

# Coping With COVID-19

The PUD's careful preparations have been invaluable

By Rodger Nichols

Since mid-March, Northern Wasco PUD has put some of its risk management preparations into practice due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among other duties, Harvey Hall is involved with the PUD's risk management program.

"It's all about keeping lights on and people safe," Harvey says. "That's our first and primary response. We have to think of the safety of our customers, and we have to think of the safety of the staff."

District staff, from the board to the newest employees, have done an excellent job in their dedication to those goals.

First, the PUD immediately stopped direct contact with customers in the field and in the office. The exception is when deploying field staff using proper personal protective equipment to reconnect and restore power and ensure system reliability in the event of an emergency.

As part of protecting both crews and customers, the PUD has instituted a practice that, for the duration of the COVID-19 event, no customer will be disconnected for nonpayment. That's important for health reasons, because some customers depend on electricity to power medical devices, and for safety reasons, because it reduces the chances for the virus to spread.

The deposit requirement for new customers also has been delayed.

The corporate services team has worked hard to keep information available for customers on the district Facebook page, the district website, messages on its bills and via phone calls.

"Staying in communication with our customers has been a critical part of the



During the coronavirus pandemic, Northern Wasco County PUD posted Facebook photos illustrating how its employees practice social distancing. Journeyman Lineman Ryan Manciu shows his love from a bucket truck. PHOTOS BY CYNDI GENTRY

response," Harvey says. "Corporate services has done an excellent job."

Wherever possible, PUD staff are working remotely, clearing out of the building and abiding by the call to "Stay home, save lives" and social distancing requests by Oregon Gov. Kate Brown.

Harvey says each team within the PUD system determined what services were essential. For the finance team, it's making sure employees get paid, vendors get paid and customers get billed.

"Just one customer service representative comes in and gets the daily deposits



**LEFT: Senior Financial Analyst James Ruoff has the office all to himself while others work remotely.**

**BELOW: Customer Service Representative Haley Red Cloud Windsor has a friend to keep her company in the office.**



from our boxes and our mail, and processes those so customer payments get logged in,” Harvey says.

Thanks to the recent installation of advanced metering infrastructure that can read meters electronically from a distance, a meter reader no longer needs to cross everyone’s property to read the meter.

Of 9,000 residential customers, about 800 have not yet received the new meters. Harvey says the PUD can estimate the readings, based on historical use, until crews can resume new meter installation.

Harvey says both the timely installation of new meters and the establishment of an enterprise risk management program made things considerably easier for the PUD to implement protective steps.

“We basically were prepared,” Harvey says. “We had a plan and we were able to execute that plan. We completely understand we’re just beginning to see the impact of this, but we’re taking a number of steps.”

One big step was taken in early April, when the PUD’s board of directors decided to postpone a modest rate increase until May 2021.

Planning played a big part in that decision. The PUD has a rate stabilization fund of approximately \$4.6 million. By tapping that fund to offset revenue the increase would have brought in, board members had the flexibility to delay the increase.

As a public utility, unlike a privately owned utility that must answer to stockholders, the PUD has a commitment to ratepayers, who are also its owners.

“We’re continually looking at ways to partner with our customers, help them through this time and not put people in an even worse spot that’s already difficult,” Harvey says. “Even when this is over and restrictions are lifted, we will continue to work with customers because the district has already anticipated that we’re going to have some people who are really hurting. That rate stabilization fund is going to be key to helping us during that period without having to damage the district financially.”

The no-disconnect and delayed-deposit provisions apply to residential, commercial and industrial customers.

The PUD is re-examining proposed

capital projects for the biennium.

The board understands investment in infrastructure can be a smart financial move—as evidenced by the recent installation of the AMI meters and past investments, such as generating facilities at McNary and The Dalles dams.

Power from the two facilities costs the district about 1.8 cents per kilowatt-hour, compared to buying power from the Bonneville Power Administration at 3.5 cents per kWh.

“Our engineers will look at the system and decide what absolutely needs to happen in the next two years to ensure we maintain our obligations to our customers, the reliability of the system, and the increased capacity to meet short-term increases or demands without adversely affecting any customers,” Harvey says.

The engineers’ proposals will be analyzed for financial impacts and implemented as needed.

Recent events have shown the advantages of planning early and being prepared for changes that are both expected and unexpected. It’s a policy the PUD will continue to practice. ■



From left, Andy Boe, Elkton School District superintendent; Dan Burke, a school board member; and Brian Kruse, the district’s maintenance and facilities manager; worked together with many others to create the Elkton High School Fallen Soldier Memorial. PHOTO BY CRAIG REED

# Remembering Those Who Served

Elkton High School memorial honors past and present veterans

**By Craig Reed**

Nelson Rowe. Henry Weatherly. Stanley Hancock. Derrill Fox. Joshua Lengstorf.

Those five names will forever be emblazoned on the Elkton High School Fallen Soldier Memorial. All five are Elkton High School alumni who gave their lives while serving in wartime.

Nelson and Stanley of the U.S. Navy, Henry of the U.S. Army and Derrill of the U.S. Marines were killed in action in Europe during World War II. Joshua, a member of the Army, died in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom.

Work on the memorial began after Joshua’s death in 2010 but was constantly delayed by a lack of funding and the time to concentrate solely on it. Thanks to the sale of 120 8-by-8-inch tiles recognizing other past and present veterans, enough money was raised to make the memorial a reality.

A dedication of the memorial at Elkton High School is

Saturday, May 16 at 11 a.m.

“I don’t think it could have turned out any better,” says Andy Boe, superintendent of Elkton School District. “It’s really a reflection of what the school board wanted to see. We’re really happy with it.”

The memorial is a few steps from the front entrance to the high school building. A U.S. flag flies from a pole next to the wall.

“I think it’s pretty unique for a small school to have something like this,” he adds. “It represents the pride we have in our veterans. It represents our commitment to thanking these folks for their sacrifices.”

Dan Burke, a member of the Elkton School board, was one of several people who helped bring the project from an idea to a finished memorial. He did the research and found the Elkton alumni who died while serving.

“This is all about honoring those five and honoring all veterans,” Dan says. “We’re pretty confident we didn’t miss



**Kenny Geyer, left, and Nathan Zimmerman put up the tiles that honor past and present veterans at the memorial. The sale of 120 tiles helped fund the memorial. PHOTO BY DAN BURKE**

anybody, but we did leave some space if we left somebody out. The memorial is in a location that the kids walk by all the time. For our young kids—for our high school kids to see that—we want them to see freedom isn't free."

Elkton School District has honored area veterans for many years during its annual veterans' assembly during the week of Veterans Day. The assembly features music and songs, and students read essays and poems. All veterans are invited, introduced and recognized.

"Our students grow up recognizing veterans through this event," says Penny Clark, the district's past administrative secretary. "This is another permanent way of recognizing people we've lost and the men and women who have served. The memorial is something the students see every day, and it's also in a place people who visit the campus can see it."

The idea for a memorial first arose after Joshua was killed in action in 2010. The initial thought to honor him quickly expanded to include all Elkton High School alumni who died while serving.

"This project and memorial are all about focusing on those five veterans and on the veterans who have served," Dan says. "A lot of people were involved in getting the memorial done, but the focus needs to be on those veterans."

"It's really touching to be able to honor Elkton alumni who died serving our country," says district administrative secretary Melissa Whitley, whose son-in-law is in the Air Force.

"The memorial gives you a moment to pause—a moment to give thanks to those who served," Melissa says.

Elkton School Board member Candy Weatherly says the memorial is beautiful. Several members of her family are veterans, and a few are recognized on tiles at the memorial.

## The Honored Five

- ▶ Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Nelson Rowe was killed August 17, 1942, aboard the submarine Bass. He was 27.
- ▶ Stanley Hancock was either 20 or 21 when he died in 1944. He was a Navy boatswain's mate third class.
- ▶ Henry Weatherly, a 23-year-old Army private first class, was killed July 23, 1945, in Okinawa, Japan. He was a member of the 7th Division, 32nd Infantry.
- ▶ Marine Corporal Derrill Fox was 19 when he was killed March 8, 1945, during the Battle of Iwo Jima. He was with an intelligence unit of the 3rd Marine Division.
- ▶ Army Sergeant Joshua Lengstorf, 24, was killed in Afghanistan January 3, 2010. He was a member of the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, based at Fort Carson, Colorado. Joshua and two other soldiers were killed when their unit was attacked by insurgents with improvised explosives and small arms fire.

"This is a great way to honor veterans for their service to our country," Candy says. "And I think it is really valuable that our youth of today see what those men and women have done. As the high school kids walk by it and see those names, they'll hopefully think of what those people did for our country." ■

*The Elkton School Board and administrative staff want to thank the following businesses for contributing their time, talents and resources to the memorial project: Ceramic Tile Supply Northwest, Umpqua Stone, Sharp Impressions, Colorcraft Paint, Diamond Tile and Stone, 3-Design & Build, Elkton School District Staff, Douglas Electric Cooperative and Reliance Connects.*



Story and photos by Courtney Cobb

# Working Through the Night

## Crews perform night work to minimize member impact

Against the quiet of a pitch-black night sky was a steady hum from several trucks, the high-pitched squeal of electric drills, and voices calling out commands.

Half a block down Neff Road near the intersection of NE 27th Street in Bend stood a lone power pole bathed in light from nearby generators.

On this frosty March evening, Central Electric Cooperative line crews donned their personnel protective gear to do the difficult task of installing an in-line switch while working with live power lines.

“Typically, work is not completed at night unless it is an outage situation,” says Brad Wilson, CEC director of operations and engineering. “There are occasions that, due to traffic or other conditions, may require a time of day where there is less impact, but for the most part, we are completing work due to planned or unplanned outages.”

On this evening, the cooperative needed to perform the work at night because of the switch’s location on a power pole near a major intersection. The street needed to be closed from oncoming traffic so crews could perform their work.

Brad says the cooperative tries to schedule any major work with members in mind. Working during the day is safer for crews. However, there are times when line maintenance must occur at night.

“Work at night can be more hazardous than daytime, requiring substantial lighting and personnel to watch all areas of the worksite,” Brad says.



For the job on Neff Road, crews worked with two bucket trucks, a utility truck and two light generators. So as not to disrupt power to members, the linemen worked hot, meaning they completed the work without de-energizing the lines.

“Crews will complete hot work as long as it is safe to complete,” Brad says. “At times, we plan outages to reduce the amount of time a project takes to complete, or it is deemed too risky to perform hot.”

Some tasks can take five to six times longer to complete hot than when de-energized.

In March, crews prepared to work into the early morning hours to finish the switch installation. With great teamwork

**ABOVE:** CEC Line Foreman Reed Youngstrom uses an acetylene torch to prepare a conductor for installation.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** From left, CEC Line Foreman Andy Burford and linemen Zach McPhetridge, Rob Lane and Grant Young discuss the installation of jumper wires from a new switch to the distribution line.

and skill, the linemen completed the job within a few hours.

What kind of jobs can be performed at night? Crews can set poles, perform major substation work, install switches and restore outages of all varieties, including those resulting from weather events.

No matter the situation, Central Electric line crews work hard to keep power going day and night for members. ■



# CEC Responds to COVID-19

By Courtney Cobb

During this ongoing health crisis, Central Electric Cooperative's priority is the safety and well-being of its members and employees.

Keeping our workforce and key personnel—lineworkers, servicemen, engineers and customer service representatives—healthy and available is imperative in providing safe, reliable electric service.

Adhering to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines and Gov. Kate Brown's stay-at-home order, CEC is doing its part to protect its employees and members from contracting and spreading COVID-19.

CEC also recognizes the financial challenges and stress the coronavirus epidemic has imposed on members. The cooperative has several ways to help

members through this difficult time.

Following are a few of CEC's efforts.

### **Social Distancing and Face Coverings**

CEC, which is considered an essential service and remains working during this pandemic, has made every effort to abide by Gov. Brown's stay-at-home order. More than 60% of CEC personnel have been working remotely since that time.

Employees who work in the offices must follow the CDC social distancing guidelines, including frequently washing their hands with soap and water, avoiding close contact—distancing at least 6 feet from others—and covering mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If proper social distancing measures cannot be maintained, employees must wear a cloth face cover. CEC has provided face coverings to all employees.

Any employee who is feeling sick or has

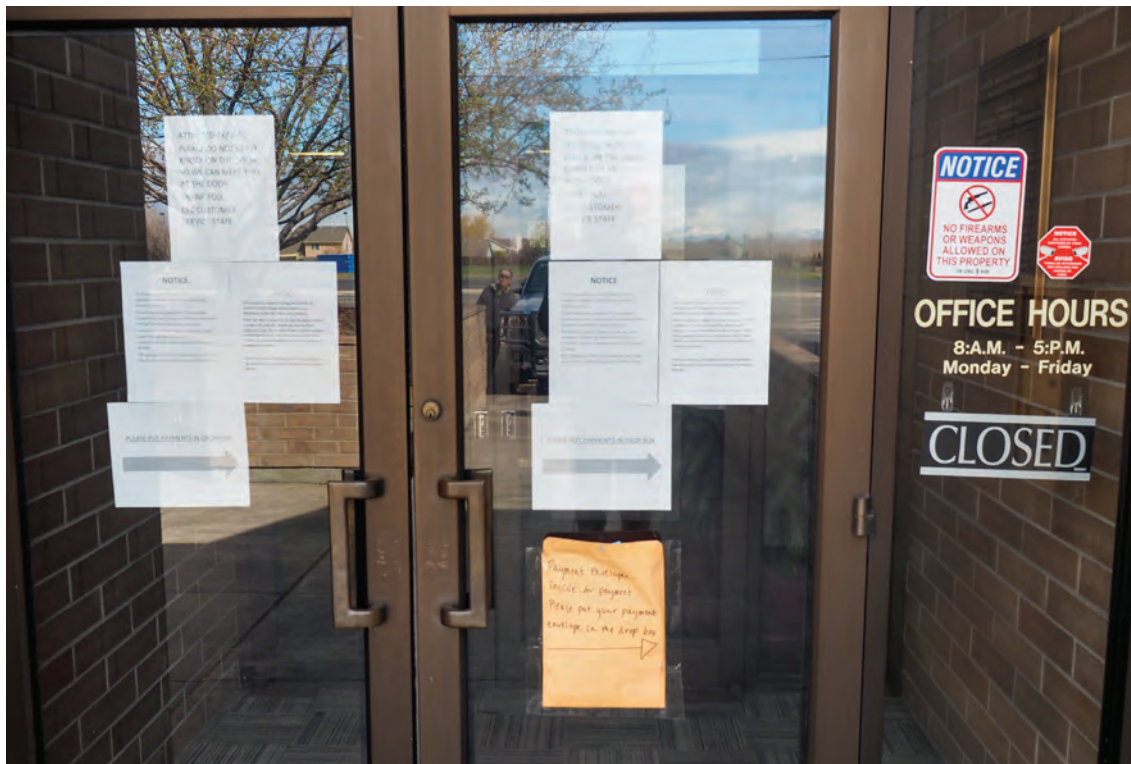
a sick family member must stay home.

In addition to a janitorial service disinfecting cooperative offices throughout the business week, employees are strongly encouraged to frequently do the same with their work stations.

Outside employees—including line crews, servicemen and engineers—are also following social distancing measures, including traveling in separate vehicles to job sites. Preferred communication with members and contractors is by email or phone. Any in-person meeting may only occur as a last resort, with social distancing measures strictly followed.

### **Payment Options for Members**

As a safety precaution for members and employees, CEC closed its offices in Bend, Redmond and Sisters to walk-in traffic on March 17. Members cannot enter the offices to pay their electric bills, so Central



**LEFT:** Office closure notices cover Central Electric Cooperative's Redmond headquarters' front doors while also providing payment envelopes for members to use secure locked drop boxes.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** CEC employees work remotely during Gov. Kate Brown's "Stay home, save lives" order. Customer Service Representatives Talina Wood, foreground, and Lisa Clark are only a handful of employees working at the Redmond headquarters.

PHOTOS BY BRENT TEN PAS

Electric encourages members to consider different options when making payments.

Members can sign-up for SmartHub—a web and mobile app—that allows them to securely pay their bills online. To use SmartHub online, visit [www.cec.coop](http://www.cec.coop). Click on "Register for Online Access." Members can also download the SmartHub app through the Apple app store or the Google Play store.

Members may leave their payment in locked drop boxes in front of the co-op's Bend and Redmond service centers and its headquarters in Redmond.

Members may also pay by phone. Call CEC at 541-548-2144 to speak with a customer service representative.

### Disconnects/Financial Assistance

CEC recognizes the financial difficulties the current health crisis imposes on members throughout our communities. To help keep the lights on, CEC is doing everything it can to work with you, including:

- Setting up payments.
- Providing you information and an application to get financial relief from CEC's Project Helping Hand.

- Referring you to Neighbor Impact and other financial assistance programs.

As a last resort, if these efforts are not enough, we can temporarily suspend residential disconnections and late fees. It is important to remember that even though CEC provides this service, you are still responsible for paying your electric bill. We strongly encourage you to set up a payment plan to prevent accumulating an unmanageable balance.

Members who need additional assistance should talk with a customer service representative about Project Helping Hand. To learn more, visit [www.cec.coop](http://www.cec.coop) and click on "Project Helping Hand" under the Community tab.

### Contribute to Project Helping Hand

If you are looking for ways to help those in need, consider joining Project Helping Hand. The program helps our less-fortunate members with their electric bills when they encounter financial difficulties.

There are three ways to participate. You may elect to have your bill rounded up to the next dollar, add a fixed amount to your monthly bill or make a one-time additional donation. Your donations—combined with

those of more than 1,800 members who already contribute—will have a significant and positive impact during these difficult times. Helping others is the co-op way.

All gifts are tax-deductible. For more information, go to [www.cec.coop/community/project-helping-hand](http://www.cec.coop/community/project-helping-hand) or talk with a customer service representative at 541-548-2144.

### Be Wary of Scams

Members need to remain vigilant about cyberscams regarding COVID-19. Cyber actors may send emails with malicious attachments or links to fraudulent websites to trick victims into revealing sensitive information or donating to fraudulent charities or causes.

Exercise caution in handling any email with a COVID-19-related subject line, attachment or hyperlink. Be wary of social media pleas, texts or calls related to COVID-19. ■

*During these difficult times, Central Electric Cooperative will continue to provide the same great service members expect. If you have any questions, please call 541-548-2144.*



LEC board member Hugh Buermann enjoys gardening in the summer. PHOTOS COURTESY OF HUGH BUERMANN

## It All Started by Attending Annual Meetings

Curious member now serves on the Lane Electric Cooperative board

### By Craig Reed

With a professional background in telephone systems that involved working with the infrastructure for power systems, Hugh Buermann was no stranger to the electrical industry.

That experience—and because his Cottage Grove

residence was in Lane Electric Cooperative's service area—led Hugh and his wife, Yvonne, to make the short drive to the co-op's annual meeting for his district.

Hugh found the meeting interesting, leading him to ask questions to learn more about Lane Electric and the cooperative process.

When longtime Lane Electric board member Ed Bangle retired before his three-year term was up, he approached Hugh about applying for the interim position. Chris Seubert, another board member, also encouraged Hugh to apply.

Hugh was appointed to the board, representing the Row

River District. He has been reelected twice and now has six years of experience.

During his career in the telephone industry, Hugh worked at substations and on poles that carried power lines, but he had to learn about the cooperative concept.

"I have no regrets whatsoever," says Hugh. "I love

the position. I've learned it's a heckuva lot of work. I had to learn what a cooperative is, I had to learn the responsibilities of a co-op director and I had to learn about handling a lot of money that didn't belong to me, but that I was responsible for.

"I had the interest, I had the time to do it and I was honored to be picked by the board to fill the interim position."

Hugh, 79, is the board's treasurer, chairman of the board's scholarship and audit committees, and is the board's representative to the Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Debi Wilson, Lane Electric's general manager, says being a co-op director requires not only a dedication of time to understand the operations, but to stay abreast of the rapidly changing industry.

She says Hugh's duties as a board member are increased by his chairman positions on two committees.

"Hugh approaches all of his responsibilities with fervor," Debi says.

Hugh, who grew up and worked on his parents' farms in Idaho, got his start in communications and electronics in the U.S. Navy. He joined in 1959 after graduating from high school in New Plymouth, Idaho.

He was sent to electronics school on Treasure Island in San Francisco. After his schooling, he spent three years on destroyer ships in the Pacific Ocean working on communication and radar systems.

"It was a very good decision,"

Hugh says. "It set me up for my career. I was able to learn a trade that I've used ever since."

After his discharge from the Navy, Hugh came to Drain, where his parents had a farm west of town. Hugh went to work as an equipment operator, building logging roads.

In 1964, he married Yvonne, a teacher in Drain. A year later, Hugh was hired by Pacific Northwest Bell. He was one of six hired from 300 applicants.

"I know my electric experience in the Navy helped me get that job," he says.

Hugh started as a residential installer, then worked his way up to manager of business telephone systems for large businesses and television events. He was involved in installing communications at large facilities such as the Eugene airport, the University of Oregon, Lane Community College and Sacred Heart Hospital.

For 20 years, Hugh worked in the Autzen Stadium press box during televised events to ensure the communications systems worked properly.

Hugh worked 25 years with the phone company before retiring in 1990. He worked five years doing telephone contract work and then five years with Oregon Lottery, installing and repairing its systems. He retired from the workforce in 2005 at age 65.

Hugh and Yvonne have been co-op members for 35 years.

"Being a director requires as much as you want to put into it," Hugh says. "A lot of people get elected to a position, but then don't do anything with it.

"I've learned how to work



Hugh and his wife, Yvonne, are ardent Duck fans.

with budgets and how to do my part in helping the co-op be a solvent organization. I've been pleased that I've been able to participate with the board in providing the money needed to replace and improve the outside facilities."

Hugh says he's spent a lot of time studying the co-op's right-of-way program and has made trips into the field with Lane Electric crews to see the progress.

"That program has to be in the forefront for the co-op because of the threat of wildfires," he says.

Hugh says he is pleased Lane Electric has the facilities

to deal with storms and subsequent power outages to provide consistent power to its members.

Hugh says serving on the board has been a gratifying experience.

"I get a lot of people who thank me for doing this," Hugh says. "I'm amazed at the number of people who don't have problems with the rates. I think they trust the co-op and its board or else they moved into the area from other places that have higher rates and they're thankful for Lane Electric's rates." ■

*Hugh's board term runs through 2021.*



# Going Green

## Couple invests in electric vehicles and brings parents along for the ride

### Story and photos by Craig Reed

For several years, Allie Hall felt bad about the amount of carbon she and her car were emitting into the air during her 70-mile round trip for work.

She drove daily from her Junction City area home to Corvallis.

“I was feeling sick about the amount of carbon I was putting out,” Allie says.

She and her husband, Marcus, looked into buying an electric car six years ago, but

discovered the Nissan Leaf at that time was only getting 70 miles per electric charge.

“We talked about getting an electric car for years, but we were waiting for the time to be right,” Marcus says.

The couple decided the time was right in 2019 after they studied the Chevrolet Bolt, a fully electric car that averages 238 miles per charge, according to the company. Allie and Marcus bought a red Bolt.

“The carbon we were putting out with our other car was the motivation for us to make this

purchase,” Marcus says. “We see it as a pretty good investment.

“For us, this was a really big purchase. Cars are generally not something we spend a lot of money on, but this is something we have not regretted.”

The list price for the Bolt was \$43,000, but there was a dealer discount of \$11,500 and state and federal rebates totaled about \$7,000. The Halls say there is a stack of paperwork to complete to receive the rebates.

The new Bolt had a fairly immediate effect on the Halls’

neighborhood. Allie’s parents, Mike and Merry Fix, who live up the hill and within eyesight of the younger couple’s home, were so impressed by the car they bought a gray one.

“The appeal for me was environmental and the use of fossil fuels,” Mike says. “We did not want to support the fossil fuel industry. We’re really not polluting now because we’re using electric and hydro power.”

Mike says in the first five months of owning the Bolt, the couple had bought only four tanks of gas for their second



Marcus Hall, right, and his father-in-law, Mike Fix with their Chevrolet Bolts.



LEFT: Allie and Marcus installed a charging station at their home. ABOVE: Under the hood, the Chevy Bolt looks a lot different than a traditional gas-powered vehicle. The Hall's say they enjoy the lower-maintenance vehicle.

car, a small sedan.

Of the two couples, Allie spends the most time driving. She describes driving the Bolt as “super fun.”

“This is my first new car,” she says. “I’ve never even had power windows before. It’s amazing. It has lane assist and will steer you back into your lane if you begin to drift. If you’re following too close, it beeps. There’s a beep if somebody is driving by behind you in a parking lot. There’s a pedestrian sensor. There’re lights on the mirrors to indicate side blind spots. There’s a back-up camera.”

Out on the road, Allie says the car accelerates fast without shifting gears. She says the Bolt’s heavy battery helps keep the car from sliding in wet or icy road conditions.

“My old car was light and slid a lot,” she says. “This new car is so zippy. I can get away really quick if I’m next to a semi-truck.”

“I love the lack of gears,” says Marcus. “It changes speeds so smoothly.”

The new car owners also like that they don’t have to worry about oil changes in their Bolts. They add that the tires are self sealing so there’s little chance of

being sidelined by a flat tire.

They also note that their insurance is discounted because of the Bolt’s safety features.

“I’m a big booster of electric cars,” Mike says. “I’m firmly convinced our next farm tractor will be electric. They’re already taking over in Europe.”

“We’ve had people approach us and ask for our opinion on the Bolt. If you’re curious about electric cars, just ask.”

Allie and Marcus say another factor that helped them decide this was the right time to go electric was the number of public charging stations installed. The Halls had a

charger installed just outside their house as well. When Allie returns home every evening, she plugs the car into the charger, assuring her the car has a full charge the next morning.

Marcus says that with changing technology and options, he anticipates that within three years there’ll be electric cars with a range of 300 miles. He also believes electric pickup trucks and SUVs will soon be available.

“I’d like to see more electric vehicles out there,” he says.

As for their 2019 Bolt, Allie says, “We made a really good decision.” ■



Members of the Paths to the Future class at La Pine High School have partnered and participated in projects with Heart 'n Home Hospice of La Pine. The collaborative projects have focused on supporting seniors and veterans. PHOTOS COURTESY OF AMY CORDINER

# Supporting Community and Its Youth

## Heart 'n Home Hospice partners with La Pine students

By Craig Reed

The 11-member staff at Heart 'n Home Hospice of La Pine wants to be known for more than helping people in their time of grief and death.

Under the guidance of Diana Hergenrader, Heart 'n Home's executive director, and Theresa Hane, the business' coordinator of volunteers, the staff has connected with the La Pine community through several projects the past 18 months.

The staff has specifically focused on partnering with La Pine High School and its students on projects such as assembling medical care kits and goodie packages, sewing catheter bag covers, and decorating

cookies and cards for distribution to seniors and veterans on Valentine's Day and Veterans Day.

"We say we're neighbors taking care of neighbors," Diana says. "We want to be great neighbors."

Diana explains Heart 'n Home is known as a hospice organization that is available throughout southern Deschutes County and northern Klamath and Lake counties to help and support individuals and families through the dying process. But the staff also wants to be known as a good community member.

After numerous staff discussions on how to become more involved in its community, Heart 'n Home of La Pine decided to focus on connecting with and mentoring La Pine High School students. The hospice staff has made a special effort to develop relationships with students who don't have the best of home lives or who don't have confidence in themselves.

"It's very important to me to be a supportive member of the community and to make a difference," says Diana, a 24-year resident of La Pine. "I grew up poor, but my mom and dad taught me you can still make a difference. You may not have the money to help, but you have the time to make somebody smile.

"We've made a difference here with hospice care, but we can also help a kid get on the right path. We want to help students find the good in life. It just feels right to provide simple acts of kindness or mentoring. It feels right for our team."

Theresa says it's exciting to work with the high school students.

"For those who don't have the support at home, this gives them the chance to feel important within our community," she says.

Although the coronavirus pandemic and school closures have suspended the hospice and student projects, they will resume



**La Pine High School students Aujia Lincoln, left, and Kayla Sabrowski put together a mailing while working on a project organized by Heart 'n Home Hospice of La Pine.**

when the crisis passes. Also on hold are plans to develop project partnerships between Heart 'n Home and students at Gilchrist High School.

"Involving Gilchrist is on our wish list," Diana says.

At La Pine High School, Amy Cordiner and Amber Downing teach resource and transition classes. They co-teach a Paths to the Future class to help students get work experience to make them more employable after they complete their education.

"Heart 'n Home has been super in supporting us, in getting kids involved in community projects," Amy says. "It's important for the kids to get some real-life experiences, to learn the soft skills early on, and to learn about giving back to their community. I think what Heart 'n Home does is pretty special."

Since January 2019, about 50 students have participated in projects with the hospice staff. Ten students went beyond the projects and took eight hours of training to learn about patient privacy and security. Those students earned HIPAA certification, allowing them to shadow

hospice staff when dealing with patients and get a closer look at health and medical situations.

"They did really well in those classes," says Theresa, who taught the HIPAA courses. "After those classes, I felt they were safe to come into our office and other health-related offices. They had to learn that what they hear and see might not be appropriate things to talk about at the pizza parlor or even at home. Some things you just don't discuss."

When some normalcy is returned to schools and life, the La Pine hospice office plans to establish a Cicely Ambassador Team—a youth volunteer program designed and initiated by Heart 'n Home. The program is named after Dame Cicely Saunders, founder of the modern hospice movement.

The mission of a Cicely Ambassador Team is to bridge the generational gap between youth and the elderly, establish a commitment to lifelong volunteerism, encourage community engagement and educate youth about end-of-life care.

"It's a program that works with



**La Pine High School students Mya Monahan, left, and Jaedyn Pratt help put together informational packets to distribute to seniors and veterans in the La Pine area.**

students on leadership skills," Diana says. "Students in that program can apply for Heart 'n Home college scholarships. Our goal is to see La Pine students get those scholarships."

Diana and Theresa say they are grateful the management office of Heart 'n Home in Fruitland, Idaho, allows the La Pine staff to develop relationships and projects with the students. There are eight Heart 'n Home offices in Oregon and Idaho. Some of those offices have followed the La Pine staff in becoming more community-involved.

"I think the home office trusts us," Theresa says. "I think they're extremely proud of us."

Diana admits that when the La Pine office "stayed inside our box, we weren't very successful in the community knowing who we were."

"Now we're not afraid to step outside the box and get involved," she says. "We're blessed the home office lets us run. They understand our passion for our community. We've even won some awards for being active in our community." ■



# The Othello Dream Team

Bringing athletes together for four sports a year, Othello Special Olympics teams create a healthful community.

**Story and photos by Katelin Davidson**

The melody of laughter and greetings lays over the rhythm of dribbled basketballs during the start of a Special Olympics practice in Othello. Basketball is just one of the four sports Special Olympics team members will compete in this year, but it is one of the favorites. Special Olympics Othello helps team members live a healthy, well-balanced life.

“The best part of this is getting to know people and having fun,” says Natasha, a team member.

“I like meeting new people,” says Lucas, another team member. “They have made me feel comfortable.”

Both athletes play on the Unified Team at Othello High School, but they practice with the Special Olympics team every day as well. They both laugh and say when they aren’t practicing sports, they play video games.

To participate in Special Olympics, an individual must be diagnosed with an intellectual disability. According to Special Olympics, intellectual disabilities cause people to live with limitations in cognitive functioning and other skills, including communication and self-care.

The different Special Olympics sports’ seasons are consecutive, which helps the group maintain large participant numbers. This year, sports include basketball, bowling, T-ball, and track and field. A few athletes travel to Moses Lake to participate on a Special Olympics soccer team.

Pam Schmidt leads and organizes the Othello teams. Pam has been involved with Special Olympics since 2014 and is in her third year of coaching. She first got involved because of her son Colton, who started competing in sports in high school. In Othello, high school students can play on the Unified Team, which pairs special needs individuals with partners from the school. Colton also played on a Special Olympics team, but those practices met in Moses Lake. Pam researched how to start a Special Olympics organization in Othello, and moved forward with creating the local program. The program was well received and has quickly grown in just a few years.

Pam says the teams typically average 15 athletes a season, but every season, more people show interest. There has been an increase in athletes playing all four sports, and Pam says she is happy to provide them with a safe and healthy environment to improve their lives.



**OPPOSITE:** Josh, an athlete, has been active in Special Olympics sports since the Othello team began. **ABOVE, LEFT:** The Othello Dream Team won a state title this spring. **RIGHT:** Lucas, an athlete, breaks down the court at a Special Olympics practice at Scootney Springs Elementary. CHAMPIONSHIP PHOTO COURTESY PAM SCHMIDT

Pam is assisted by a group of volunteers during the seasons. “This takes a bunch of volunteers to make happen,” Pam says. “I’m head coach, and I also work on securing the facilities to use for practice and finding funding.”

“Participating in Special Olympics doesn’t cost our athletes a penny,” Pam says, emphasizing the program runs solely on donations and grants. Pam praises the community for supporting and being generous to the program. Special Olympics Othello has received multiple grants from Big Bend Electric’s Caring Neighbors, as well as donations from local organizations such as the Othello Lions Club.

All Special Olympics programs are open to individuals starting at 8-years-old. Pam said the youngest athlete on this year’s basketball team is 13 and the oldest is 73.

“Special Olympics is sports, but it encourages health as well,” Pam says. “The program includes exercises and incentives for athletes.”

This season, the Othello group participated in the “Fit 5” program created through the Special Olympics organization. It encourages athletes to workout five days a week, eat five fruits or vegetables each day and drink five bottles of water every day.

Rita and Eddie, who are athletes and siblings, say the Fit 5 program has saved their lives. Both have lost weight. Rita says her diabetes is under control. She was at risk of having a leg amputated, but the healthy living has allowed her to stay out of hospitals and on the court instead.

“In addition to sports, we also do social activities together,” Pam says. “We want the athletes to be out and active. This helps them feel successful and they feel welcome.”

A few favorite activities of the group are helping with Lions Club events and the hamburger booth at the car show, and participating in the annual parade.

Some athletes compete in all four sports, while others pick and

choose their activities. Any of the high-school aged athletes can play with the Unified Team and practice with Special Olympics, but they cannot compete on both teams during the same season. Pam says the spring and summer sports tend to have the largest turnout because of the ending of sports at the high school level, and because the athletes are looking for activities during the better weather.

Last year, the T-ball team won the state title, and the group is back with enthusiasm with plans to compete again this year. The basketball team—the Othello Dream Team—also secured a state championship win this spring. Each participating athlete took home a gold medal.

Pam explains playing at state is more than a chance to compete and meet other athletes. It is an opportunity for athletes to have direct access to specialized care. Special Olympics provides the Healthy Athletes Program, which is on-site health care that offers advice and services regarding oral hygiene, foot care and physical therapy. The services are crucial for the athletes, especially for those from rural areas who do not have direct access to health care providers with specialized expertise.

Just a few weeks after competing at the state tournament, all Special Olympics practices and events were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pam says the athletes have been staying healthy by continuing to compete in the Fit 5 program, and regularly communicate with each other about progress with workouts. WWE Superstar Becky Lynch has teamed up with Special Olympics for School of Strength, an in-home, athlete-led exercise program for people with special needs.

At the team’s practices, everyone in the room is immediately affected by the positivity and fun happening on the court. While there are moments of competitiveness, the athletes thrive on supporting each other and being able to play sports together. ■



Harney Electric Cooperative General Manager Fred Flippence, right, talks with James Buell after one of the co-op's past annual meetings. Fred was recently honored for his role at the cooperative.  
PHOTO BY LAUREN

# Harney County Boss of the Year

Harney Electric Cooperative general manager honored at annual banquet

By Lauren Brown

You know you're doing something right as a manager when your employees nominate you for boss of the year.

Harney Electric Cooperative General Manager Fred Flippence was awarded the honorary title at the 70th annual Harney County Chamber Banquet in January.

Harney Electric Operations Manager Jason Hill presented the award, highlighting Fred's consideration for his employees, his expertise in his field and his volunteer work in the community.

"Harney Electric employees appreciate their boss, but even more importantly, as co-op and community members, they are indebted to his work on their behalf," Jason said.

Fred's leadership style lends itself to conversation rather than critiques.

"I am a manager who manages by walking around," Fred says. "It's very easy

as a manager to get tied up in day-to-day functions where you aren't aware what's going on in your surroundings. By walking around, I'm checking with folks to see where I can help or what's going on. It's a little different. It's not like checking up on them."

Fred believes that when hiring an employee to do a job, a manager needs to give them the space to do the work.

"I try to have a very open-door policy, so I don't think my employees are ever afraid to come to me with an issue," he says.

When folks make a mistake, Fred says that they both learn from the situation.

"It's not a punishment type thing," he says. "It's how people learn. Even if they've done something wrong, you've still got to support them."

Fred offers an example of an irate customer having an issue with something an employee did.

"In this position, you do have the authority that you can probably override anything, and that's the easy thing to do," he says. "But then your employee loses all credibility with that customer."

The way to handle it, he says, is to label it a misunderstanding, lay out the policy, back the employee and move forward.

Harney Electric Lineman Wyatt Shelley says Fred is personable and easy to relate to.

"He talks to all of us linemen before we go to work like we're normal people," Wyatt says. "We look at him more as a friend and a peer versus our boss. That's probably one of the greatest aspects about him."

Fred notes that as a manager, it's imperative to support his employees and be aware that sometimes they have bigger issues at play at home.

"It's important that you talk to your folks and make sure there aren't other



The employees at Harney Electric nominated Fred for Boss of the Year award. The Harney County Chamber of Commerce Awards Banquet, held every January, honors members of the community in a variety of categories. PHOTO BY JESSE LANGSLET

things going on in their lives that are affecting their work,” he says. “You might need to help them get through that from a work standpoint.”

Sometimes his staff might need some time off to deal with an issue.

“I think people become more productive if you can help them through that situation,” Fred says. “You can’t do everything, but maybe you give them a little time off or a little bit of leniency on something.”

Tanya Smith, Harney Electric cashier/account clerk, appreciates the way Fred takes it upon himself to know a bit about the job each employee does.

“If you have a question, you can bounce things off of him,” she says.

Harney Electric Executive Secretary Heather Bailey says it’s the same with employees’ personal lives.

“He’ll be like, ‘How’d your games go?’ or ‘How are the kids doing?’” she says. “It’s

not all just work. He cares about you, too.”

Tanya agrees.

“It makes it feel more like a family than a bunch of co-workers,” she says.

Outside of work, Fred volunteers with several community organizations, including Oregon Community Foundation, Harney County Library, Lions Club, Symmetry Care, Harney District Hospital and High Desert Partnership.

He takes vacation time to volunteer.

During the banquet presentation, Jason said that Fred’s “real legacy to our community is where he puts in countless hours investing in local projects like the Community Center and Arrowhead Plaza; in people, by assisting with scholarships and mental health; and in organizations, by contributing to mediation discussions and funding allocations.”

Stephanie Bowen, HEC office manager, says employees can learn either how to lead or how not to lead from their boss.

“Fred is one that you take notes on how you want to manage people and treat people,” Stephanie says. “He’s definitely been a mentor to me.”

Fred says knowing his employees nominated him for the annual chamber of commerce Boss of the Year award is an honor he won’t soon forget.

“I’ve always said I’d put my people up against anyone,” he says. “They’re very knowledgeable.”

Between the line crew, which navigates the dangers of the job with competence and insight, and the office crew, whose capable skills and talents offer necessary support, Fred knows the cooperative is in expert hands.

“I could be gone for a month and I don’t think this place would have a problem,” he says. “They might get nervous with things because they have to step outside of their comfort zones, but I think it would run just fine.” ■

# Taking Care of the Kids

Scholarship fund has been helping Tillamook High School students for almost three decades

By Denise Porter

In the 1960s, Jean Bailey's house always seemed to be full of high schoolers. The neighborhood kids knew they could pop over to her house and hang out.

Jean cared for her four children and all their friends, too. She is still caring for high schoolers—but many of them don't know it.

Jean turns 97 this month. She is the last living founder of the THS Alumni Scholarship Fund. The fund has awarded more than \$200,000 in scholarships to high school seniors since 1992, says Debbi Reeves, president of the scholarship fund committee.

The fund has never been endowed by a single enormous donation, and the 10-member board of directors doesn't host fundraisers. Rather, the group relies on small donations from class reunions, memorials and individual bequests to fund the scholarships.

This year, three Tillamook High School seniors will each receive \$3,000 for college or trade school. Another \$3,000 is available to any THS graduate, no matter his or her age, to return to college or trade school to further their educational needs.

The scholarship fund was born from a decision Jean and a group of friends made at their 50th high school reunion in 1991.

Jean recalls that she and her friends were visiting at the reunion and wanted to do something for the school.

"Someone wanted to purchase drapes, but no, we decided to have a more lasting impact," Jean says. "We passed around a hat and drummed up some money, and that was the start of it."



**Jean Bailey, the last living founder of the Tillamook High School Alumni Scholarship Fund, believes in supporting her alma mater and its students.** PHOTOS BY JOANNA STELZIG

The THS Alumni Scholarship was born. The following year, the committee awarded its first \$500 scholarship to graduate Kevin Creech.

"We wanted to do something for our school," Jean says. "We had a good education. We wanted our kids to have a better one."

Debbi has been involved with the scholarship since 1992. She recalls being

asked to take meeting minutes by Margaret Winslow, one of Jean's friends and another of the scholarship committee founders.

Debbi graduated from Tillamook High School and is a longtime friend of Jean's family.

"I have a real close connection with her because her daughter is one of my good friends," Debbi says. "When I got on to the group, it felt like I was going home. Jean



Since 1992, the THS Alumni Scholarship Fund has awarded more than \$200,000 in scholarships to Tillamook High graduates.

always loved having kids around. They were such a part of her life. She's always had this love for children, and I know she's had a love for learning also."

All four of Jean's children went to college. Jean worked outside the home, which, at the time was something many women did not do. She was a secretary at Tillamook PUD.

"She was a woman who had a job back when most women were stay-at-home moms," Debbi says. "She found a happy balance between family and a job. Everybody knew Jean Bailey. Everybody."

Bob Miles is also a scholarship fund director. He graduated from Tillamook High School in 1966. Like Debbi, he grew up knowing Jean. In fact, he was a neighbor.

When he graduated from high school and the opportunity to quietly work behind the scenes on the scholarship committee came, Bob signed on.

"I grew up watching them," Bob says, "people like Pete Sutton and Alice Holden,

and the others who started this. Jean, she's the last one of the founding fathers. Those people all cared about their community and all cared about their kids.

"The community was so good to me, to help little Bob Miles grow up and get out of poverty. My goal was to give back and I'm very, very happy with doing that."

Bob says the committee needs a few more volunteers. The board meets nine times a year.

Bev Schriber, a longtime Tillamook teacher, is also on the scholarship committee. She says Jean still comes to an occasional monthly group meeting.

"She's probably one of the sweetest, most gentle old ladies I know," Bev says. "I think she's highly intelligent, too."

The first criteria for scholarship selection is financial need. Then the committee reviews community service and scholastic ability.

Jean recalls one man who spoke to the committee about having received the scholarship. He'd gone to college and

returned to his hometown.

"He'd gotten one of the scholarships and he wanted to give back," Jean says. "I got all warm and fuzzy over that. He was so proud to stand there and tell us, 'Thank you for the scholarship.'"

Jean says that through the decades, she's been amazed at the small donations that pour in for the fund. She recalls one woman who donated \$5 for many years. She says that yearly donation was important to the fund and to the woman who contributed.

Serving the community has always been about making area children stronger, Jean says.

"I had four kids myself that went through college, and kids need money," she says. "We felt like it was a responsibility to help the kids." ■

*For more information about the THS Alumni Scholarship Fund, go to [www.ths-asf.yolasite.com](http://www.ths-asf.yolasite.com). High school seniors should note that due to COVID-19 restrictions, the due date for applications may change. The website has the most current news.*

# Tree Planting Guide

Properly planted trees around the home provide many benefits. They can reduce energy consumption, decrease heating and cooling costs, increase property values, facilitate groundwater retention, and beautify homes and neighborhoods.

Before buying and planting a tree, consider the planting site carefully. Imagine how big your tree will be in 20 to 40 years. Will it come in contact with power lines? Will it shade your home? Is it too close to your foundation?

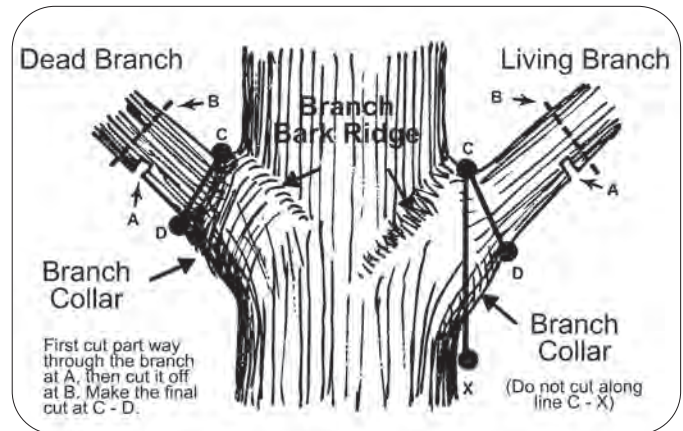
By planning ahead, you can pick the right tree for the right spot and avoid future problems for you and your new tree.

## Planting Guidelines

Planting a tree is pretty simple, as long as you have thought about the type of tree you are planting and the environment you are planting it in. Whether you are planning a community event or a weekend project around your home, you will need to know how to get your trees into the ground. In addition, please call 811 before digging to find out where underground power lines are located.

First, locate the trunk flare of the tree. The trunk flare is above the area where the roots are growing and is most often recognizable by the swelling or flared appearance of the trunk. For a container-grown tree, the flare should be at the surface of the soil in the container.

One of the most common tree planting mistakes is digging a hole too deep or too narrow. Dig a hole that is no deeper than the distance from the trunk flare to the bottom of the root ball or the container. The hole should also be at least three times wider than the root ball or the container. This allows for good air and water movement, and can provide looser soil for the roots to begin growing outward.



## Simple Pruning Practices

The objective of pruning is to produce strong, healthy and attractive plants. By understanding how and why to prune, and by following a few standard principles, this objective can be achieved.

Pruning for safety involves removing branches that could fall and cause injury or property damage, trimming branches that could interfere with lines of sight on streets or driveways, and removing branches that could grow into utility lines. Pruning for health involves removing diseased or insect-infested wood, thinning the crown to increase airflow, and removing crossing or rubbing branches. Pruning for aesthetics involves enhancing the natural form and character of trees or to stimulate flower growth.

Pruning cuts should be made so only branch tissue is removed and stem tissue is not damaged. At the point where the branch attaches to the stem, branch and stem tissues remain separate, but are contiguous. If only branch tissues are cut when pruning, the stem tissues of the tree will probably not become decayed, and the wound will seal more effectively.

If you have any questions about pruning, visit [www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/howtos/ht\\_prune/htprune.pdf](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/howtos/ht_prune/htprune.pdf). ■



**Know what's below.  
Call before you dig.**

## Utility Line Trees

Never plant trees with a mature growth height of more than 20 feet directly below overhead power lines. Trees reaching 20 to 40 feet in height should be planted at least 30 feet from power lines. Trees growing to more than 40 feet tall should be a minimum of 50 feet from power lines.

Some examples of acceptable trees to plant under power lines include:

Maples	<i>Acer</i> spp.
Hawthornes	<i>Crataegus</i> spp.
Kwansan Cherry	<i>Prunus serrulata</i>
Canada Red Chokecherry	<i>Malus</i> spp.
Columnar Mountain Ash	<i>Sorbus x hybrida</i> "Fatigiata"
Flowering Crabapple	<i>Malus pumila</i>
Tea Crabapple	<i>Malus hupehensis</i>

## Medium-Sized Trees

Medium-sized trees—between 30 and 50 feet at maturity—may be planted 15 to 30 feet from power lines. Some examples include:

Common Hackberry	<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>
Autumn Purple Ash	<i>Fraxinus americana</i>
Green Ash	<i>Fraxinus pennsylvanica</i>
Honeylocust	<i>Gleditsia tricanthos</i> "Inermis"
Columnar English Oak	<i>Quercus robur fastigiata</i>
Apricot	<i>Prunus armeniaca</i>
Utah Juniper	<i>Juniperus osteosperma</i>
Cliffrose	<i>Purshia stansburiana</i>
Eastern Red-Cedar	<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>
Staghorn Sumac	<i>Rhus typhina</i>
Washington Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus phaenopyrum</i>
Eastern Redbud	<i>Cercis canadensis</i>

## Large-Sized Trees

Large trees (more than 50 feet high at maturity) may be planted 50 feet or more from wires. Some examples include:

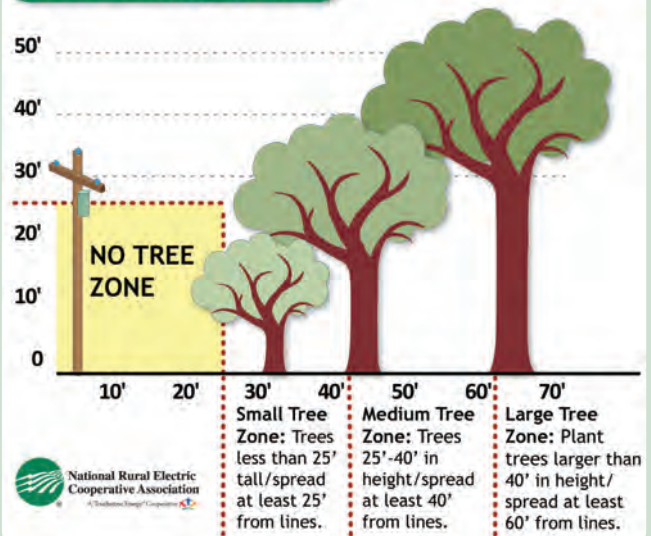
Northern Catalpa	<i>Catalpa speciosa</i>	Black Pine	<i>Pinus thunbergii</i>
Kentucky Coffeetree	<i>Gymnocladus dioica</i>	Kousa Dogwood	<i>Cornus cousa</i>
London Planetree	<i>Platanus acerfolia</i>	Singleleaf Ash	<i>Fraxinus anomala</i>
Linden	<i>Tilia</i> spp.	Rocky Mountain Juniper	<i>Juniperus scopulorum</i>
Bur Oak	<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>	Callery Pear	<i>Pyrus calleryana</i>
Northern Red Oak	<i>Quercus rubra</i>	Winter King Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus viridis</i>
Pin Oak	<i>Quercus palustris</i>	Lavelle Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus x lavellei</i>
American Elm	<i>Ulmus americana</i>	Gray Dogwood	<i>Cornus racemosa</i>
Ponderosa Pine	<i>Pinus ponderosa</i>	Hybrid Forsythia	<i>Forsythia x intermedia</i>
Spruces	<i>Picea</i> spp.	Wayfaringtree Viburnum	<i>Viburnum litana</i>
Firs	<i>Abies</i> spp.		

## Our Region

Please note that in Ely and surrounding areas, trees adaptable to U.S. Department of Agriculture hardiness zone 4b are best for exposed areas. It is not advisable to plant trees that are not adaptable to climates greater than hardiness zone 6b because it is possible the trees will not be able to acclimate and survive.

Mt. Wheeler Power encourages residents to consider other species not listed here and to determine the mature height of trees before purchasing to ensure a healthy, long-lived tree.

## Tree Planting Guide





For Monty, a day at the office means riding to check his cattle and horses.

# A Ranch to Remember

Drawn by region's natural beauty, Idaho ranchers move family business to northern Nevada's Clover Valley

By Dianna Troyer

A motto clipped from a magazine and taped to his office desk inspires Monty Pearce at Memory Ranches in Clover Valley south of Wells: "It's better to wear out than to rust out."

Determined not to rust out, Monty and his wife, Merry, bought the vast ranch two years ago.

"There wasn't enough room at our ranch in western Idaho for what we planned to do because our kids want to have a future in our family business," says Monty, 71. "We've always had a goal of working together as a family to run a successful business."

Over four decades in Idaho, Monty and Merry developed through selective breeding coveted bloodlines of quarter horses and Red and Black Angus bulls.

Three of the Pearces' seven adult children—Merrily, Clancy and Luke—live on the ranch. Luke lives with his wife, Amber, and their four children.

The family wants to continue to develop profitable cattle and sought-after horses.

Monty says the move from Idaho to northern Nevada happened because they took an impulsive detour.

"We'd been looking for an ideal location to expand our ranch for several years, but



Clancy brings in some cows. PHOTOS BY MERRILY PEARCE

couldn't find the right place," he says. "We'd driven past this area numerous times but never took the time to look around."

Merry's parents live in St. George, Utah. They usually drove past Wells when going back home to New Plymouth, Idaho.

"On one trip, we decided to see what it was like off Highway 93 by driving down Clover Valley," Monty says. "We'd always heard how beautiful it was. As we went down the road, we saw a jogger and stopped to ask her if she knew of any ranches for sale. She pointed to the ground and told us this one was for sale."

The majestic, snow-capped 11,000-foot-high East Humboldt Mountains were the backdrop to the ranch and looked like a postcard or a scenic film set.

"We were impressed with how picturesque it was," Monty says. "We bought 12,000 acres and started to work."

They built 5 miles of fences and 1.5 miles of steel sucker rod and cable for a feedlot. From April to September of 2018, they accomplished the Herculean task of trucking more than 100 brood mares and 500 cows to their new home 300 miles away.

They cleared 3,500 acres of sagebrush and juniper and planted grass for their herds. They also built an outdoor covered arena for roping cattle and training their horses.

Monty's and Merry's Nevada ranch fulfills a dream they shared when they met as students at Brigham Young University. After they married



**Luke with his son Hondo on the ranch.**

in 1972, they managed ranches until they could afford to buy their own place.

In 1977, they purchased 29 acres near New Plymouth and named it Memory Ranches—a combination of the letters in their first names.

"We had a couple of horses and about a dozen cows," Monty says. "It all started from there."

Now they have more than 100 brood mares from the Driftwood, Joe Reed, Leo and Joe Hancock bloodlines, known for sturdy bone structure, instinctive drive to work cattle, endurance and desire to please their riders.

"With the horses, you wouldn't believe how many miles we've driven over the years to get bloodlines and the genetic traits we wanted," Monty says.

Their horses are known for excelling as ranch, roping and family horses, according to comments posted on the ranch website. Jarad LaMarsh,

a customer and roper from Oregon, described the mare he bought as "a big, stout, fast and very smart horse, yet gentle enough to put anyone on. The way she chases down steers, it's almost personal to her. You can tell she loves her job. She's a great horse."

The Pearces host a horse sale every two years in June, drawing customers from throughout the United States. More than half of their horse buyers are repeat customers. They sell their bulls by private treaty to 95% repeat buyers.

Innovation has been the key to raising quality livestock, Monty says. He decided to use artificial insemination to establish certain genetic traits in his herd at a time when it was a novel idea.

"We've been artificially inseminating our cows for 46 years," he says. "When you have a small herd, you'd better get your breeding right because you can't afford

mediocrity if you want to stay in business."

Besides breeding cattle with desirable genetics, the 150 bulls they raise and sell undergo pulmonary artery pressure (PAP) testing—a factor indicating whether they will be susceptible to respiratory and heart problems.

"In feedlots, the most common causes of death are due to respiratory issues and heart attacks," Monty says. "With steers at about 1,200 to 1,400 pounds and worth about \$2,000 each, you can't afford those losses. We're working to raise bulls that don't have those issues."

Monty says his family is excited about living in northern Nevada.

"It's not only gorgeous with the mountains and blue skies and wide open spaces, we love the people here," he says. "We have great neighbors. For us, it's a perfect place. We're here to stay." ■



**Monty and Merry Pearce sell prized quarter horses and Angus bulls at Memory Ranches south of Wells.**



# Rural Communities Respond During Coronavirus Crisis

By Lisa Jacoby

Heather Rookstool sees only two cars on Main Street in John Day—not the typical scene for Tuesday of spring break.

“We should have 47 softball and baseball games going on right now,” she says. “The atmosphere downtown is depressing. It’s eerie.”

Heather manages a coffee shop and café, Java Jungle. Her business, like many across Oregon, took a hit in March when Oregon Gov. Kate Brown banned the dine-in option at restaurants to help slow the spread of coronavirus.

In light of the mandate, some businesses

closed until the crisis is averted. Others, like Java Jungle, stayed open with limited staff to offer takeout, drive-thru and delivery.

Even as Heather laments the loss of revenue she would typically see during spring break, she speaks of good news during this pandemic.

When the governor closed schools starting March 16, the Grant-Union School District began supplying free lunch to local children. But spring break, from March 23-27, meant no lunches.

Until an anonymous donor offered help. “This person was just trying to make sure kids could still get something to eat,”

Heather says. “I told him how much my cost would be to make 200 meals, and he covered it.”

Lunch was provided at three different locations that week: The Ugly Truth Bar and Grill, Java Jungle and Chester’s Thriftway.

The Ugly Truth served 60 meals: a slice of pizza, fruit and a drink.

“They liked it,” says owner Ali Lenz.

Java Jungle provided a variety of sandwiches, fruit, crackers and a drink.

In Baker City, help with school lunches came in the priceless form of volunteers.

When the governor announced the school closure, Baker School District staff



**The window at The Book Parlor in Burns shows its support for everyone in the community helping out during the crisis.**  
PHOTO BY JEREMY HILL

worked through the weekend to devise a meal program for youth age 18 and younger.

The approach, says Nutrition Director Jessica Dalton, is similar to the summer lunch program, but on a larger scale.

“I added sites of places I don’t typically serve summer meals,” she says.

Service groups and churches immediately responded with offers to help serve food to the youngest members of the community. Grocery Outlet donated fresh fruit and vegetables.

Volunteers from Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative, First Presbyterian Church, First Lutheran Church, St. Stephens Episcopal Church, Just Serve and Soroptimist International of Baker County helped hand out breakfast and lunch.

By March 23, the system evolved so the

next day’s breakfast was served with lunch, allowing the groups to alternate days.

## **An Uncertain Future**

Heather isn’t sure what to expect going forward.

“Today was a better day than yesterday,” she says.

However, eliminating Jungle Java’s dining room, means regulars can’t congregate.

“I’ve lost all my elderly customers,” she says.

Although she delivers when asked, Heather misses her regular customers that she would call to check in if they didn’t show up.

Ali at The Ugly Truth is equally optimistic and cautious.

“It’s all right,” she says. “We’re trying to work with the circumstances we’re given.”

The Ugly Truth cut back to four hours a day. Ali says the inability to serve alcohol or offer video lottery will affect the business, but it will continue to offer food.

“I’m trying to recoup something because I have overhead whether I’m open or not,” she says.

In Harney County, Chamber Director Lola Johnson says she has seen a wonderful side of humanity throughout the crisis. For example, a local bar offered to cook and deliver food if Meals on Wheels ceased to operate.

“It’s little acts like that,” Lola says.

“There’s a lot of people coming out of the woodwork asking, ‘What do you need?’”

Although many businesses have closed their doors for now, Lola says others posted signs saying, “We’re closed, but if you need anything, call and we’ll deliver.”

A doughnut shop ended up busier one evening than ever before—and also received a large order to be delivered to the sheriff’s office.

Lola says everyone is supporting the businesses that are open.

“Our town is trying to eat takeout as much as possible—more than normal,” she says.

As for the social distancing recommendation of staying 6 feet away from others,

Lola says that’s not too tough in the largest county in Oregon where the population equates to one person per square mile.

But the restrictions on gatherings caused cancellation of the Harney County Migratory Bird Festival in mid-April—normally the start of tourism season in Harney County.

## **A Boon to (Some) Businesses**

In Union County, at least two businesses saw an increase in customers—especially after the governor issued the “Stay home, stay safe” mandate encouraging everyone to stay at home except for mandatory trips, such as to the grocery store or a medical appointment. More time at home meant more time for projects.

“We’re a lot busier than we generally would have been,” says Michelle Stephens, who owns La Grande Paint and Glass with her husband, Jeff.

The business is open because customers and employees can maintain the social distancing recommendation of 6 feet.

With businesses and schools closed—and many people working from home—Michelle says customers are working on home improvements. The store stocks paint and window replacements for residential, commercial and automobiles.

“Things they’ve wanted to fix up they now have time for,” she says. “They were thanking us for being open. They are going stir-crazy at home.”

In downtown La Grande, The Mountain Works bike shop received more requests for tuneups than usual for the time of year.

The stay-home order allows people to leave their houses for exercise.

“People want to get outside,” says Micah Anderson. “Lots of tuneups and new bike sales.”

Although they saw more bike orders, Micah says the restrictions on businesses affected The Mountain Works because people could not hang out and visit.

“It’s a bit of a clubhouse for sure,” he says of normal days.

Like the rest of the world, Eastern Oregon is ready for those normal days to return. ■



# Shear Tranquility

What started from morning reflections by a pond is now a farm with 25 ewes, creating wool products and a home for local knitters.

## Story and photos by Rick Stedman

For Alice Mattson, living and working on Alice's Reflection Farm in Eatonville has been a labor of love. She and husband Virgil purchased the property in 1982, and eventually turned it into a successful sheep farm.

Alice and Virgil's family bought this 18-acre pastoral setting in 1962. The couple bought their own section 20 years later.

"After my husband and I bought a section of the farm, we would spend weekends up here in our camper," Alice says. "We'd sit by the pond in the mornings with our coffee and enjoy the

reflection off the water. We would also reflect about what we wanted to do in the future. Alice's Reflection Farm evolved from those initial reflections."

Alice started raising a couple of yearling ewes as backyard pets. She began spinning wool in 1989, and hand spinning fleeces in 1995.

In the 1990s, a neighborly affair of sorts blossomed when Alice acquired new neighbors—the Haydens and Homans—who also shared an interest in sheep. "Sharon Hayden later started a spinning mill, and we eventually began attending trade shows together," Alice says. Sharon's husband, Mark, and their two



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Alice Mattson operates Alice's Reflection Farm, raising sheep and spinning wool products. **ABOVE, LEFT:** Rayni and Sam are the farm's Livestock guardian dogs. **ABOVE, RIGHT:** Alice produces many wool products, including hats.

daughters also worked with the sheep and wool. "Sharon's sister Mary Homan still lives here with her husband, Bob, who trains border collies for sheepherding," Alice says.

Cathy and Bill Caloren bought the Hayden farm five years ago, and the sheep connection continues. "This is like heaven living here!" says Cathy, a veterinarian technician. "Alice is like our mom, best friend, and grandma all rolled into one."

In addition to running the farm, Alice expanded her offerings in 2003 when she opened a store on the property and began selling wool-related products. She offers supplies ranging from fresh fleeces to spinning wheels, yarn, knitting needles, along with patterns and how-to books. Visitors can buy sweaters, vests, hats, and other hand-knitted garments.

### Gathering Place for Locals

Today, Alice's Reflection Farm is a popular meeting place for local spinners, and a source for buying spinning and knitting supplies and equipment. In addition, the Romeldale sheep raised on the farm are a dual-purpose breed used for their quality meat and fine soft wool, with a high yield and uniform fleece. Alice says the Livestock Conservancy classifies Romeldales as a rare breed. "Both registered purebred Romeldale sheep and lambs are sold for showing and breeding, while unregistered Romeldales are sold for pets and meat," Alice says. Some locals have been buying meat from Alice's Reflection Farm for more than 20 years.

Alice also sells freshly shorn fleeces that are clean and ready for spinning. For non-spinners, there is yarn that has been hand spun or commercially spun. "I do a lot of knitting myself," Alice says. "So I also sell completed garments such as hats, scarves, sweaters, socks, and shawls."

### Going to the dogs

A farm wouldn't be a farm without a dog or two. At Alice's Reflection Farm, Rayni and Sam are the keepers of the flock. Livestock guardian dogs were first mentioned in history books more than 2,000 years ago, according to Alice. "They lived and protected nomadic flocks of sheep as well as the shepherd and his family in middle and southern Europe," says Alice.

The dogs are wary of strangers and are bred to take responsibility of the flock and make decisions in the absence of the master. The dogs take their job seriously despite the true threat of predators such as wolves or bears.

To help her dogs do their job more efficiently, Alice cut holes in the cross fencing to allow them to access any of the fields and the yard. Rayni and Sam have free rein with their guard duties, which include protecting 25 ewes, two rams and the 35 lambs they produced this year.

Rayni, the senior citizen of the duo, is 6-years-old, while her counterpart Sam is just a 1-and-1/2. "Sam drives everyone crazy with his energy and pranks," says Alice.

### Reaping What She's Sewn

At 82 years young, Alice has no intention of expanding the business. In recent years, she has cut back on attending trade shows and the number of sheep maintained on the farm. Alice takes great pride in a job well done.

"I get to meet many people and many of them have become dear friends over the years," she says. "It gives me a chance to travel and meet those of similar interests all over the country. In fact, I'd want to be doing this whether or not I had a business, for the business is just an outlet for some of the finished products." ■



Sonja and Dale Hopkins of Anderson Island started HoppyShop, a business where they create steel art. PHOTO COURTESY OF SEAN GRIFFIN

# Pruning Steel Into Art

By Crista Fitzgerald

An apple tree left to grow of its own accord over decades becomes a frightful jumble of crisscrossed branches. Its gnarled mess of arms and elbows jut out in all directions, daring only the hardiest of climbers to pluck a fruit from its towering height. Likewise, strewn in piles awaiting order and use at a construction site, steel sheets, beams, rods, rebar and fittings look like nothing that could possibly be more than the cast-off remains of the crew. But here, too, the materials require only the skill and vision of a creator to shine.

On a quiet lane in an out-of-the-way neighborhood on Anderson Island, a former apple pruner and a retired union ironworker have found a way to honor each other's passion and create HoppyShop, a business that brings delight to their customers and beauty to island landmarks.

Many years ago, when Sonja Hopkins was a single mother learning how to prune apple trees at an orchard in Chelan, she discovered she could find the beauty that existed within the structure of a tree “like the sculpture waiting in the marble slab.” This is the practical application—the eye of the artist—that Sonja

brings to her half of an on-island adventure in steel art production with her husband, Dale.

Dale Hopkins' career spanned more than 40 years in industrial and commercial metal applications. He worked on construction of the convention center in Seattle, at SeaTac Airport and many other commercial venues. Metal fabrication has always been his passion. He can create the steel structure for a utility trailer, do custom work crafting gates, make custom hinges and hardware, and repurpose materials into new and functional forms. Dale is a welder/fitter who knows what works and what doesn't, and shares that wealth of experience and knowledge with customers.

Sonja and Dale have lived on Anderson Island for 15 years. Both originated in small towns—he from the oil leasing fields of Wyoming, and she from Bellingham. Sonja's skill in pruning apple trees was welcome at the historic Anderson Island Farm orchard—a badly neglected and toweringly overgrown forest of apple trees bearing unreachable fruit. She and the islanders she taught transformed the orchard into a bountiful grove, a source of easily gathered fruit for the island's annual apple squeeze.

During their early island years while she worked at Boeing, Sonja took a Small Business Administration class, mindful of



upcoming retirement. She figured she and Dale would want to do something else, perhaps together. The class offered the guidance of realistic expectations.

Sonja learned that 70% of small businesses fail, and for primarily three reasons:

- The owners choose to pursue something in retirement they have no experience with.
- They lack financial resources to tide them over for an extended period of time.
- They form partnerships without clear boundaries, causing arguments and hurt feelings.

Dale retired before Sonja with a disability; all those long years as a steel tradesman took a toll. “But what do you do to a craftsman when you take his craft away?” Sonja asked herself. The answer, with funding from a Labor and Industries settlement, took Dale back to school. He earned an associate degree in mechanical engineering at Bates Technical College in 2013. He had built a big shop a few years earlier, and had the tools and desire to continue working in steel. Remaining funds were used to buy a plasma table. Together, the couple experimented and learned—are still learning and have not yet reached the limit of the capacity of their high-tech tool to turn a sheet of steel into a thing of beauty.

They revisited what Sonja learned from that SBA class. They decided her half of the enterprise would be design, which was what she loved and was good at. She takes photos and uses them to trace patterns onto her computer. The completed design is put on a thumb drive and taken to Dale’s production shop adjacent to the house.

Dale’s half of the enterprise creates the physical pieces using the drafting program running the 5-by-5-foot square plasma table. The process of cutting the images into the cold rolled steel is intricate and programed. “Whatever design you put in,” Sonja says, “that’s what you get.” Dale can also cut designs into corrugated steel and on different thicknesses of steel sheeting. Every project can require thousands of cut lines. As an example, the cutwork for the tractor panel on one of the light fixtures in the McGoldrick Library in the new Archival Building at Johnson Farm took an hour to cut after Sonja’s design was programed into the table.

At first, Sonja and Dale began with simple projects. They played with altering, enlarging, increasing new skills and developed a style. They made steel art small enough to transport and kept the images generic—country life, tractors, herons, salmon. When they had enough inventory, they traveled for a year doing weekend festivals and art/craft shows, discovered those venues were not for them. They consigned some pieces at the General Store on the island for a couple of years. From there, they began receiving local commissioned work.

**ABOVE:** The Hopkins’ designed these two light fixtures for their library. **BELOW:** Much of HoppyShop’s art starts from photos, with designs and shapes traced and cut from steel. PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOHN LARSEN



Sonja and Dale designed and created multiple steel scene images for the island Lakeshore Restaurant featuring local wildlife after the owners could find no one to craft what they had in mind. “They were thrilled to have an on-island person create the panels,” Sonja recalls. Everyone was delighted when the owners discovered the duo could custom produce exactly what they wanted right in their own island backyard.

When one customer was so pleased with the steel art piece they created of her son’s wedding day and exclaimed, “You don’t make art – you make memories.” ■



**Berry pickers in Bethel work under a 900-kilowatt EWT turbine that was installed in 2018.** PHOTOS COURTESY OF STG INC.

### By Bill Thomson

Alaska Village Electric Cooperative began providing electric service to rural Alaska in 1968. We now serve 58 communities, mostly in western Alaska, using 50 separate and independent microgrids.

Communities include cultures such as Athabascan, Aleut, Inupiat, Yupik, Siberian Yupik, Tlingit and Caucasian. Many of our members live a partial subsistence lifestyle relying on whaling, fishing, hunting and trapping.

These communities are spread across the largest area of any retail electric cooperative in the world. To

travel between communities or to hub communities, you need a bush plane. To deliver heavy or bulky items—or diesel fuel—you must use seasonal barges. Only one of our communities is accessible by road.

For AVEC's first 30 years, the only practical source of electricity was diesel gen-sets. AVEC has 164 gen-sets totaling 80 megawatts of capacity. Fuel for the generators is delivered mainly by river or coastal barge seasonally, with one or two deliveries a year. We typically store 14 months of fuel to cover for variations in weather and delivery schedules.

All of this is expensive, even before the

volatile and expensive price of the diesel fuel itself is considered.

Diesel gen-sets remain important to AVEC for the foreseeable future, or at least until a less expensive method for transmitting power between Arctic communities is developed.

Until that happens, AVEC will rely on what we have learned during the past 20 years in how to reduce our dependence on diesel fuel by using renewable resources.

Solar energy is problematic in the Arctic. However, AVEC communities have some of the best wind resources in the world. AVEC now has 32 active wind turbines installed in 12 communities.

Through tie-lines, they serve 20 communities.

We started learning about wind in 1999 by doing a high-penetration research and development installation in Wales. When it was commissioned in 2001, there was little reliable wind equipment rated for the Arctic, so the small 65-kilowatt turbines needed a great deal of maintenance. The supporting equipment was too complex to be installed in such a remote location, so we created a second site with the same turbines at Selawik in 2003.

Through the years, the turbines became more difficult to keep running. None of the six turbines remain in operation. Neither is the manufacturer, for that matter, which is a common occurrence in renewable energy.

AVEC then started to buy larger, 100-kW turbines from Northern Power Ltd. This company had been building turbines for Antarctica and was considered a good candidate for our climate.

From 2005 to 2011, we installed 30 of its turbines. These towers were tubular with internal ladders. They could be climbed while sheltered from the weather, but some maintenance still required a crane.

Again, the manufacturer went out of business. Fortunately, we learned by then how to maintain these turbines. Most are still operating.

With growing confidence, we went in search of a new supplier and started looking at even larger turbines. We realized larger turbines might work well, even though a single turbine could provide more power than an entire community needed. There were several reasons why these would work:

- Larger turbines have blade pitch control, which we never had before. We now have accurate and quick control of power output. Pitch control also allows more efficient operation over a wider range of wind speeds.
- Larger turbines have more interior space, meaning a larger number of components can be accessed from inside,



**A crane is used to install a new 900-kW turbine in St. Mary's.**

which is an important consideration during winter in the Arctic. Another huge consideration is cranes are less likely to be needed for maintenance.

- Larger turbines provide more power per invested dollar. The installed cost of a 900-kW turbine may be three times more than a 100-kW turbine, but it is only one-third the cost per kilowatt.
- The larger swept area works in lower wind classes and tends to have a smoother output than smaller blades.
- Larger turbines often have large blocks of surplus renewable power, which is used for displacing heating fuel, but it may be valuable for charging electric vehicles in the future. It is also a clear incentive for installing intertie lines between villages to more effectively share the resource.

To date, we have installed two Dutch-made EWT 900-kW turbines. One started up at Bethel in 2018 and a second at St. Mary's in 2019. A third turbine is on order for Stebbins for installation in 2021.

Results from the larger turbines have been amazing and point toward a future with less dependence on diesel fuel, which will help meet targets set by the AVEC Board of Directors for reducing fuel consumption.

Before installation of the 900-kW turbines, wind accounted for 3.5% of system generation in 2017 and 2018. During the last five months of 2019, these two turbines alone supplied more than 3% of our total system generation.

Looking forward, AVEC should be able to exceed 7% this year—a dramatic increase that makes AVEC's policies for reducing fuel consumption possible.

From August to December 2019, operation of the St. Mary's turbine reduced fuel consumption by nearly half, from 100,507 gallons in 2018 to 54,740 gallons. While doing this, the large turbine was smooth and easy to control.

Even after reducing generation fuel this much, a large amount of surplus energy is still available, which will be used to further reduce fuel use when an intertie to an adjacent village is completed this year.

What have we learned in the past 20 years of wind installations?

- Don't trust that the supplier will stay in business or continue to support your equipment.
- Have a long-term internal maintenance plan. We have sometimes obtained full technical disclosure in the past so we can continue to keep the equipment maintained.
- Bigger is often better. Large turbines are more controllable and responsive than our smaller turbines.
- System integration is important when adding wind to microgrids. Wind energy is unpredictable—even with pitch control. A system controller must control how the power is generated and ensure enough generation is in reserve in case of the unexpected.

System logging is required to conduct forensics when something goes wrong. Wind-diesel hybrid microgrids are inherently more complex, and when the lights go out it is not always clear what caused it.

AVEC is working on ways to use technology to reduce our cost of service. Wind energy is just one of these solutions, but we are excited that it has potentially matured into an effective solution for remote Arctic microgrids. ■

*Bill Thomson is the technology and engineering adviser at Alaska Village Electric Cooperative in Anchorage, Alaska. He can be contacted at [wthomson@avec.org](mailto:wthomson@avec.org).*



Panaca Fire Department EMT  
Kade Lee. PHOTOS BY ERIC HOLT

# Lincoln County First Responders Restore Calm When Calamity Strikes

By Dianna Troyer

While most people fear the unknown, Lincoln County first responder Kade Lee thrives on it.

“You never know what kind of call you’ll get,” says Kade, a 28-year-old advanced emergency medical technician and member of the Panaca Fire Department. “It might be a car wreck, medical emergency or house fire. There’s always a surge of excitement because I have a love for this kind of work. It’s always a rush.”

In Lincoln County, Kade is among about 100 first responders—firefighters, EMTs and

ambulance drivers—who volunteer 24/7 to fight fires and provide emergency care.

Lincoln County Emergency Manager Eric Holt oversees first responders in the northern part of the county. Eric says first responders in northern Lincoln County handle about 25 to 30 calls a month. In the southern part of the county, Emergency Medical Services Coordinator Ryan Rhoads says responders deal with about 130 to 150 calls a year.

“We know we can count on them no matter what happens,” says Lincoln County Sheriff Kerry Lee, who is Kade’s father.

The county’s first responders will

celebrate National EMS Week with a banquet in mid-May. The week was established in 1974 by President Gerald Ford to honor first responders for their tireless community service.

The recognition banquet is still being planned, Eric says.

Reflecting on the past year, he says he is pleased eight volunteers who had completed their basic EMT certification enrolled in an advanced EMT class, which ended in March. They learned a higher level of lifesaving techniques such as placing an advanced airway, inserting intravenous lines and administering



The Area 51 Incident Management Team was prepared to deal with emergencies during the Alienstock and Storm Area 51 music festival.

medications to unconscious diabetics.

“We have a great team of people who keep the program going,” Eric says. “They do a fantastic job. The best part of being a first responder is helping someone when it’s their worst day. You never know who you’ll respond on. It could be someone you know because we have a small population in the county.”

Another highlight of 2019 for Eric and Kerry was seeing how professionally first responders planned for and provided weekend medical coverage for two events that garnered national media attention last September in Hiko and Rachel in southern Lincoln County.

On social media, 2 million Facebook viewers indicated they would participate in Storm Area 51 Basecamp in Hiko and Alienstock in Rachel near U.S. Air Force’s Nevada Test and Training Range.

While planning how to provide emergency services for such a crowd, Eric and Kerry anticipated about 30,000 people would actually show up. They relied on about 200 other first responders from outside the county who offered mutual aid.

To their relief, the two events evolved into mild music festivals. Kerry estimates about 3,000 people stayed for the weekend, while another 5,000 visited for a day and left.

“We were relieved that not much happened,” Kade says. “Besides minor first aid, the only incidents were a car versus

cow crash with people walking away from it, and a truck rolling over when the driver was racing on a dry lake bed.”

One of the rollover victims was flown by air ambulance to a Las Vegas hospital, while the other two were transported by ground ambulance.

Ryan, who lives in Hiko, says the event “wasn’t bad at all, and people were calm during the weekend.”

Being a first responder is a tradition for some families because “there’s a community need,” Kerry says.

In Pioche, John Stever, like his father, is the town’s fire chief. In Caliente, George Rowe is fire chief, following in his father’s footsteps.

In addition to being sheriff, Kerry is the county coroner and volunteer chief for the Panaca Fire Department. His father was among the founders who established the department after a school burned in town in the 1940s.

Kerry says at one time the Panaca department had about 25 volunteers but is down to about 12.

“We could use more volunteers,” he says.

His son, Kade, heeded the call to serve in high school.

“I’ve always wanted to be a fireman and EMT,” Kade says.

As soon as he was old enough, at age 16, Kade enrolled in an apprenticeship program the Panaca Fire Department offered. When he was 18, he earned his

certification as an emergency medical responder and enrolled in the fire science technology program at Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno, graduating in 2013. Four years ago, he passed his EMT exams.

He teaches classes so first responders can obtain their required hours of monthly training. Kade says the main qualification to be a first responder is having a willingness to serve and time to take classes.

“We have people from all walks of life: teachers, retirees, people who work night shifts,” he says. “We can always use more volunteers.” ■

*To volunteer to become a first responder, contact Eric at 775-962-2376, Kade at 775-962-2218 or Ryan at 702-682-1016.*



Lincoln County first responders hold a briefing to prepare for the Alienstock and Storm Area 51 music festival.

MARLBORO ELECTRIC



Jim Bunch started Bunch's  
Garden Shop and Nursery in 1959  
after leaving his job at AT&T.  
PHOTOS BY HANNA CHEEK



# A Business in Bloom

Bunch's Garden Shop and Nursery has been growing a local business since 1959

By Jodi Helmer

Jim Bunch never planned to open a nursery.

He remembers his father working in the nursery business in Charleston and Florence. He helped in the greenhouse as a child, but dreamed of doing something different.

In the 1950s, after graduating from high school, Jim took a job at AT&T that brought him to Bennettsville. He made frequent trips back home to Charleston, where he often bought plants at Middleton Place—the oldest formal garden in the United States—to give to friends and neighbors.

"I met some people who were interested in hearing about my childhood growing up on a plantation in Charleston," Jim recalls. "From there, I started to do favors for people, bringing plants to Bennettsville. I had no interest in growing a business."

But business blossomed.

In 1959, Jim left the telephone company to open Bunch's Garden Shop and Nursery. The retail nursery grows and sells plants ranging from fruit trees, azaleas and roses to colorful annuals and perennials.

Local customers supported the business from the beginning, but Jim quickly realized he was growing more plants than he could sell in the retail garden center and needed other outlets. He decided to drive around to see if he could set up wholesale accounts with other companies. The decision changed the trajectory of his business.

After some small successes, Jim decided to stop at a local supermarket to gauge its interest in selling plants.

"I stopped at a Winn-Dixie store in Hartsville and I had a good conversation with the manager," he says. "He had some things he'd bought from another nursery to sell at his store and had no idea what he had. As a favor, I identified the

plants and labeled and displayed them—and these were plants he bought from someone else. He wanted to pay me, and I said, 'No it was just a favor; I was happy to do it for you.'"

The manager was appreciative and promised that if the plants sold well at the Winn-Dixie store, he'd start buying additional plants from Jim. A few weeks later, Jim received a call from the manager. He lived up to his word and placed an order.

Jim delivered plants and, unlike the other nursery, all the plants were labeled with descriptive and colorful tags so customers knew exactly what they were buying. The plants sold quickly, and Jim started receiving regular orders from the supermarket.

It was the start of a successful wholesale business that complemented retail nursery sales.

"All of a sudden, I had a second business in another town," he says. "It was exciting. I was getting about as much attention in that particular place as I was getting in my place, as far as sales were concerned."

A commitment to customer service and quality plants helped Jim turn Winn-Dixie into a loyal customer. The supermarket manager invited him to supply plants to four additional Winn-Dixie stores in South Carolina, where the colorful selections continued selling well.

"The idea for merchandising these stores was to give to the customers who were walking through the doors at the Winn-Dixie stores specialty plants," Jim says. "I wanted to give them plants that were hard to find—things that people really wanted to plant in their yards."

The plan worked.

The plants Jim delivered to all five

Winn-Dixie stores sold quickly, capturing the attention of the supermarket executives who invited him to their headquarters in Raleigh and proposed he begin supplying plants to additional stores. Before long, Jim was working with 350 stores across five states.

Jim subcontracted with other nurseries across the South—including growers in North Carolina, Tennessee and Florida—to provide plant material for the supermarket chain. He had trucks running 24/7 to ensure deliveries arrived on time. Other big box stores contacted Bunch about establishing wholesale accounts, but he declined.

"Even though other companies wanted to join in on what I was doing, I never left Winn-Dixie," Jim says. "I stayed very loyal to them and they stayed very loyal to me. All those years of loyalty to one another with all the business being done, we never had a signed contract. It was all based on a handshake."

The relationship continued until 2004.

"I sold to them for 43 consecutive years, and it all started with a favor," Jim says.

## Serving Local Customers

While Jim was making sure all 350 Winn-Dixie stores from South Carolina and Georgia to Virginia had enough colorful, local plants, his son, Glenn, was working behind the scenes in Bennettsville.

Just like his father, Glenn confesses a career in the nursery business was not part of his plan. He attended Frances Marion University in Florence and went on to a 21-year career as an officer with the National Guard.

"I wanted to get out of the nursery business—where I worked all through high school—and get out of Bennettsville," he



**Bunch Garden Shop and Nursery has a retail nursery in Bennettsville and a 20-acre farm at a separate site in Marlboro County.**

says. "I left and found out that I loved the business and the town more than I thought I did."

Glenn calls his father "the people person" in the business. Friends often tell him they love going to the nursery to visit with Jim and always plan to devote at least 30 minutes to catch up with the elder Bunch. Glenn prefers work behind the scenes.

"I like people, but I love the process," he says. "I love being outside and watching things grow."

There's plenty to watch. In addition to the retail nursery in Bennettsville, Bunch Garden Shop and Nursery has a 20-acre farm on a separate site in Marlboro County, where the team cultivates the plants that are sold in the nursery.

Spring is the busiest time at Bunch Nursery.

"Everybody gets spring fever and wants to get outside and plant and get

dirty," Glenn says.

The second-generation nurseryman encourages customers to think of every season as gardening season. Summer is an essential time to tend to the plants, monitoring for pests and providing plenty of fertilizer and water while appreciating the fruits and flowers gardeners have been waiting on since spring.

Fall is the best time to establish new plantings because the cooler temperatures make it easier for the roots to take hold.

Even though nothing is growing in winter, Glenn believes the dormant season is the perfect time to complete tasks such as repotting and garden cleanup you're too busy to do in the spring.

Regardless of the season, many of the customers that come into Bunch's Garden Shop and Nursery are familiar faces. Some who tagged along with their parents to buy trees and flowers are now shopping for their own yards.



**ABOVE:** Jim supplied plants to Winn-Dixie for 43 years.

**RIGHT:** Jim's son, Glenn, didn't plan to join his father in the nursery business. After a 21-year career in the National Guard, Glenn realized how much he enjoyed being home.



Glenn believes the small-town location gives the family-owned garden center an advantage over big-box stores.

"In a small town, everybody knows everybody," he says. "We know their neighborhood and sometimes even their yard. We can ask questions about where they want to plant something or how big they want it to get and give them advice and make recommendations based on their specific situation."

Customers often come in with photos of diseased leaves or tiny bugs asking for help. Thanks to their long history in the business, the father-son operators can provide advice on everything from plant selection to pest control.

Just as his father provided superior customer service to major accounts such as Winn-Dixie, Glenn makes sure to provide the same level of service to each shopper who comes into the greenhouse—even if they only buy a single plant.

"We've been doing this for a long time,"

Glenn says. "If someone comes in with a problem, we want to help them solve it."

The proliferation of big-box garden centers has forced the nursery to get creative.

"The chain stores have changed things a lot," Glenn says. "Small nurseries like us have to specialize so we have some of the same plants that are sold at Walmart and Lowe's, but we also have things that are different that make people want to come to us."

It's the same tactic Jim used to build a successful wholesale business with Winn-Dixie decades ago.

"I worked very hard to find these first-class plants—the same plants that could be found at the very finest garden centers in other cities—and I worked at getting these products at a reasonable price," Jim recalls. "I wanted to sell plants, not at a high dollar price, but at a price anybody that wanted them could buy them."

Looking back over his long career, Jim

recalls he was often chided for starting a business in Bennettsville and urged to consider larger cities such as Columbia or Raleigh, where greater opportunities might be waiting. He believes staying in a small town, he believes, was one of the biggest reasons for his success.

"I love the people here, and I found success right here in the community," he says. "Success can be found where your heart is, and you can be as successful in Bennettsville as you can in Columbia."

For an unplanned business that started with a few favors and a handshake, Jim admits he couldn't have planned it better.

"It's been a wonderful trip through life," he says. "I never dreamed that my entire nursery business would start, from the very beginning, with a favor." ■

Small Ways to

# Save Big

Saving money always seems to be associated with sacrificing fun. But this isn't an article about sacrificing fun. This article shares how small money-saving changes can make your life happier and more fulfilling with extra cash as a byproduct. I know because I've lived it.

When the economy tanked in 2009, my husband, along with 8.7 other million Americans, lost his job.

Like most people, our emergency fund wasn't great. Overnight, we had to figure out how to live on half the income we were accustomed to. Everything from Netflix to the cat's food was scrutinized as we figured out ways to cut spending drastically.

This may sound familiar to many of you who have had to react to overnight changes in our economy.

At first, my husband and I were panicked by the sudden, extreme restrictions. But a few weeks later, something unexpected began to happen: We found ourselves happier and more content than ever.

It took a year for my

husband to find another job. During that time, we changed our lives for the better, forever. We found enough small ways to save that year that we built an emergency fund and took a two-week trip to Italy—all on one income.

Here are a few of the ways we did it.

## Go Plastic-Free

The most surprising revelation we had that year was how expensive things in plastic are. We made a list of all food, personal items and household products that came in plastic and switched to homemade or eco-friendly versions in paper containers. By making this one change, we saved enough that year to fund our Italian vacation.

Our plastic-free overhaul included things like switching jugs of fabric softener for wool dryer balls, shower gel for bar

soap, and an entire cabinet of commercial household cleaners for inexpensive castile soap. We made staples, such as peanut butter and salad dressing, from scratch. We bought produce from local farms. If you only make one change to save more money in the next year, going plastic-free is a game-changer.

## Pretend You Love to Cook

Cooking at home and avoiding restaurants to save money isn't new advice, and most of us have been cooking at home more than ever. However, you may be surprised at how much cooking enriches your life and your relationships.

We usually splurged on an expensive meal for birthdays. However, my favorite birthday dinner of all time turned out to be a potluck on a friend's deck with a big, sloppy homemade cake at the end.

Neither of us loves to cook, but we love what cooking at home did for us. We not only saved thousands of dollars on food that year, but the more we cooked, the more time we spent with each other and our friends.

Though we can afford to go out more often now, we don't. Our house has become the best restaurant in town.

## Eat Plants

We also discovered that if we made more plant-based meals, we spent about half as much at the grocery store. Since we were learning to cook anyway, we learned to make

By Robin Howard

Libraries may be closed right now, but they still offer plenty of digital options to keep you busy and entertained.

PHOTO BY ANTONIO GUILLEM

mostly vegetarian recipes, many of which came from my grandmother's old farm cookbook.

We not only cut our grocery budget in half, but in six months we'd both lost 30 pounds, and our cholesterol and blood pressure values fell to normal ranges. We felt so much better that we never went back.

### Find a Free Hobby

Our new financial reality was hardest on the weekends when we were at a loss for how to have fun without spending money.

In a fit of optimism, we became bird-watchers. Neither of us was particularly into birds, but we needed a free activity that would get us out of the house for a few hours.

With a pair of borrowed binoculars and a secondhand bird guide, we set off every Saturday for a park or birding hotspot. We competed to see who could identify the widest variety or the rarest bird.

Eventually, we met other birders, joined in on free bird walks and developed a new group of interesting friends. Even though we don't have to bird-watch on weekends anymore, we still do.

Not everybody loves birds, but you might consider taking up an inexpensive hobby such as geocaching, photography, hiking or dog agility training if you're trying to save money.

### Keep a List of Free Events

Free events added novelty to our simple life, and it helped us expand our horizons. That year, if it was free, we were there—especially if there were snacks. We went to museum exhibits, community yoga classes, concerts, outdoor movies, language lessons, nature lectures

and farmers markets.

When you're trying to save money, it's vital you don't become a hermit.

Free online classes, concerts and museum tours are all over the place right now. Take advantage of free content and anything you can do for free from a safe distance.

### Use the Library

Libraries are goldmines of free fun and entertainment. If you don't already have one, get a library card. Sure, you can download or check out free books, audiobooks and movies, but libraries are also community hubs for cool no-cost events and classes.

The library may be physically closed right now, but you can still download free books and other content.

### Reevaluate What Makes You Happy

During our year of saving, we allowed ourselves one holdover from our two-income habits: Taco Tuesdays.

Suddenly, the takeout tacos we'd always taken for granted became our most anticipated indulgence. The funny thing is, we never got that excited about going to an expensive restaurant.

I wish we hadn't learned the hard way how to live on half of what we made, but by starting with a blank financial slate, we were gradually able to identify the things that genuinely make us happy. It turns out the things that make us happy are relatively simple, like nature walks and tacos. Other things, like travel, are more extravagant.

By reevaluating how we spent money, we also learned where to save and where to splurge. ■



Birdwatching is a fun, inexpensive hobby, and a good way to get outdoors and stay active.

PHOTO BY FORESTPATH



# Area Business Steps Up

2,000 pounds of food helps families during COVID-19 pandemic

By Diane Junion

Our community faces challenging and uncertain times during the COVID-19 crisis. Many people have reached out and helped their neighbor.

Gila Valley Polaris-Gila Outdoors is one business that has helped the community. The company provided more than 2,000 pounds of food to more than 300 people in the Gila Valley on March 31.

Lance Shupe, owner of Gila Valley Polaris-Gila Outdoors in Thatcher, partnered with the owners of Branding Iron Restaurant and Shane's Place to buy food in bulk. Employees divided the large quantities into smaller grocery bags filled with potatoes, oats, rice, beans, spaghetti, salt and sugar. Several rolls of toilet paper were given specifically to the elderly.

"We didn't know this would snowball with comments and attention," Lance says. "We just felt so privileged to help out the Gila Valley during this crazy time."

He says he hopes everyone is doing well.

When the call went out on social media for face masks for the medical community, several churches stepped up to fill the need. Church members made and delivered hundreds of masks to local clinics and the hospital.

While we can't thank everyone in our community for their continued help during this crisis, we want to thank our members for their patience during our lobby closure. We hope everyone continues to be safe and healthy. ■



ABOVE: ATVs are filled with food divided and ready to share with people in the Gila Valley. TOP: More than 300 community members picked up food donated by Gila Valley Polaris-Gila Outdoors owner Lance Shupe.

# Safety On the Lines

It is all in a day's work for the line crew at Escambia River Electric Cooperative



Kyle Strickling practices pole-top rescue during a safety training session for line crews.



Crews have safety training on the various equipment and machinery they operate, such as the Bobcat Wesley Clark uses to lay underground power lines.

Reliable, cost-efficient delivery of electricity to our members is a priority for Escambia River Electric Cooperative, but it is not the No. 1 priority. That has been and always will be safety—for our members and our employees.

It is why every issue of our monthly publication, *Florida Currents*, includes information to help keep you, our members, safe from the hazards of electricity.

EREC takes its Safety City demonstration board to local schools to show students the dangers of improperly using electricity and how to stay safe when using it. Communicating safety to our members takes on other forms during the year as we stress its importance.

But how do we ensure the safety of EREC employees day after day, year after year?

EREC employees are our greatest asset. We want to be sure every employee goes home at the end of the day the same way he or she came to work that morning.

Maintaining more than 1,800 miles of energized line is a dangerous job. Electric line crews put their lives on the line to ensure reliable delivery of power to our members.

EREC line crews go through extensive training. They not only learn the mechanics of power line operations, but are instructed on the dangers and consequences of working with electricity.

Operations personnel undergo continuing safety training on various aspects of working with electricity to keep safety issues at the forefront of their minds. They train for pole-top and bucket rescue annually. They complete CPR and automated external



defibrillator certification so they are prepared to help save the life of a coworker should an accident occur.

Line crews are equipped with fire-retardant uniforms and other safety equipment to be worn at all times when working on energized lines. They check equipment regularly to ensure it is in proper working order.

What is in a day's work for the typical lineman and crew? Line crews perform routine repairs on distribution lines and structures, replacing cross arms, poles and insulators as needed. They respond to emergency situations to repair damaged lines and poles, often caused by adverse weather or man-made disasters, such as fires or car accidents. They build temporary lines to facilitate

construction of new lines and other projects.

Many times, these duties are performed on energized lines during less-than-optimal conditions, such as inclement weather with wind and rain.

Every day—but especially under hazardous weather conditions—EREC line crews put their safety training to the test. EREC's safety record is exemplary—particularly commendable for the electric utility industry.

Safety is emphasized as our No. 1 priority, and we do everything possible to provide a safe working environment for the line crews. But it's the employees' steadfast dedication to safety in all aspects of the job that really makes the difference. ■

**Randall Ashworth, left, and Mark LeFlore demonstrate CPR— an essential life-saving skill for utility lineworkers.**

# Caring for Those in Need

Peace River Center provides refuge and resources for the community

By Tahlia Warrick

Helping victims escape environments of domestic and sexual violence is a complex process, and equipping them with the supplies they need is essential to restarting healthy lives.

With help from the Glades Electric Charitable Trust—and generous members of Glades Electric Cooperative—Peace River Center helps make that a reality in Highlands County.

PRC is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving communities in Polk, Highlands and Hardee counties by restoring and empowering individuals. Its services include mental health, victim and substance use disorder services.

PRC's mission is more specific in Highlands County—home to the center's only shelter dedicated to supporting and rehabilitating victims of domestic and sexual violence.

With the victim's consent, law enforcement shares its reports with PRC, which immediately begins providing support to the victim.

The center is involved in every stage of their clients' journeys: responding to an emergency incident, filing an



Peace River Center representatives put the final touches on a few baskets. From left, PRC Director of Victim Services Linda Parker, PRC InVEST Advocate Carmen Nieves and PRC Outreach Specialist Gloria Forbes. PHOTO BY TAHLIA WARRICK

injunction and helping them move out of a dangerous situation to a shelter.

PRC works closely with law enforcement, the court system and medical communities to support clients and raise awareness of domestic and sexual violence in our communities.

“This is not just about helping victims,” says Director of Victim Services Linda Parker.

“We want to be proactive in changing the culture and driving social change to create healthier, safer communities. We try to get involved in as many outreach activities as we can. We do a lot of training and development for police departments, the legal system, generalized outreach, and we work with the Department of Children and families.”

One of PRC's most tangible means of outreach is through its shelter in Highlands County. The shelter serves as a safe home for victims escaping environments of domestic and sexual violence. Having a shelter to house victims is essential to the work PRC is doing to rehabilitate individuals.

“It holds about 30 people, depending on if there are small

children that can be in a crib,” Linda says. “We also are able to accept pets. It’s a big deal; victims don’t want to leave their pets behind. We will accommodate anyone who needs us.”

Moving out of a dangerous situation and into the shelter is often the beginning of a long recovery process for victims.

The shelter houses victims until they are able to move into a place of their own.

Linda says PRC is grateful for strong community support.

The shelter has been at capacity since October.

When a resident moves out of the shelter, in many instances they are starting over with nothing. That’s where a grant through Operation Round Up was able to help.

With GECT’s gift, Linda and her team provided essential items to clients moving out of the shelter to start their own households again.

“With Glades Electric’s donation, we were able to put together 50 baskets with a variety of items in them,” Linda says. “I let the staff decide what would be most beneficial to put in the baskets, and we ended up including sheets, towels, toiletry and hygiene supplies, dish soap, dish rags, toilet paper, paper towels and laundry soap.”

Often, victims come into the shelter with only the clothes on their backs. The center relies on government funding and grants to continue its outreach, so generosity from the community is invaluable in providing the support needed for each victim.

“These items are all things that clients have said they wish they’d had when they were moving out of the shelter into their new home,” Linda

### Operation Round Up: What is It?

Operation Round Up is an elective program that allows members to round up their monthly bill to fund projects benefiting community members in need.

**Operation Round Up**  
Round your bill to the nearest dollar. The average annual contribution per member is \$6.

**Operation Round Up Plus** Add a set dollar amount, that you determine, to your bill each month.



To join Operation Round Up, contact Member Services at 863-946-6200, or sign up in the SmartHub app.

### Glades Electric Charitable Trust

Funds from Operation Round Up go to the Glades Electric Charitable Trust, which benefits individuals and organizations in Glades, Hendry, Highlands and Okeechobee counties. A board of nine members reviews GECT assistance applications monthly.

- 1. Determine a need.**  
GECT funds are designated for members in need of assistance OR organizations supporting communities within our service area.
- 2. Complete an application.**  
Applications are available at [gladeselectric.com](http://gladeselectric.com).
- 3. GECT board reviews application.**  
The GECT board meets monthly to review applications and approve awards.
- 4. Small change makes a big difference.**

## GEC Committed to Serving the Community

For more than 20 years, nine members of Glades Electric Cooperative have gathered monthly to review requests for financial assistance from members and organizations throughout our communities.

These nine members serve on the board of directors for the Glades Electric Charitable Trust. The purpose of GECT is to support members in need and special projects of nonprofit organizations serving Glades, Hendry, Highlands and Okeechobee counties.

GECT is funded by the Operation Round Up program, through which members elect to have their monthly bill rounded up to the next dollar. Awards are granted to applicants who are struggling financially because of difficult circumstances or to charitable organizations working to support our communities.

In September 2019, GECT awarded \$2,000 to Peace River Center to support the work of its victim services program in Highlands County. Peace River Center embodies GECT’s mission of caring for our communities. PRC is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving communities in Polk, Highlands and Hardee counties by restoring and empowering individuals. It offers a range of services, including mental health, victim and substance use disorder services, and a shelter in Highlands County to support victims of domestic and sexual abuse.

GECT exists to serve and improve our communities by supporting individuals and organizations such as PRC. If you know a GEC member in need of support, please refer them to GECT’s funding application at [gladeselectric.com](http://gladeselectric.com). If you would like to join Operation Round Up, contributing monthly to help support members in need, sign up through the SmartHub app or contact Member Services at 863-946-6200.

says. “When people come into the shelter, they get a smaller basket with essentials. These larger going-away baskets are something we’ve started more recently as a tool to help get them started as they go out on their own.”

Linda says the Highlands County shelter is fortunate to receive such strong support

from the community. Many local churches, organizations and individuals generously donate items, such as furniture, to be used in the shelter or in new client homes.

Donations such as GECT’s allow the shelter to maximize the impact on their clients’ lives and recoveries.

“Domestic and sexual

violence are community issues,” Linda says. “If we can focus on this more as a community and rally behind the survivors and try to provide them with the resources they need, then we will start to see these issues less frequently.” ■

*To learn more about the Peace River Center, visit [peacrivercenter.org](http://peacrivercenter.org).*

# Preserving a Legacy

Jade Osceola is fighting to keep her tribe's native language from becoming obsolete

By Amy Keller

During the 1990s, Jade Osceola attended Seminole Elementary School in Okeechobee, nearly 30 miles northeast of the Seminole Brighton Reservation where she lived. School was a struggle, and prejudice and stereotyping took an emotional toll.

"All the native kids always sat in the back," she recalls, and stares kept them from wearing their traditional beads and clothing. "If you were a native kid, (people assumed) you came from a drug-addicted

and alcoholic home, you have lice in your hair ... you weren't going to do well on tests."

Her favorite days were Fridays. That's when she and other Native American students would remain behind on the reservation to learn Creek, her tribe's native tongue, and about other Seminole traditions. Osceola enjoyed Friday "pull-out school" so much that by high school she was volunteering as a "junior teacher" in the program.

Not long after, she realized teaching was her calling.

Today, Osceola, 33, teaches Creek to eighth graders at the reservation's Pema yetv Emahakv (pronounced Pemma-yetta Emma-ha-ga)

## Pema yetv Emahakv Charter School Teachers Recognized in Florida Trend Magazine

Glades Electric Cooperative makes it a priority to support the students and schools in the communities we serve, but the real stars are our teachers. They work tirelessly each day to educate the youth in our communities. In December, Florida Trend magazine recognized 10 teachers from across the state for their outstanding efforts. Two teachers at Pema yetv Emahakv Charter School at Seminole Brighton Reservation—Jade Osceola and Joy Prescott—were among those recognized. This month, GEC features Florida Trend's story about Jade and Joy. GEC is an advocate for all educators, and salutes the work these teachers do in the schools and communities we serve.



Jade Osceola in her classroom where she teaches Creek to eighth-graders. "Language is what makes you different from all other Native Americans," she says. PHOTO BY BRIAN TIETZ

Charter School, or "Our Way" school. Earlier this year, she was named Glades County Teacher of the Year.

The school, which opened in 2007, is also earning high marks. It's the highest performing of all three public schools in Glades County, earning a B grade for its elementary and an A rating for its middle school.

Like all charters, Pema yetv Emahakv must adhere to the same academic standards as any other Florida public school, and students must take the same state-mandated tests.

But there are some notable differences. The average class size is 12, and each classroom has a full-time aide. Students participate in sports and cultural activities—such as woodcarving and archery—that they wouldn't encounter in a traditional school.

"I don't think most schools butcher a hog at the end of the year," Osceola says.

The most significant difference, she says, is the school's emphasis on the tribe's native language. Over the past several decades, the number of fluent Creek speakers on the

## A Lesson About How Words Matter

For two years running, teachers at Pemayetv Emahakv have been honored as Glades County's Teacher of the Year. Joy Prescott went on to win Florida Teacher of the Year in 2019.

Prescott, 42, says the honor made for a busy year as she traveled the state sharing her teaching wisdom on her favorite topic: social and emotional learning. The idea behind SEL is teaching the kids how to interact kindly with one another, how to agree and disagree, how to own their mistakes and, quite simply, how to get along.

As a fourth grade teacher, Prescott tries to weave lessons into the curriculum where she can. One example is what she calls the "apple activity." She presents two similar apples to the class and tells them that one apple represents a person she doesn't like. The other apple represents someone she does like. Then she has the kids talk negatively to the "disliked" apple and heap praise on the "liked" apple. What the kids don't know is that the night before



**Joy Prescott uses her expertise in social and emotional learning to teach kids how to interact kindly with one another and how to disagree.** PHOTO BY BRIAN TIETZ

Prescott took one of the apples and hit it on the floor a lot so that the inside would be bruised and mushy. She gets lots of "ahhhs" when she slices the apples open, and it drives an important message home.

"You can tell kids words hurt all the time, but until you give them a visual, I don't think they really get it," she says.

reservation has dwindled to just a few. Right now, the community's youngest fluent Creek speaker is 55—and Osceola worries that time is running out.

"As a community, we saw our numbers, and it terrified us because language is what makes you different from all other Native Americans across the country," she says. "It's not your food. It's not your clothing. It's not any of that, and you can't do your ceremonies without language.

"That's what makes us different. That's what puts us on the map."

All of the school's 186 students study and practice the language for an hour every day—and a dozen kids participate in the school's Creek immersion program, which Osceola oversees.

Academic instruction is provided solely in Creek, and kids attend year-round. Community elders come in and work with the children on a daily basis.

Students in the immersion program range from 6 months old to 7 years old. Osceola's daughter, now 5, started in it when she was a year old.

"She's learning kindergarten solely in the language," the mother and teacher says. "So her first language is Creek."

This year, Osceola says, students in the immersion program spend about one to two hours a day reading and writing in English, and some are pushing for up to half a day of English instruction.

Osceola is "hoping that won't happen until much later." Between TV and YouTube, she believes kids get plenty of exposure to English at home.

Language lessons aside, Osceola tries to instill in her

students a sense of pride and a strong identity, particularly as they head off to traditional high school.

She doesn't want them to go through the pain and hardships she did. She encourages them to sit in the front of the room, to know their lineage and be proud of their roots.

"I just want them to know who they are, where they come from and know that they're a strong native person," Osceola says. ■

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Remnants of a couch remain on a power line in Central Electric Cooperative territory following a prank that created extra work for CEC crews. PHOTO COURTESY OF CENTRAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

# Three Days of the Coronavirus

As the coronavirus swept through the state, three crucial days in March demonstrated the role Oregon’s electric cooperatives play in the lives of their consumers.

By Ted Case



On March 20, 2020, there were 114 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Oregon. While the cases were mostly clustered in the Portland metro area, Oregon’s 18 rural electric cooperatives prepared for the looming threat.

Schools were closed, and the Oregon Health Authority announced the infection rate doubled in the state every four days. As life was rapidly changing, a confluence of events during three crucial days demonstrated the role Oregon’s electric cooperatives play in the lives of more than a half-million of their consumers.

## Friday, March 20

Phone calls stream into Oregon electric cooperatives’ member service representatives from consumers who feared

they could no longer pay their electric bills.

“We’re hearing from people we’ve never heard from before,” says one co-op representative.

Electric co-ops such as Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative in Baker City announce they are suspending disconnects and late fees for those affected by the pandemic.

“We are committed to our communities,” says Joe Hathaway, an OTEC spokesman.

Meanwhile, more than 300 miles away from Baker City, lawmakers in Salem prepare to take emergency action.

At 1 p.m., the Oregon Legislature’s Joint Committee on Coronavirus Response meets in a locked-down State Capitol to discuss recommendations to help citizens

affected by COVID-19. The committee debates a proposal to send funds directly to utilities to help consumers who cannot pay their electric bills. But it is unclear if the proposal includes consumer-owned utilities.

“We need to make sure this includes small (co-op) utilities,” says Sen. Arnie Roblan, co-chair of the committee. The committee agrees.

That evening, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown pleads with Oregonians to stay at home “unless absolutely necessary” to quell the spread of the novel coronavirus. She stops short of issuing an order for families to shelter in place, hoping her fellow Oregonians use common sense.

Meteorologists predict unseasonably warm temperatures over the weekend.

By day’s end, three more Oregonians die from coronavirus.

### **Saturday, March 21**

Oregonians by the thousands take advantage of the sunshine and ignore Gov. Brown’s social-distancing guidelines, flocking to popular recreation areas such as the Oregon Coast and Columbia River Gorge. Other Oregonians experiment with dynamite.

At 11:45 a.m., Oregon State Police and Central Electric Co-op crews respond to a couch frame hanging from co-op power lines in Bend, caused by an explosive device that launched the furniture in the air.

“As if things aren’t crazy enough,” says Central Electric CEO Dave Markham. “But it’s our responsibility to keep the lights on.”

That afternoon, children’s books begin to arrive in rural mailboxes sponsored by Oregon co-ops involved in Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library—a gift each month to families with children age 5 and younger. The new books will soon be a scarce commodity.

Scenes of Oregonians frolicking on the Oregon Coast lead the nightly newscasts. Local officials are outraged at a scene that looks more like a rowdy spring break than that of a global pandemic.

Twenty-four more Oregonians test positive for the coronavirus.

### **Sunday, March 22**

A group of 25 Portland-area mayors call



**Salem Electric employees practice social distancing while serving their members.** PHOTO BY MICHELLE ADKINS

upon Gov. Brown to issue an executive order compelling Oregonians to stay home.

As pressure mounts on the governor to take action, businesses continue discussions with her office regarding an executive order, urging her to include essential services—such as electric utilities—in the official list of who would be exempted to provide some certainty.

The Oregon Health Authority is prescient about the spread of the coronavirus. Over the past four days, the infection rate has doubled in the state. One more Oregonian is dead.

Gov. Brown has had enough.

### **Monday, March 23**

Gov. Brown issues Executive Order 20-12, compelling Oregonians to “Stay home, save lives,” but she declines to offer a list of essential workers.

There is some initial confusion. A utility worker is pulled over by law enforcement and sent home. Co-op operations personnel ask if they are out of compliance with social distancing rules by working in the close quarters of two-man bucket trucks.

But the regulatory uncertainty is nothing compared to the disruption felt across the state. Thousands more Oregonians file for unemployment benefits, and three more are dead.

Oregon electric co-ops that also offer their consumers broadband deploy technicians in protective gear to wire new homes for high-speed internet—an essential service now that the kitchen table serves as the new corporate headquarters. One Oregon co-op donates masks to a local hospital.

There will soon be COVID-19 cases in most rural counties, the contagion spreading to frontier towns that don’t even show up on most maps.

By day’s end the state is on indefinite lockdown. Stormy skies roll in from the Pacific Ocean across the vast expanse of rural Oregon.

Electric co-op consumers are warm and safe in their homes and connected to the world in some cases by co-op internet. But in places where social distancing is a way of life, they are now more isolated than ever before by a virus infinitely more sinister than dynamite. ■