For Olivia, the cultural exchange wrestling trip continued a family tradition. Her grandfather, Keith, was a member of the first cultural exchange team. He was a wrestler at Canby High School and traveled with a team to Japan in 1963.

In 1986, Olivia's uncle, Trent, was on an exchange team that traveled to Egypt. In 1991, her father, Aaron, was on a team that visited Japan. Both Trent and Aaron were students at Lowell High School when they made those trips.

"It's cool my grandpa was on the first boys' team and now I was on the first girls' team," Olivia says.

Charli started wrestling in the seventh grade. At the high school level, she finished third at the state tournament as a freshman in the 105-pound weight class. As a sophomore, she won state tournaments in Greco-Roman, freestyle and folkstyle at 120 pounds. She won three matches at a Sweet Home qualifying tournament to earn a berth on the cultural exchange team.

Charli's cousin, Macie Stewart, was part of a cultural exchange team to Canada several years ago while she was a student at Thurston High School in Springfield.

Olivia started wrestling in elementary school, but then played basketball during her eighth grade winter season. Despite her father encouraging her to do something else in high school, she returned to wrestling her freshman year. There were a few girls on the La Pine wrestling team, but they were 15 to 20 pounds heavier than Olivia. She ended up practicing against some of the lighter boys as well as her female teammates.

As a freshman, Olivia didn't place at state in the 106-pound weight class. She placed sixth during her sophomore year, then third during her junior season. She finished last year with a 21-1 wrestling record; her only loss was in the state semifinals.

Olivia's success earned her an invite to compete at 105 pounds for the girls' exchange team.

"Wrestling keeps me in shape," she says. "It keeps me physically and mentally stronger."

Olivia says her goals for her senior year at La Pine High School are to win state in wrestling and to finish in the top three in the long-distance races in track



and field. A year ago, she placed third in the 3,000-meter and fifth in the 1,500 at state. She would like to earn a college scholarship in either wrestling or track and field.

Charli, a junior, still has time to decide on her future after high school. But with more colleges forming wrestling teams for women, she's hopeful one will be interested in her talents on the mat.

Both Charli and Olivia say they are thankful for the opportunities wrestling has given them. They say the cultural exchange wrestling trip was both fun and memorable.

"I would definitely recommend the trip to other wrestlers who are interested in traveling," Olivia says. ■

**ABOVE:** Olivia, front row, second from right; and Charli Stewart, front row, third from right; pose with their Oregon teammates.

**TOP:** A referee holds up Charli's arm, naming her winner of her match.



**Volunteer Gail Lyon stocks the shelves at the new FISH food pantry within Mid Valley School in Odell.**

# Feeding Friends and Neighbors

## FISH Food Pantry opens in Odell

**Photos and story by Drew Myron**

Two words drive a sweeping program with a practical mission: “Alleviate hunger.”

With the opening of the Odell Food Pantry at Mid Valley Elementary School, the effort to end hunger has expanded. In a space not much larger than a closet, the Odell Food Pantry aims to fill a basic and urgent need.

The Odell site is part of FISH, a nonprofit organization with food banks throughout the Hood River area. The main location is in Hood River, with smaller sites in Parkdale,

Cascade Locks and Odell.

For nearly a decade, FISH—an acronym for friendly, instant, sympathetic, help—served the agricultural community of Odell. That changed in 2018 when the organization was forced to shutter operations.

The food pantry reopened in December 2019 at a new location. Having a food bank within the school is an added bonus, says Kim Yasui, principal of Mid Valley Elementary School.

“FISH does great work all over the county, and it’s great to have them in Odell again,” she says. “The school is a gathering place for our community, and having the food pantry here is good and convenient for our families.”

Formed in 1969 and rooted in practicality, FISH is fueled with a no-fuss, can-do spirit. The organization began with just a few women discreetly sharing food with their hungry neighbors.

“It started out with two little ladies,” explains Becky Bugge, who has been a FISH volunteer for 15 years. “They gave out a hunk of cheese and some bread.”

That simple effort to feed a few has grown into four food banks, one community garden, 500 volunteers and food provided to more than 1,200 families annually.

All this happens with remarkably low overhead and next-to-nothing administrative costs. FISH operates with just three paid part-time staff and a

pitch-in-and-work-hard board of directors, led by Marianne Durkan for more than 20 years.

“Food insecurity is a problem in rural communities, and transportation is a real problem,” Marianne explains. “Mid Valley School is a community center for many activities, and having a food pantry here is a natural fit.”

FISH receives no state or federal funds and operates solely on private donations. Food comes from a variety of sources, including local farmers, orchardists, grocery stores and food drives.

FISH is also aligned with the Oregon Food Bank, which allows the organization to buy food items at a discount. More than 170,000 pounds of food were donated last year, and



A sign on the west side of the Mid-Valley School parking lot in Odell directs people to the new FISH Food Pantry inside the building.

volunteers contributed more than 11,000 hours of service.

“Because of our huge volunteer force, we’re able to spend money on food for our clients,” Marianne says.

From retirees to working parents, and folks living in cars to those living in comfort, the Odell Pantry Food feeds all who are in need. There are no income or citizenship requirements. Most importantly, there is no judgement.

“We tell all our volunteers, ‘Do not judge,’” Becky says. “Someone may drive up in a nice car, but they may be living in it. We don’t judge. We err on the side of compassion.”

The Oregon Food Bank says the need for food assistance is as strong as ever. Although a decade has passed since the Great Recession, many struggle to cover their basic needs. Although fewer people are unemployed, the high cost of living and stagnant wages

continue to create family food insecurity.

Food pantries no longer serve solely as an emergency food source but as an important source of nutrition, according to Oregon Food Bank reports. Pantries make a significant difference in the lives of food recipients. In fact, more people are visiting a pantry more often.

Tidy and clean, the Odell Pantry is small but full. Visitors choose from a selection of meats, butter, cheese, eggs, milk, bread, rice, beans, a variety of canned foods and seasonal fruits and vegetables. In the summer, produce harvested from the FISH Community Garden is offered to clients. The Odell location, which serves a large Latino population, features local favorites such as hominy, jalapenos, corn husks and cactus.

Because the site opened recently, it’s still unknown how

## FISH Locations

### Odell

- ▶ Mid Valley Elementary School, 3686 Davis Dr. West side of the school parking lot.
- ▶ Open the second and fourth Tuesday of every month from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.

### Cascade Locks

- ▶ Cascade Locks City Hall, 40 SW Wa-Na-Pa St.
- ▶ Open the fourth Wednesday of every month from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. and the following Saturday from 11 a.m. to noon.

### Parkdale

- ▶ Parkdale Community Church, 4910 Baseline Dr.
- ▶ Open Mondays from 4 to 6 p.m.

### Hood River

- ▶ 1130 Tucker Road
- ▶ Open Mondays from 3:30 to 5 p.m., Wednesdays from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m., Fridays from 3:30 to 5 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to noon.



With 500 volunteers and three part-time employees, FISH operates four food banks. The efforts are led by Marianne Durkan, who has volunteered for 20 years.

many the pantry will serve.

“Even if it’s just five, 10 or 20 families, it’s important,” Kim says.

All are encouraged to use this free resource.

“You don’t need a driver’s license,” Marianne says. “You

don’t need to be fearful. We’re not the food police. We don’t want anyone to go hungry.” ■

*To volunteer or make a donation, reach out to FISH Food Bank, 1130 Tucker Road, Hood River, Oregon 97031, go to [www.fish-food-bank.com](http://www.fish-food-bank.com) or call 541-386-3474.*

# Learning at Home

Home-based preschool program prepares rural Harney County children for kindergarten

By Lauren Brown

Families in rural Harney County know there are many benefits to raising children in the country. Kids can play outside, help with chores, care for animals and see their parents tend to the work of running a ranch every day. However, when it comes to early childhood learning and getting children ready for kindergarten, living rurally can have its challenges.

Donna Schnitker, director of early childhood programs for Harney Education Service District, has worked on this problem for many years, fine-tuning a preschool program

that works for rural families. Donna tried a variety of programs, including preschool by mail, until she obtained federal funding for a home-based Head Start program in 2000.

When a family in Harney County enrolls their child in home-based Head Start, an instructor visits the home and works with the child for an hour-and-a-half once a week. The child, accompanied by a parent, attends a socialization session every two weeks in a classroom setting with other children in the home-based program at the Early Childhood Center in Burns.

Initially, Donna says it was



**Eli James works on a craft project during a home visit session, which is a weekly part of Head Start. Children also attend twice-monthly socializations in Burns with other children in the program.** PHOTO BY CHEYENNE FOWLER

tough to win over parents who weren't sold on the idea of having an instructor from a federally funded program come into their homes to work with their children.

"We're not a government agency coming in to do anything except teach your children how to be ready for kindergarten and to teach you as a parent how to get your child ready for kindergarten, too," Donna says.

Eventually, parents began to see the benefits of the program, and home-based preschool found its place at the Early

Childhood Center. The center also hosts half-day and full-day preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds who live in Burns/Hines.

While children in the home-based program aren't getting daily lessons from a teacher, the idea behind the program is to give parents the tools to continue educating their children when the instructor can't be there.

"We're bringing in something once a week for them," Donna says. "That's not enough, but hopefully over the time that we have the child

in the program, the family will figure out how they can carry everything forward at home. One of the basic ideas is providing crafts or ideas for learning with items that you would find in your home so you wouldn't necessarily have to go and purchase a bunch of new things in order to deliver the education."

Brenda Engbretson is assistant director for Head Start programs at the Early Childhood Center and has been a home-based instructor. She has had students in the Fields area, more than two hours away from Burns. Weather can pose a problem in the winter, when snow and ice make driving treacherous.

"Last year was my busiest year as far as miles," she says. "I traveled an average of 600 miles a week."

It can be tough only getting to see a student once a week, but working one-on-one with a student for an hour and a half has its benefits. As a home-visitor instructor, Brenda could tailor lessons to a student's needs.

"I feel it really gives students a good foundation to start kindergarten," she says. "I think that's a success story for every family that's in the program."

Socializations at the center are an essential part of the home-based program.

"The idea is that if you do a home-based program, you want to get the kids into a setting where they're with other children so they're not just by themselves," Donna says. "We have these children living on

these isolated ranches with no access to friends next door, and this is a way to make that happen."

The two-hour socialization sessions are filled with arts and crafts, songs, games and play time. Parents must stay on the premises with their child. Initially, Donna says, parents wanted to be able to drop their kids off for the socializations. However, the purpose in having the parent stay is that they can learn from the socialization activities and continue those ideas when they return home.

Family advocacy is also part of Head Start and can be an important part of the home-based program.

"Families sometimes are in a crisis and don't know where to go for help, and we guide them," Donna says. "We don't do it for them, but we guide them. The idea is they learn a process when we do it with them so that next time a problem comes up, they'll be able to figure out for themselves how to get from point A to point B."

Donna notes that once a sense of trust is built between the home visitor instructor and the parent, families might feel more comfortable telling the instructor about problems the family is facing.

"Some of those families are so far out, we might be the only grown-up they see that week," Brenda says.

Living on an isolated ranch can be lonely at times, which is why Donna believes the connections made between a

home visitor instructor and the parents and children can be valuable.

"On ranches, you can have the best intentions in the world, but it is a hard life," she says. "The fact that you take a break and sit down with your child for an hour-and-a-half once a week is something really special when you don't have time to do that the rest of the week."

Home-based Head Start can help rural families bridge the

gap in helping prepare children for the next step in their education.

"We're just really thankful that we have it," Donna says. "It's an added value to our community to help kids feel more comfortable when they get into kindergarten." ■

*For more information about the Home-based Head Start program at the Early Childhood Center, call 541-573-6461.*



**Cheyenne Fowler reads to her son, Eli, during a home visit session.**  
PHOTO BY BRENDA ENGBRETSON

# Ruralite

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FEBRUARY 2020

## Drift Busters

Minidoka County snowplow drivers never know what to expect. Page 4

PHOTO BY DIANNA TROYER





Story and photos by Dianna Troyer

# The Dependable Drift Busters

While plowing snow one dark morning, Del Maier felt his 22-ton road grader start to slide backward down a hill next to the cemetery north of Rupert. He desperately tried to steer.

“To get some control, I shifted to reverse faster than I’d ever done before,” says Del, who began working for the Minidoka County Road Department in 1990.

When he finally stopped sliding at the bottom of Cemetery Hill, he put chains on the tires to gain traction.

“I could hardly see,” he says. “It was 4 a.m., and the wind was blowing snow everywhere. That was back in the mid-’90s before we had radial tires. The radials we use now have good

traction, so we don’t need to chain up most of the time.”

Del still carries chains on the side of his grader, but uses them mostly to rescue drivers and pull their vehicles—school buses, semitrucks and cars—back onto the road.

He is among 18 Minidoka County Road Department employees who keep about 300 miles of paved and 300 miles of gravel roads clear of snow from late fall to early spring. Depending on the intensity of a snowstorm, the workers often

toil day and night, driving six graders and seven trucks equipped with massive plows.

Their wintertime work is unpredictable, tiring and, at times, terrifying.

“During storms, everyone in our department works hard for as long as we’re needed,” Del says.

He says the office staff does a great job too.

“We keep each other going. One time, I worked 21 hours straight,” Del says. “Your eyes hurt from the strain of trying to see where you’re going.”

The stress is tempered with the satisfaction of providing a vital public service for commuters and emergency responders. At times, the

workers are asked to plow and lead the way for ambulance and school bus drivers, or linemen who need to fix a power outage.

No matter what happens during a plowing season, they are glad for February.

“It’s about the halfway point for our season,” Del says. “That’s when we start our countdown to the end of winter.”

To relieve wintertime tension, Del and other drivers have sharpened their sense of humor. People often ask them to predict what the winter will be like.

“I tell them to look out their window every day just like I do,” says Scott Mecham, who was hired in 1992 and



**FROM LEFT:** Scott Mecham's sense of humor helps relieve the tension of plowing snow. Minidoka County Road Department employees use massive road graders to bust through drifts during winter. Del Maier uses a joystick to control his massive grader.

is assigned the remote roads northwest of Paul. "We can only predict and deal with one day at a time."

Scott recalls joking with a motorist after he pulled his car back onto the road.

"He asked me how I could even see," Scott says. "I happened to be wearing sunglasses and asked him if he hadn't heard about the magic glasses. He said he hadn't, so I laughed and told him I hadn't either because I couldn't see the road any better than he could."

Sometimes without warning, the sky and ground blend together in a wall of white.

"When visibility is almost zero, you use landmarks like weeds growing alongside the road or utility poles so you

know where to drive," Del says. "In some remote places, though, there aren't poles. All of a sudden you see stubble and realize you're plowing snow on a farmer's field. When it's foggy, you can't even see the front of the grader."

The grader's cab is warm as a summer day with the heater and defroster blowing.

"We keep the windshield warm, so snow and ice will melt as it blows back from the plow and we can see where we're going," Del says. "It also helps prevent ice balls from forming on the wipers."

Many days, their efforts seem futile.

"You clear some roads, and by the time you drive back it's blown in so you can't even tell you plowed," Del says.

Some days, progress is slow. During one storm, Del drove just 3 miles in 5 ½ hours. Some 10-foot-tall snowdrifts have seemed impenetrable.

"You wouldn't believe how the wind compacts and hardens the snow," Del says. "You get a running start and hit a drift hard, and it stops the grader. You try again and might only go 20 feet at a time."

Del and Scott laugh about people thinking they are invincible and never get stuck.

"When I started, my supervisor told me if I didn't get stuck, I wasn't plowing enough," Scott says.

One farmer watched Del maneuver his grader back on the road after it slid off.

"He told me he would never have believed what I'd done

if he hadn't seen it," Del says. "You can use the blade under the grader to lift it up and push yourself back up on the road. You can only go 1 or 2 feet at a time, so it takes 10 to 15 minutes. Sometimes, you're almost there, then you slide back off the road and have to start over."

Del and Scott's frustrations are sometimes soothed with kindness.

"We appreciate it when some people wave us down at the edge of the road and give us a plate of homemade cookies or cinnamon rolls," Del says.

Whatever happens, Scott says they are prepared.

"When spring comes, we'll start fixing the damage from winter, but at least then we can see what we're doing," he says. ■

# Celebrating 50 Years and the Power of Community



By Christina Sawyer

**O**prah Winfrey once said, “To move forward, you have to give back.” This quote reflects the special bond and obligation that ties Mt. Wheeler Power to the communities we serve. With Valentine’s Day approaching, we can’t think of a better time to express how much we love this community and serving you—our members.

When we helped bring electricity to rural Nevada and parts of Utah 50 years ago, the quality of life improved for all. Through the years, other issues needed to be tackled, and we have been at the forefront of helping to address some of those issues. We want to help meet the long-term needs of our community to ensure it continues to thrive.

February marks our 50th anniversary, and we begin our celebration of this momentous achievement by reflecting on our past accomplishments. That means taking pride in the success of programs for our youth, such as education scholarships or the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour, which takes some of our community’s brightest young people to Washington, D.C., for a week to experience democracy in action. It also means pulling together to help keep the spirit of Christmas alive in the homes of those who struggle during

the holidays. It means sitting down to help our members navigate the application process for state funding, including programs that help pay utility bills, such as the Energy Assistance Program. It means partnering with organizations such as Co-Bank and CFC to increase our power to make a financial difference to small mom-and-pop establishments and other worthy community-based programs like tribal ceremonies, youth curriculum and state and national parks improvements.

Over the last five decades, our community-focused programs and other giving projects have supported businesses, uplifted families, enabled those in need to keep the lights on, and so much more.

We couldn’t do any of this without you—our members. We all benefit from these programs because of you and your neighbors. You empower Mt. Wheeler Power through your membership and through your participation in and support of these programs.

While reflection is great, we are excited to look forward to a bright future. As a local business, we are proud to power your life and bring good things to our community. While our top priority is to provide safe, reliable and affordable energy, our mission to enrich the



lives of the members we serve is equally important. This focus on investing in our community is central to the way we operate as a cooperative. Mt. Wheeler Power knows that electricity is a critical need for modern-day life, but it takes more than poles and power lines to make a community.

Over time, our co-op has evolved to meet changing needs and improve the quality of life in our community. The renovation of our aging facility and investment in a new operations center are examples of our commitment to positive growth. Incorporating new technology, safety procedures and modern conveniences allows us to better



**Mt. Wheeler Power's management team is (from left) Finance Manager Trish Stanton, Operations Manager Bill Ricci, CEO Kevin Robison, Engineering Manager Jesse Murdock and Member Services/HR Manager Shellie Watts. PHOTO BY ETHAN E. ROCKE**

serve our community.

We will continue to seek out the most cost-effective, safe and reliable means to provide our members with power. Our work over the past year to develop a complete digital mapping program will continue into 2020. The results of this work will allow us to reduce response times during an outage and identify potential hazards.

We will use social media and other innovative communications tools to provide our members with energy-efficiency tips, important deadlines and notifications and to bring our community closer

together. We will invest in technology, such as the mobile app that provides our members convenient options for making payments and reporting outages. We will continue to support local businesses as they invest in new technologies, such as electric charging stations and internet options.

We will continue to encourage your participation in board elections to guide our efforts as we plan for the future. We depend on your active role in this democratic process. It's the foundation the co-op was built on, and it continues to be a vital to our success. Your co-op's

long-term goals are all achieved with the hard work and commitment of your elected leaders and our staff.

The energy landscape is undergoing dramatic change fueled by evolving technology and consumer desires for more options. Having someone you can depend on to make good decisions starts with the election process.

While the larger environment in which we operate is constantly changing, one thing remains the same. By working together—the cooperative way—we can continue to do good in our community for another 50 years and beyond. ■

# Award-Winning Teacher Passes Passion for Civic Engagement to Her Students

By Dianna Troyer

Kathy Durham was blown away when she learned she won a statewide teaching award last year and was a finalist for 2019 Nevada Teacher of the Year.

“I was honored, humbled and excited to bring some positive attention to our school and community,” says Kathy, who teaches U.S. history and American government at West Wendover High School. “To me, the awards reflect the hard work of our staff. No one in education can be great on her own. It takes all of us working together as a team.”

Nevada’s Advisory Committee on Participatory Democracy honored Kathy with its Jean Ford Democracy Award in the education category. Jean Ford was a Nevada legislator who began her political career as a volunteer and citizen activist. The award program that bears her name recognizes the exemplary service and leadership of Nevada citizens who have benefited their communities, state and nation through participation and leadership in furthering the democratic process.

Kathy tries to impress upon her students the value of civic engagement, encouraging them to participate in local government or volunteer in their communities.

“Go to city council meetings;



**Kathy Durham has a discussion with student Anahi Soriano.**  
PHOTOS BY KAMERON KEITH

see what’s going on,” she says. “Then ask, ‘What can I do?’”

Much to Kathy’s satisfaction, former students have applied the democratic lessons she taught them at local and national venues.

Daniel Corona, West Wendover’s mayor since 2016, says Kathy sparked his interest in politics and community service when she was his American history teacher in seventh grade.

“She encouraged us to do our civic duty but didn’t do it in a preachy way,” he says. “We all have an important role to play in our democracy. She made history fun and interesting. She found ways to explain how historical events are relevant and linked to current events.”

Kathy was elected to the West

Wendover City Council in 2018.

“We’re lucky to have her in school and on the city council,” Daniel says.

Colton Smith, a 2018 WWHS graduate, worked for Chris Stewart, a Republican representing Utah’s 2nd Congressional District, last summer in Washington, D.C.

“Colton’s very determined and has had a game plan for quite some time,” Kathy says. “He’s realizing his dreams and being a rock star in the process.”

Last fall, Kathy was among four finalists for Nevada Teacher of the Year. The Nevada Department of Education sponsors the award to recognize teachers who are dedicated to their students’ success.

While she appreciates the accolades, Kathy says

other honors are equally important.

“One of my proudest moments as a teacher happened four years ago,” she says. “Three students invited me to the library to watch them vote for the first time. They were so happy and proud. To me it was everything—to see students take what they learned in the classroom to the world beyond our school.”

Kathy, a West Wendover teacher since 2000, says she has at least eight years left to influence students before she considers retiring.

“I’m 56—how did that happen?” she asks. “The voice in my head still feels like 30. I’m so blessed to make a living from my passion, and my passion is trying to be the best teacher I can be. I want to be the Donovan Mitchell of the classroom,” she says, referring to the tenacious basketball player from her favorite team, the Utah Jazz.

Kathy says she will teach her students about two important issues in 2020: the presidential election and the national census.

“The census is vital for us because it determines representation and allocation of federal funding,” she says. “Our town is among the most undercounted in the state and nation, so we need to get kids involved to spread the word at home about how important it

Y AND UNION



Kathy in her classroom at West Wendover High School.

is to fill out the census forms.”

Kathy hopes her students understand their responsibility “to preserve our democratic republic,” she says. “Our form of government depends on an informed and involved electorate.”

Kathy teaches a curriculum called “We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution.” Developed by the nonprofit Center for Civic Education, it focuses on giving students an understanding of the ideals and laws enshrined in the Declaration of Independence

and the Constitution. When they were published, the principles in those documents were revolutionary.

“The Declaration is the most beautiful breakup letter of all time,” Kathy says. “In the first sections, it spells out how the relationship between government and its people should work. The Constitution’s preamble describes the core values of the American identity. That these documents still resonate with us today shows they can withstand the test of time.”

The curriculum culminates with students staging a congressional hearing.

“The kids really like the curriculum because they’re required to apply information and critical thinking skills in various scenarios,” she says.

Kathy says she feels energized when she develops lesson plans to encourage critical thinking. She attributes her teaching style to University of Utah history professor Dr. Harold Bauman.

“He had such a profound impact on my life,” she says.

*“When you show students you care, they work so hard in return. Teaching is about relationships.”*

—KATHY DURHAM

“For a final class project, he encouraged me to teach a lesson instead of write a paper. I realized what a blast it is to teach and earned a bachelor’s degree in social studies teacher education. I’m forever grateful for his insights and for my dad encouraging me to go to college.”

In celebration of Presidents’ Day this month, Kathy is sharing her favorite fun facts about U.S. presidents with her students. John Quincy Adams, for example, used to bathe naked in the Potomac River. A reporter once sat on his clothes and refused to hand them over until he agreed to an interview.

Kathy plans to continue teaching as long as she can.

“I love developing curriculum, but most of all I love the kids here,” she says. “When you show them you care, they work so hard in return. Teaching is about relationships first. If you don’t connect with the kids, it doesn’t matter how much you know.” ■

# Lineman Builds Models to Help Tell Story

## No detail is too small for VEA's Butch Davies

Lineman. Craftsman. Teacher. Valley Electric Association's Butch Davies wears all three hats.

For most of the past two decades, Butch, a Journeyman Lineman, has been keeping the lights on for VEA members by patrolling the Cooperative's vast network of transmission and distribution lines, performing maintenance and making repairs. Like many of his colleagues, Butch knows the trade inside and out, and he has a passion for explaining how the grid works and how students and members can stay safe.

Butch is quick to volunteer at member events or in Nye County School District classrooms where eager students get an expert breakdown of the Co-op's electric system. Their curiosity is easily matched by Butch's willingness to engage them. The interaction keeps him young.

"I like sharing what I know about our system with people, especially students," says Butch.

He now has two handcrafted teaching models to assist.

Butch built both of the models – a miniature distribution system, and a substation, illustrating how voltage is stepped down from 138,000 volts to 24,900 volts.

With the models, Butch can show what a utility system looks like. It brings to life what line workers, meter techs and other utility employees.

Before he built them, Butch sometimes would become stumped trying to explain these concepts to students if the classrooms had no window where poles and wires could be seen, or, if there was a window, the facilities were too far off in the distance for the kids to see what he was talking about.

Butch's solution? Bring the facilities to the classroom, in miniature, of course.

Butch invested more than 300 hours



**Butch Davies likes sharing what he knows about VEA's electric system and has invested more than 300 hours into two scale models that students can relate to.** JEFF SCHEID PHOTOS

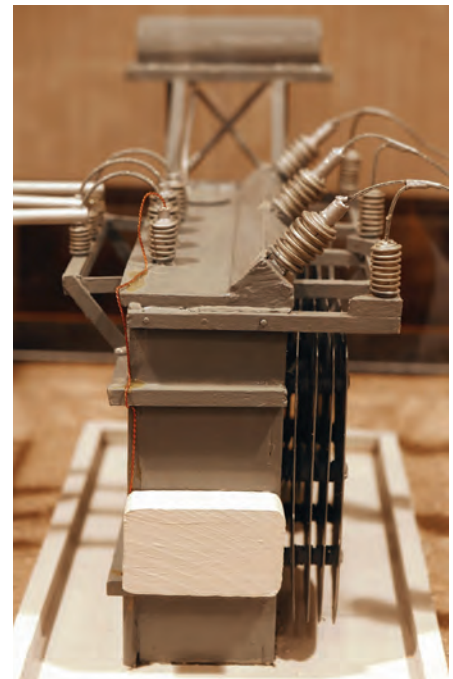
over the course of 12 months to build the exact scale models. He used five-eighths-inch dowels for power poles, dozens of match sticks for cross-arm supports and hundreds of tiny washers to replicate insulators. Wire usually used to hang heavy mirrors was the perfect substitute for power lines. He stained or hand painted every little piece.

"I used to build models – sailing ships, airplanes and cars – when I was younger," says Butch, who is now 55. "I love doing this kind of work."

Butch was sidelined from his day job for several months last year recovering from knee surgery when old sports injuries finally caught up with him. He spent much of his down time in the garage of his Pahrump home building the models, covered by Plexiglas shields. No detail was too small, down to the desert landscaping and the concrete footings on each model.

Now when he explains how a transformer or a breaker works, everything the students need to visualize what he is talking about is right in front of them.

Butch gets a kick out of the way students relate to the models. Last spring while talking to students in Pahrump,



Butch learned that one young woman was interested in becoming a line worker. "I have since found out that after graduation, she is now enrolled in lineman's school. How about that?"

Though Butch's handiwork has become an important teaching tool at the Co-op, he is not content. He is already planning his next project – an electric generation model, which may a hydro generator, a solar plant or a gas-fired facility. Maybe all three. ■



Furnace Creek Resort was designed and built in the 1920s by Albert C. Martin Sr., who also was the architect on the Los Angeles City Hall.  
FURNACE CREEK RESORT

## There Is a Reason It Is Called ‘The Oasis’

Furnace Creek Resort goes back a century

By John M. Glionna

Phyllis Nefsky recalls the moment she laid eyes on the old hotel.

She and husband, Harry, drove from Las Vegas for a Death Valley vacation in 1999, not reaching Furnace Creek until after 1 a.m.

Rounding the last corner along California Route 190, they encountered the gem amid the salt flats and prehistoric boulders, its towering palms softly lit against the desert sky, its greenery breathtaking.

It's now known as the Oasis,

and Phyllis knows why.

“There’s this ‘Wow!’ factor seeing the hotel lit up at night,” she says. “I’d had this distorted image of Death Valley as all cow skulls and sand dunes. My husband and I don’t agree on a lot of things, but we looked at one another and said, ‘This is nice.’”

You could say the hotel changed their lives.

Today, Phyllis is a sales manager at the Oasis, known back then as the Furnace Creek Resort. Until he retired, Harry worked in I.T.

Together, they took pride in the AAA-rated four-diamond



For Phyllis Nefsky, the aura of old Hollywood still exists.

JOHN GLIONNA

resort that started as a compound built in the 1920s by the Pacific Coast Borax Company.

The graciousness of any luxury hotel emerges from the loyalty of the staff. Rather than paid smiles, there’s a palpable

feeling that people actually like what they do.

"I adore this hotel," says Gary Bryant, who has worked here for 29 years, most recently as a restaurant waiter. "It's deliberately simple, but what a grand life!"

It's also historic.

Opened on February 1, 1927, the hotel originally featured 12 small rooms as Pacific Coast Borax sought to open Death Valley to tourists. Architect Albert C. Martin Sr., who designed Los Angeles City Hall and other cathedrals there, put his stamp on the project and its Spanish Mission-style architecture.

The goal was to create a green refuge in the brown desert. More rooms were added, along with a U-shaped terrace. Later rooms featured private balconies and fireplaces.

The hotel eventually became a Hollywood getaway, attracting stars like Clark Gable, Bette Davis and Goldie Hawn. Ronald Reagan was a regular guest in the mid-1960s when he hosted the long-running TV show *Death Valley Days*, which was shot on-site.

These days, former professional basketball player Bill Walton drops in for weeks at a time, relishing in 100-mile desert bike rides and laps in the pool. He calls the hotel his "happy place."

Phyllis says the aura of old Hollywood still exists. "It's a 'Disappear here' kind of place," she says. "They used to have pens that said just that: 'Disappear Here.'"

Phyllis has been around long enough to see a few stars.



**Omar Meshref and Christine Sceppe fell in love with the Oasis and each other.** JOHN GLIONNA

She sits with a visitor near the check-in counter, the windows behind her revealing an expansive view of the valley floor, stretching west to the shimmering Panamint Mountains in the distance.

"Anthony Quinn used to sit right over there, playing chess with his son," she says. "Marlon Brando came out to escape the paparazzi when scandal hit in Hollywood."

The 88-room Oasis, which is owned Xanterra Parks & Resorts, just completed a \$100 million renovation that included new furnishings, and upgrades throughout that include the addition of 22 new casitas in the famed Oasis Gardens, a spread of green with swaying palms that is a favorite spot for weddings.

Phyllis is particularly proud of the elegant casitas, which have joined her list of favorite places on the hotel grounds, including an open-air room near the spa sits over a stream that runs through the property. She also likes Room 224 with its views and back porch and

always tried to reserve it for her parents when they visited.

But for many employees, a favorite spot is a star-gazing roof where guests can sit with a drink and watch timeless views of the Milky Way.

Christine Sceppe, a Staten Island native who is now the hotel's guest services manager, says the star-gazing roof is just one of the features that makes the Oasis special.

"The place just seems to be incongruous with its surroundings," Christine says. "You look out at the stark beauty of Death Valley and can imagine that it hasn't changed much since the miners pulled borax through here on mule trains. But this is the lap of luxury."

She said the views of the valley often bring people together.

One winter day a few years ago, she says, scores of guests congregated in the lobby to watch a dust storm roll in from the mountains onto the valley floor. "We all had the perfect view."

Christine, 32, came out to Death Valley on vacation and fell in love with the landscape. She began working at the hotel in 2016 as a front desk clerk and believed she'd found nirvana, even if eligible men were scarce.

But the Oasis solved even that need.

She eventually met employee Omar Meshref and they began to take walks together on their days off. "We liked each other's company," Christine recalls.

Omar returned home to his native Egypt, where he earned an advanced degree before returning to Death Valley.

And Christine was glad to have him back.

One night, after both had completed their shifts, they were watching television — a movie, Christine recalls, she had seen 100 times but whose name escapes her — when Omar turned to her.

As she tells the story, the couple stands at the front desk and Omar resumes.

"I said 'I want to marry you,' he says. "She thought I was joking. I wasn't."

She said yes, of course.

"We got married in Vegas, in exactly the kind of ceremony that my family would have made fun of," Christine says. "I mean, Elvis was there."

Since then, both have been promoted.

Such is life for the staff of a hotel where the staff has fun doing their jobs.

"You know that song by Joni Mitchell about paving paradise to up a parking lot," asks Phyllis. "Well, this hotel is the complete opposite." ■

# 2020 Hopes, Expectations

VEA board members sound off on future

Valley Electric Association began 2020 with a new Chief Executive Officer and a new Board of Directors.

Mark Stallons arrived from Kentucky the first week of January. New Board member Robin Barber was sworn into her District 6 (North Pahrump) seat in late December, completing a transition that saw all six Board members being replaced during 2019.

And so 2020 ushered in different perspectives and new opportunities.

Following are comments from VEA Board members on their individual hopes and expectations for the Co-op in 2020 and beyond:



Kathleen Keyes

**Kathleen Keyes**  
**Board President**  
**District 4, Fish Lake Valley**

In 2019, a solid foundation was put in place to move Valley Electric Association into the new year and beyond.

In 2020, VEA will begin building on that foundation. With a new Board of Directors and a new CEO, the opportunities for positive change are endless.

When 2020 is in the history books, and we look back on

the year, I want to see a Co-op that has become financially sustainable.

A Co-op that has a strong, cohesive management team and a responsible Board of Directors. And a Co-op that has turned challenges into measurable successes through hard work and good decision making.

Valley Electric is boldly going forward in this direction and I believe that all of these things are possible. VEA will be that Co-op, 2020 will be the year of smiles!



Michelle Caird

**Michelle Caird**  
**District 1, South Pahrump**

It is with great anticipation we look forward to 2020. We will want to be nimble and take a strategic approach with respect to both opportunities and challenges, while being proactive and positive in our approach.

It is critical that we plan methodically and comprehensively for the new year, working collaboratively as a team for the betterment of all our members and the communities we serve.



**Bonnie Groenert**

**Bonnie Groenert  
District 2, Amargosa Valley**

The excitement of a whole new Board of Directors and new CEO leaves me with much anticipation that 2020 will be committed to the best ever customer satisfaction.

I believe as a Board member there are assets I need to remember at all times:

- ▶ Who the boss is. The customer.
- ▶ What does the customer want or need? We need to help anticipate those needs with solutions that we can provide.
- ▶ How do we show them we care? We need to make every effort to listen and understand.
- ▶ How to involve our customer? We need to help make doing business with VEA easy and understandable.
- ▶ What to do if we have a problem? We need to know how to apologize and do it quickly with any possible solution available.
- ▶ How can we measure our success? Feedback, possibly through online survey.
- ▶ Employee and future employee relations are great assets that must be maintained.



**Rob Shirley**

**Rob Shirley  
District 3, Beatty**

I believe it is important that the Co-op continue to move in a direction that is innovative and responsible, that we provide the most reliable, affordable services possible – electric or broadband.

As members and directors, our Board must provide leadership in our communities that contributes to the future growth of VEA.

**Terrie D'Antonio  
District 5, Sandy Valley**

Having spent two months as Interim CEO, I want members to know what a great staff we have at VEA, how ethical they are and how much expertise exists in the organization.

We live by the Seven Cooperative Principles. I am convinced that VEA will continue to be the great organization that it has always been. We've had a few hiccups, but VEA has always been a good Co-op.

I hope our members will understand we have to make changes in the future. We are all members. It is not "us vs. them." It's We.

Our Board will be active, and we will ask the right questions, the tough question.

You can't have a CEO that



**Terrie D'Antonio**

doesn't share with the Board, but you can't have a board that doesn't ask the right questions either. I believe our new CEO is the right person at the right time.

We must move forward. I am excited about all the great things that are going to happen in the future.

**Robin Barber  
District 6, North Pahrump**

Not me, WE! My hopes and expectations for a new year, 2020, are for a new start.

I hope to help close the old chapter of misfortune and missteps with our Co-op and open the new year with a fresh new start. My intention is to work with our members as their representative in a collaborative, open, and successful way.

WE can work together to ensure our community has the services needed to be safe, responsive, and economically sound for the future. WE can do this together.

We have a new outlook – on everything. How many co-ops have an opportunity like this? ■



**Robin Barber**

# Contribution is a Way of Giving Back

## Chicago transplant calls Pahrump home

It would be difficult to find anyone who sings the praises of Pahrump louder than Keith Layton. This transplant from the South side of Chicago was transformed two decades ago when he left the Windy City for rural Nevada.

“I needed a change,” says Keith. “Things weren’t going good for me and my family back in 1999, so I threw everything I had – nine bags of clothes – into my truck and headed West.”

From his first days in Pahrump, life was much better, and Keith has never looked back. “It’s the people,” says Keith. “They’re real.”

As a gesture of gratitude to his adopted home, the owner of Layton Tree service makes a year-end contribution to a community organization. For 2019, the Valley Electric Charitable Foundation was his choice for a \$500 gift.

“Each year, I try to find someone I can help,” says Keith, who wrote a check to the foundation just before Christmas. “All my kids are grown, so I have no one to buy gifts for. (The Charitable Foundation) is perfect. Pahrump has been so good to me for the past 20 years. It feels good to give back to the community.”

“What a surprise it was to hear of this very generous contribution,” says Terrie D’Antonio, Interim CEO at the time of the donation and current Chair of VEA’s Charitable Foundation Committee. “This is very timely, because we are developing new



Keith Layton near one of his trucks as a crew clears tree growth from a distribution line near Betty Avenue and North David Street in Pahrump. VALLEY ELECTRIC PHOTO

and bigger plans for the foundation, so we are very grateful to Keith.”

Keith has been trimming trees for more than 30 years, starting out in Chicago before taking his skills to Nye County. About six years ago Keith contracted with VEA to keep tree growth away from distribution lines.

His work occasionally takes him on the road as well. When disasters hit other parts of the country, tree trimmers like Keith are in great need. Keith has been known to join FEMA work crews, which help clean up the damage caused by tornadoes and hurricanes.

VEA’s Charitable Foundation had approximately \$35,000 in it Jan. 1. About 20 percent of the funds come from members, primarily through Operation Roundup, a program that allows consumers to “round up” their monthly payments with the excess going toward the foundation. The majority of the foundation’s funds are contributed by VEA employees through payroll deduction and direct contributions.

The Foundation often makes annual contributions to senior centers throughout

the territory to help offset power bills.

A larger role is in store for the foundation in 2020 and beyond.

In July, VEA formed a Charitable Foundation Committee, comprised of members and employees, to plan ways to better serve non-profits in the Cooperative’s service territory.

Long term, the foundation hopes to appeal to more members so it is better able to serve organizations large and small, says Terrie, a member of the VEA Board of Directors.

The committee is in the process of rewriting the foundation’s bylaws, revamping the application process and exploring the possibility of acquiring grant funding.

Members of the 20-person committee are very hopeful for the foundation’s future. “We are definitely heading in a positive direction,” says member Willi Baer of Pahrump. “This foundation should end up being the premier grant organization in the area.”

*Non-profits in the VEA service area can apply for donations on VEA’s website at [www.vea.coop](http://www.vea.coop)* ■

# Teaching Electrical Safety

OTEC encourages children to be creative while learning safety

By Susan Parrish

Last spring, Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative unveiled an educational program to encourage students to be creative while learning about safety around electricity.

In launching its kids' electrical safety poster and artwork contest, OTEC hoped to increase student awareness of safe electricity use and to encourage schools, teachers, and parents or guardians to include discussion of electrical safety to increase awareness and avoid electrical injuries.

"Safety is a top priority at OTEC," says Sandra Ghormley, OTEC's director of member and program services. "We talk about electrical safety daily before work begins and in our meetings to increase awareness of possible unsafe conditions."

Prevention and awareness are keys to being safe because they may mean the difference between life and death when it comes to electricity.

"Our members' and employees' safety is of the utmost importance to us," Sandra says, "so it makes sense to teach our children how to be safe around electricity at an early age."

To determine the effectiveness of the contest idea, OTEC reached out to students in Grant County to participate



Last year's K-3 first-place winner Gabe Gangler poses with his award. PHOTO BY SAMANTHA GANGLER

last year. John Day was the site of OTEC's annual meeting, and students received their awards during the annual meeting.

Close to 200 Grant County students submitted their artwork around the theme of electrical outlet safety. Students in kindergarten through third grade colored a coloring sheet. Students in grades four through six created posters.

Student artwork was displayed at OTEC's annual meeting in May at the Grant County Fairgrounds. All students who entered the

contest, along with their parents, were invited to attend the meeting.

The judges were OTEC employees at the Grant County office. While judging the entries, the students' names were not visible on their artwork. There were winners from each of the 22 participating classrooms.

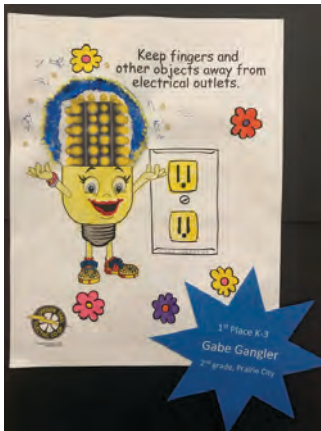
For both age groups, three winners received cash prizes. First place won \$100; second place, \$50; and third place, \$25. Each student who participated received a certificate.

Shilo Fretwell, who teaches a blended classroom of 14 students in kindergarten, first and second grade at Dayville School, gave a coloring sheet to all of her students and encouraged them to enter.

"OTEC's contest gave me the opportunity to talk about electrical safety in my class," she says.

One of Shilo's students received a prize in the contest, as did both of her sons, Kellen and Preston, who also attend Dayville School. Because the school had the highest

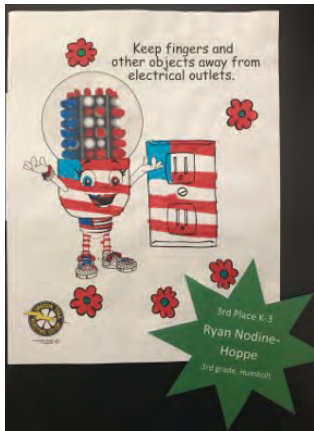
# 2019 Grant County Contest Winners



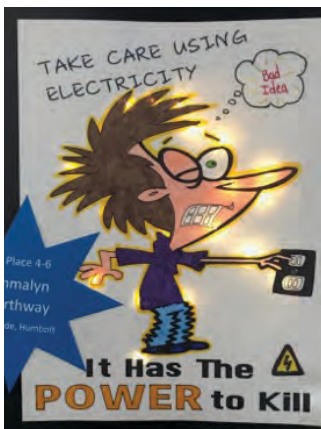
First place K-3, Gabe Gangler



Second place K-3, Kellen Fretwell



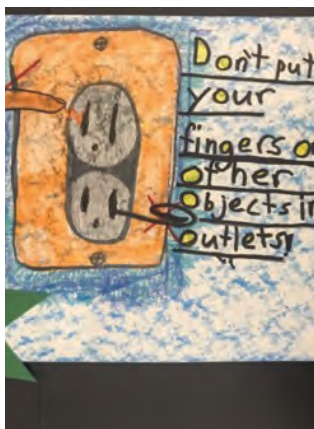
Third place K-3, Ryan Nodine-Hoppe



First place 4-6, Emmalyn Northway



Second place 4-6, Mylan Wolfer



Third place 4-6, Preston Fretwell

participation, the school received a professionally produced DVD about electrical safety that can be added to class curriculum.

"Thanks go to OTEC for providing the opportunity for our kids and the platform to open up a conversation about electricity safety," Shilo says. "It's always important to go over that in a structured environment. And it was fun. They liked the materials and they liked the creative opportunities."

When Gabe Gangler, a student at Prairie City School,

brought home a coloring sheet for the contest, his mother, Samantha, encouraged him to add glitter and beads after he colored it.

"Gabe colored the sheet himself, and he thought the glitter and beads made it look shiny like a real lightbulb," Samantha says. "It was the perfect opportunity to talk about electrical safety with him."

Gabe was the first-place winner and received \$100. He and his parents, Tom and Samantha, attended the annual meeting.

"This experience was a great confidence booster for my son," Samantha says.

Because last year's participation was positive, OTEC is expanding the contest to all elementary and middle school children throughout OTEC's system.

"Knowing how to be safe around power lines and electricity is a subject that never goes away," Sandra says. "Safety is at the forefront of everything we do at OTEC." ■

Look for more information in your local newspaper, on OTEC's Facebook page and otec.coop.

## 2020 Contest

### Play it Safe Around Electricity

February 1-April 15, 2020

Posters and material are on [otec.coop](http://otec.coop).

#### Topics to choose from:

- ▶ Always keep a safe distance from power lines.
- ▶ Don't fly anything, like a kite, near power lines.
- ▶ Don't play outside during a thunderstorm.
- ▶ Don't climb trees located near power lines.

#### Rules:

- ▶ Parents must give permission for their child to enter the contest.
- ▶ OTEC has the right to use submitted entries.
- ▶ Manual entries are accepted at all offices.
- ▶ Send electronic entries to [communications@otec.com](mailto:communications@otec.com).
- ▶ No entries are allowed after April 15.

#### Prizes:

- ▶ \$100 gift certificate for first-place winners in each age category.
- ▶ \$50 gift certificate for second-place winners in each age category.
- ▶ \$25 gift certificate for third-place winners in each age category.

All winners are invited to attend OTEC's annual meeting and will have special seating next to board members.

Free safety coloring books for contestants are available for pick up from all OTEC offices.

For specific criteria and rules, visit [www.otec.coop](http://www.otec.coop)



# OSP on the Rural Beat in OTEC Communities

**Story and photo by Lisa Jacoby**

A squelch blurts from the radar system in this silver Dodge Charger, and Trooper Jonathan Boggs points to the numbers popping up on the screen. From his spot in I-84's median, Jonathan can see the speeds of eastbound cars as well as the westbound vehicles on the other side of the freeway.

His gaze sharpens when a number flashes that is higher than the posted 70 miles per hour. In most cases, it quickly falls as the vehicle passes his patrol car. "That's the car doing its work," he says.

Jonathan has been an Oregon State

trooper for six years. He works in La Grande, but for the past six months he's filled a vacancy in the Baker City office. His shift is 4 p.m. to 2 a.m. In the summer, that means a good portion of his 10-hour workday is in the daylight. On this night, the eve of the winter solstice, his entire shift is in darkness. Since he lives in La Grande, Jonathan starts work there and patrols I-84 on his way to Baker City, Oregon State Police has jurisdiction throughout the state, but troopers tend to stay within their county boundaries when on patrol.

Jonathan joins traffic heading east, on a stretch of highway between Baker City and

Huntington where only traffic signals light the road. Jonathan signals to the left before he pulls into the median, kills his headlights and turns on the radar. He says drivers can see the outline of the light bar atop the patrol car. Usually, Jonathan says, the glimpse of a squad car's silhouette results in drivers slowing down if their speedometer had crept over 70 mph. A vehicle flies by with no sign of reducing a speed that is well above the posted limit. Jonathan shifts into drive, glances over his shoulder to make sure the lane is clear, then roars onto the highway. "That's unsafe," he says as he catches up to the speeding car. "They saw



Oregon State Trooper Jonathan Boggs patrols the area between Baker City and La Grande.

me and didn't slow down."

As soon as Jonathan hits his blue lights, the car signals to pull over. Jonathan walks behind his patrol car and approaches on the passenger side, away from the interstate traffic roaring past. After a conversation and inspection of the license and registration—the vehicle matches the license plate, and the driver has no outstanding warrants—he sends the car on its way.

"Nice couple," he says as he buckles into his seat. "Speed just got away from them going downhill. I'm going to give him a warning."

The job of OSP, Jonathan says, is to help make the freeway safer for every traveler.

"I picture my wife and kiddos on the freeway," he says.

He hopes pulling over an offender will, he hopes, avoid the dangers that can come from speeding.

"I just want to be in a position to change that behavior," he says, "to make a difference."

"The biggest thing is just be nice to people," he says. "I hate getting stopped. It's nerve-wracking."

He has an easy smile as he greets each driver to explain the reason for the stop. If there are children in the car, he hands over rubber Oregon State Police bracelets when he returns the driver's license. When he does make a traffic stop, Jonathan tries to give the driver a positive impression of law enforcement.

"I learned that at the academy," he says. "You're setting it up for the next officer."

What happens to drivers who push the speedometer way past 70? Troopers gauge how long it will take to catch the offenders and take road conditions into account to determine how fast they can safely drive to catch the speeder. And no officer is alone.

"Our radios are faster," Jonathan says with a smile.

### Taillights and a Voucher

Most of his stops this evening are for malfunctioning taillights or headlights. For these interactions, the driver usually receives a warning and a coupon for 20% off \$20 as part of OSP's Car Care Program. Even people with working headlights get pulled over when they forget to use them. Jonathan estimates he stops a car a week that has forgotten daytime running lights do not turn on the taillights.

After each contact, Jonathan takes a few minutes to fill out the paperwork on the laptop secured halfway into the passenger seat. Below that are myriad parts of the video camera system new to the patrol car. This is why, he says, he leaves the car idling when stopped.

"You'd be surprised how fast the batteries die with all the equipment," he says.

The radio chirps near-constant chatter as officers update locations and dispatchers provide requested information. OSP dispatch is in Central Point in southern Oregon, but Jonathan hears—and can respond to—the local dispatch.

Jonathan's eastbound trip usually ends at Huntington, but this time he cuts it a

bit short to turn around at the Lookout Mountain Road exit after seeing a disabled vehicle on the westbound side of the interstate. An inspection shows no sign of a driver or passenger, but the hazard lights are on and the pickup is pulled far enough off the road that Jonathan doesn't deem it in need of a tow. He heads back to town to fill his half-full tank. He doesn't want to get caught low on gas during an emergency that could take hours to clear, which can easily happen during the winter in Eastern Oregon.

Jonathan keeps an eye on the edge of the road, in case the pickup's driver is walking toward gas. Jonathan gives each car or truck he passes a cursory glance, too, in case he sees the glow of a cellphone. Oregon's Distracted Driving Law carries stiff fines: a maximum of \$1,000 for a first offense that doesn't contribute to a crash. Three offenses in 10 years could result in a \$2,500 fine and up to six months in jail.

No one is on their phones tonight.

### Backup

Driving through Baker City on his way to Highway 30, Jonathan stops a vehicle with one taillight out and failed to signal. Another patrol soon pulls up behind—a Baker City Police officer out on rounds. Jonathan says the city, county and state officers will often check in when they see another officer on a routine stop.

That's not the only partnership in this line of work. Jonathan says troopers often rely on reports by citizens, such as a witness who sees someone swerving across lanes of traffic.

"It's a team effort when people report an impaired driver," he says.

Jonathan's night will hold a few more stops for missing lights and a chance to educate a Washington driver on the Move Over Law, which mandates drivers to move over when approaching an emergency vehicle or any motor vehicle that is stopped with warning or hazard lights. Failure to do so can result in a \$265 fine. Jonathan decides that tonight's stop educates rather than cites, as he sends the driver back on the road with a warning.

"The world is a little safer," he says. ■

# Ruralite


**PARKLAND LIGHT & WATER**

FEBRUARY 2020

## Mount Rainier

**Up-Close Adventures at  
Northwest Natural Icon**

Page 4



Jonathan Graham and Jennie Kiffmeyer take a rest during their Mount Rainier journey with their children, Benjamin and Elizabeth.

PHOTO BY DIANN SHELDON

# Up Close With Mount Rainier

By Rick Stedman

**DIANN SHELDON HAS ONE OF THE BEST JOBS IN THE WORLD:** She is a Mount Rainier tour guide. This iconic backdrop to the Pacific Northwest region and Puget Sound draws about 2 million visitors annually, according to the National Park Service.

With that many visitors to the fifth-oldest national park in the country, Diann saw an opportunity and started her company, Discover Nature LLC, in 2012. Since then, she stays busy offering tours of

Mount Rainier year-round.

Diann is hesitant to use the term “work” when describing her job as a tour guide, since her vocation and avocation are one in the same.

“Sharing all that the mountain offers is pure joy to me, and it’s something I never get tired of doing,” Diann says.

During the past nine years, Diann has hiked the Twin Firs Trail at Mount

Rainier National Park roughly 1,800 times. That translates to about 750 miles on this less than half-mile loop trail.

“Though it’s the same trail, it’s never really the same,” she says. “Each visit is new in the sense that it is another opportunity for experiencing this unforgettable park. And I get to share that with visitors on a regular basis.”



Mane Puaca enjoys the sun and view while adventuring with Diann Sheldon's Discover Nature LLC, which takes small groups around Mount Rainier. PHOTOS BY DIANN SHELDON

Diann leads small group tours—five to seven visitors—throughout the year, exploring the majestic national park, which includes the 14,410-foot-high mountain in all weather conditions. Her visitors span the globe and include local, regional, national and international adventurers.

Kate and Todd Walton from West Chester, Pennsylvania, were recent visitors to Mount Rainier. They joined one of Diann's tours last May.

"After spending a tremendous amount of time researching adventures to do while in Washington, the Discover Nature site stood out," Kate says. "The photographs, the descriptions and the testimonials were

impressive. The day of our adventure, it was pouring rain. But no amount of rain could have put a damper on that special day. There was just so much beauty to see in Mount Rainier National Park and so much to learn and discover.

"I can't say enough wonderful things about Diann. She made the adventure amazing because of her enthusiasm, knowledge and kindness. My husband and I will be forever grateful to Diann for making our day so special and memorable."

Another first-time visitor last summer was Scot McConnor. He and his family are from Baltimore, Maryland.

"We chose Discover Nature based on reviews we read and the ease of booking online," Scot says. "There were several

highlights on the tour, including multiple waterfalls, lunch next to the river, seeing a black bear and finishing with a hike.

"Diann was a wonderful guide, and her knowledge of the ecology is top notch. There wasn't an animal or plant species that she didn't know. But the best part of her tour was how welcoming she was. We left there feeling like we had known her our whole lives. I would recommend her to anyone interested in spending a day on the mountain."

Scot says the trip was more than just an adventure.

"My 14-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son didn't complain for once, and were forced to interact with each other since

*Continues on page 8*



## PARKLAND LIGHT & WATER



Discover Nature guests Frank Ribuot, Marion Ribuot, Julien Ribuot, Angela Pollicino and Marine LeLay enjoy the outdoors. Justin and Hannah Gililand rest and take in the view. Fun and games are part of the adventure at Discover Nature.

### Mount Rainier Adventures

*Continues from page 5*

there was no cell service!”

Diann’s winter excursions to Mount Rainier include snowshoeing, which gets visitors into the heart of the park’s exquisite beauty. Diann says that during the snowshoe trek, visitors experience first-hand the park’s incredible winter scenery.

“If you are new to snowshoeing, no worries,” she says. “If you can walk, you can snowshoe!”

Since every trip is different and based on the changing seasons, Diann offers detailed information about what to expect. All of the particulars of the trip are detailed and outlined on the Discover Nature website, [www.tourrainier.com](http://www.tourrainier.com), including specifics about pickup and drop-off points, and a general overview of the day’s activities.

Regardless of the time of year, Discover Nature clients benefit from Diann’s

extensive background and knowledge of nature and the local area. After earning a bachelor’s degree in ecology and evolutionary biology from the University of Arizona, she worked as a fisheries biologist for the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and then at Mount Hood National Forest. She later moved to the Evergreen State serving as a tour guide for Tours Northwest, where she drove a large bus.

“This gave me great experience and insight as to how I could truly make a difference in someone’s visit to the mountain,” Diann says. “These experiences also enriched my understanding of wild places and our relationship with the natural world.

“Sharing the wonders of Mount Rainier National Park is a job I never get tired of doing. These small groups receive ‘big adventure’ tours and are able to discover this incredible gift of Mother Nature in a way they never thought possible.” ■





# Extreme Winter Working Conditions

AVEC field employees don't have a typical day in the office

Next time you are having a bad day at the office, be thankful you work in a heated building with running water. AVEC field employees don't have a regular office to work in. Most of them work outdoors, braving extremely cold, potentially dangerous conditions.

## Subzero Temperatures

Temperatures in Alaska can drop quickly and early, with subzero temperatures arriving in force in October and lasting through March or April. Cold temperatures can generate additional revenue for AVEC, but also cause a multitude of problems. Typical high temperatures during the winter months range from 15 degrees down to minus 60

degrees, with the wind chill factor causing temperatures to feel even colder.

Field personnel wear heavy arctic winter clothing and continually monitor the temperatures and their exposure time to avoid frostbite. Excerpts from a January trip report to Kiana said, "Work has been really slow due to extremely cold weather. Temperatures down to -52 degrees. Add

another minus 10 for wind chill factor. Exposure time is very limited."

Another trip report said: "-40 degrees this morning, nothing started. By noon we had the skid steer and the snow machine going. Attempted to dig the anchor hole again and broke the auger bit off again ...; minus 44 this morning, everything running ...; minus 40 this

morning ... having problems with the snowmachine; minus 50 this morning. Had more problems with the snowmachine.”

### **Winds and Drifting Snow**

Strong winter winds frequently occur in many communities. These powerful forces of nature can play havoc in many ways, including blowing loose material into or on top of people and blowing debris into their eyes.

One of our welders said he sometimes has to stop welding to dump out the snow that has blown inside his welding helmet. Strong winds make climbing power poles and trying to use a 30-foot hotstick to pull a cutout or turn off a transformer extremely dangerous.

Blowing snow also causes snowdrifts to develop. Employees have to shovel out the entrance to power plant buildings. Equipment and parts stored outside get covered with snow and ice and have to be located and dug out. Even though some of our plants sit 4 feet off the ground due to permafrost and blowing snow conditions, sometimes the linemen shovel snow two or three times a day.

### **Gambell's Buried Plant**

Gambell's old power plant used to regularly get drifted over. In January 2000, a couple of nonstop blizzards dumped 18 feet of snow during a two-week period.

“We had white-out conditions for more than 10 days, with winds of 60 mph,” said Patrick Hughes, who was in



**ABOVE: AVEC linemen sometimes have difficulty locating service entrances when roofs are covered with wind-blown snow.**

**OPPOSITE PAGE: When temperatures drop to 40- or 50-below zero, snowmachines don't start and linemen walk to their job site pulling gear on a sled.**

Gambell at the time. “Snow covered our tanks and the entire power plant, turning it into a 21st-century igloo. We could walk on top of the tanks in our tank farm and only the exhaust stacks were visible on top of the plant.”

Thanks to the valiant efforts of Patrick and his crew, who worked around the clock for 10 days, there was only one 20-minute power outage due to overheating. Unfortunately, Patrick suffered second-degree frostbite.

“I had to balance personal safety with keeping the lights on,” Patrick said. “I didn't have any choice but to do whatever was necessary to keep the radiators clear of the constantly-falling snow and free of ice that stopped the blades from turning.”

Gambell's new power plant sits on 4-foot-high pilings with a covered walkway over the module entrances so snowdrifting usually isn't as

big of a problem any more.

### **Buried Homes**

Along with snow drifting around power plants, snowdrifts form high enough to almost cover homes. It's not uncommon for our employees to get a call about problems with a residential service and they end up walking or riding over the snow-covered home while looking for the service entrance.

One time, an employee rode around on a snowmachine looking for a house he simply couldn't find. After he stopped to get his bearings, he felt a painful burning sensation in one of his legs. Somehow he had parked right next to the stovepipe of the house he was looking for and it burned his pant leg.

### **Flooding and Storm Surges**

An increasing number of communities are subject to flooding, either from the sea

or rivers. Communities on the sea get hit with powerful storm surges that bring strong winds and high waters that relentlessly eat away at the land. Some water surges turn power plants and tank farms into islands and topple tanks.

Other communities are located along rivers that flood during spring breakup, when frozen ice jams cause water to back up. Once ice jams break loose, the backed up water roars down the river, overflowing banks, roads and bridges and carrying heavy icebergs that cause damage.

Powerful winter storms have also caused extensive erosion to the northern villages of Shishmaref and Kivalina, threatening homes, distribution lines and even tank farms. Some homes in Shishmaref have fallen into the ocean. AVEC has also had to relocate some distribution lines and most of our tank farm in Kivalina.

### **Savoonga's Unique Storm Outage**

In late December 2010, Savoonga residents suffered from a weeklong power outage due to a unique situation. Warm temperatures had caused the sea ice to melt or drift away, resulting in open water near the village. A sudden drop in temperature of almost 50 degrees, accompanied by strong winds from the north, resulted in saltwater being picked up and deposited on our lines and hardware, such as insulators and transformers.

*Continues on page 8*

## Winter Work

*Continued from page 5*

The extreme cold resulted in the salt spray freezing into a semi-solid slush—a highly conductive coating. This caused numerous faults throughout the system, resulting in outages. Strong winds (60-plus mph), severely cold temperatures and a power outage at the airport prevented air traffic to and from Savoonga, further compounding the problem.

AVEC linemen worked diligently in inclement weather to locate and resolve these problems. The linemen had to powerwash the hardware (insulators, transformers and bushings) to remove the conductive material to prevent further arcing.

Unfortunately, we may see more storms like this due to climate change. Therefore, AVEC retrofitted the distribution system with equipment that can withstand the arcing caused by frozen salt spray and retrofitted systems in other susceptible villages.

### Canceled Flights and Scary Landings

When it gets extremely cold or the weather gets severe, small planes can't fly, which causes delays in travel and shipments of parts. Traveling employees always carry emergency gear and extra food as they can get stuck in villages or in hub airports for three days or more due to flights being held.

Canceled flights mean crews can't get to the villages to work on projects, which can be really critical if the power is out and employees or required parts are not able



**Strong winds and heavy snow storms can cause snow drifts to build up and almost cover homes, meters and service entrances.**

to arrive. This happened right after September 11, 2001, when all aircraft travel was halted. There was a downed power pole in one of our villages, and nobody was able to fly there to fix it for a few days. Luckily, the power plant operator on-site contained the problem until help arrived.

One November, our welder was finally able to fly to Hooper Bay after his flight was put on weather hold for a few days.

"Upon landing, we had trouble with ice on the runway and a strong crosswind at the air strip," Greg Tiplady said. "We were unable to stop at the end of the airstrip and slid off the runway sideways. Luckily, we found no serious damage."

### Equipment Failures

Extremely cold temperatures can cause major equipment problems, including breakdowns, frozen fuel lines and the inability to get equipment started. This can cause headaches and frustration, especially since field personnel can't easily get replacement

parts, such as new spark plugs. They can't drive to a local parts or hardware store. They usually have to call the main office to have parts shipped.

One typical winter trip report stated: "We worked several hours trying to get the four-wheeler, skid loader and snowmobile running."

A week later, the same employee reported, "Problem with snowmobile, fouled plugs. Pulled snowmobile back to plant and warmed it up."

### Dangerous Animals

Gambell is also the site of another exciting and potentially dangerous incident. One morning, an employee woke up to discover fresh, large polar bear prints in the snow, circling the living quarters. Unlike other types of bears that eat plants and berries, polar bears only eat meat and have been known to track and prey on humans. The employee called the city office and asked for somebody to come down with a rifle and make sure it was safe for him to get outside.

### Food and Water

Field employees carry all of their tools and gear to each of the villages, along with all the food they will need. These items can weigh 600 pounds or more. In contrast, many of us just have to bring a purse or wallet to work.

Many power plants don't have refrigerators or running water available, which also adds complications. During winter, food needing refrigeration is left outside in coolers. While canned food is popular in the summer because it doesn't need refrigeration, it is avoided during winter because the cans freeze and explode.

Some villages have washeterias that provide shower and laundry facilities. There are places to buy potable water. However, in some villages, such as Wales, water is only available from streams or springs that freeze in winter and require chopping through ice to get water.

Can you imagine working all day and having to travel a mile through blowing snow and freezing temperatures to fill up containers with water so you can drink and wash? ■

### Thank You!

Alaska is an incredibly beautiful state, but it can be harshly demanding and unforgiving. We appreciate the hardships our field personnel endure while working to keep the power on. We are proud of the outstanding work and service they have provided the cooperative and our members in extremely challenging conditions for more than 50 years.



Bob Durham, left, greets D-Day veteran Ben Asquith at the 2019 Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association annual meeting. PHOTO BY MIKE TEEGARDEN

## Working Hard for Wasco—and ORECA

Wasco Electric's Bob Durham is adding another job to an already heavy workload: president of the ORECA Board of Directors.

Bob Durham is a man on the move. Like many rural leaders, Durham, a director for Wasco Electric Cooperative, has deep roots in his community and stacks up volunteer opportunities like the hay on his cattle ranch west of Dufur—a town of approximately 600 people near The Dalles.

A native of Idaho, Durham graduated from the University of Idaho with bachelor's and master's degrees in animal science, then moved to Dufur with his wife, Kathy. They have been Wasco County residents for 42 years.

It's difficult to find a part of the community where Durham hasn't left an imprint. In addition to his ranch, Durham has been an intermediate EMT with Dufur Volunteer Ambulance, a school bus driver and active with 4-H for many years, including a stint as auction chairman.

"A great bunch of people and a great bunch of kids," Durham said.

His work with Oregon electric cooperatives is taking a higher priority after his election last November as board president of the Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative

Association. Durham says the organization—and the issues—have changed dramatically since he joined the Wasco Electric board 25 years ago.

"We didn't have those type of challenges when I first joined the co-op," he said, citing high-profile issues such as cap and trade, vegetation management and the recently passed RURAL Act, a major legislative victory for the association. "In all these examples, ORECA has responded to our needs. I want this trend to continue."

Wasco Electric Cooperative General Manager Jeff Davis



### ORECA Leader Wins CEO Communication Award

ORECA Executive Director Ted Case, left, accepts the J.C. Brown Award from Jim Matheson, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association CEO, at the association's CEO meeting January 13. Case was recognized for his work advancing communication in the industry. PHOTO BY STEPHEN REASONOVER

said Durham brings considerable skills to the ORECA board leadership.

"Since his appointment to the ORECA board of directors, I have seen Bob grow immensely in his leadership," Davis said. "He will do a great job in his role as the newly installed president of the association."

Outgoing ORECA President Dave Schneider, CEO of Midstate Electric Cooperative, agreed Durham is an inspired choice.

"He has done outstanding work on the Budget Committee and other major initiatives like our Washington, D.C., trip and our Guatemala Project,"

Schneider said.

Indeed, Durham's new role as ORECA president will invariably pull him out of Dufur and to places such as Washington, D.C., and Montanita de la Virgen, a small village ORECA will electrify this April using Oregon electric co-op linemen.

Durham has pledged to bring the same relentless energy to his new role as he does to his beloved rural Oregon town.

"I want to just keep moving us forward," he said. ■

**Durham with his grandchildren, Bailey and Wyatt, at his ranch in Dufur.** PHOTO BY ELENA DURHAM

