



Marla Davies drives one of Gilliam County Transportation's vehicles in Condon's 2019 July Fourth celebration. The company is finding new ways to support the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. PHOTOS BY K'LYNN LANE

Wheels of Hope

Transportation service meets the needs of the community family

By Jody Foss

Dispatcher Shania Drinkwine answers a phone call at Gilliam County Transportation in the Gilliam County Courthouse in Condon. An elderly resident is calling for a ride to a doctor's appointment at Mid-Columbia Medical Center in The Dalles. Shania jots down the caller's name and the date and time of the appointment.

Another call comes in. A woman needs to pick up her glasses. Then Shania

answers a call from someone needing to shop for some supplies. She adds the trips to the scheduling calendar and starts calling volunteer drivers to see if they can cover the trip for the medical appointment to The Dalles.

With any luck, all three requests can be scheduled with one vehicle and driver.

Transportation Coordinator Marla Davies and Senior Services Coordinator Sabrina Wagenaar help Shania schedule appointments as needed. Twenty-four volunteers are willing to help.

GCT has 11 fleet vehicles stored at Arlington and Condon bus storage buildings. There are four ADA-accessible vehicles, including two minivans and two small buses. There are also two small

SUVs, four more minivans and one medically frail transport vehicle. GCT has walkers and a few wheelchairs available.

Since 1987, GCT has provided transportation for medical appointments, shopping and social excursions for those in need of a set of wheels and a helping hand. Available to the general public, this service is vital for seniors, people with disabilities and some veterans.

Operating on both federal and state grants, the program provides a crucial service to the communities of Gilliam County regardless of one's ability to pay. Thanks to a Highly Rural Transportation Grant, all veterans' trips for medical appointments and services are covered.

"We gladly accept donations for the



Sabrina Wagenaar, left, and Marla stand next to one of the decorated transportation vans that serves the community and safely carries people to appointments and events.

ride,” Marla says.

During the COVID-19 crisis, GCT continues to serve the community in innovative ways by adding temporary services that help the most vulnerable, scheduling pickup and deliveries for prescriptions and mail.

“We are doing everything we can to encourage people to stay at home,” Sabrina says.

GCT is also stepping up to feed area residents.

The Arlington and Condon weekly meal sites have changed the way they provide meals. Traditionally, the Condon meal site hosts 50 people Thursdays at noon at the United Church of Christ in Condon for a meal made by Andrew Pippin and Sara Starr. Arlington folks traditionally meet Tuesdays on the lower level of the Masonic Hall to enjoy a meal made by Kathy Covey and Bobie Aniard.

To respect social-distancing guidelines, GCT now delivers hot meals to 110 people in their homes. Although drivers do not stay and visit with the recipients, they are happy to deliver the food.

“These people are like our extended family,” Sabrina says. “We look out for each other.”

Sabrina oversees both meal sites and tries to buy supplies locally at Two Boys Market.

“Since we are home-delivering the meals, we are making them a little heavier than normal so people can get several meals out of the one,” Sabrina says.

For example, the recipients might get homemade lasagna, garlic bread, corn, several salads and a dessert.

“We are under strict nutritional guidelines,” Sabrina says. “I send my menus to a nutritionist in The Dalles three months’ out to get approval.”

For this year’s Easter celebrations, GCT staff invited everyone in Condon and Arlington to participate in a social-distancing Easter egg hunt. Participants were asked to put a picture of an Easter egg in a window or door so it was visible from the street or sidewalk in front of their home. Staff also suggested decorating the yard with river rocks painted like Easter eggs. By creatively tackling the task of social distancing, they created an activity everyone could enjoy from a distance.

“One lady in town had an Easter Egg tree,” Marla says. “There was an Easter bunny peeking out of the bushes.”

Marla applauds her volunteer drivers for the hard work and long hours they put in.

“I wouldn’t have a job without them,” she says. “They logged nearly 200,000 miles last year. They are amazing. Everyone’s personality is different.”

To be a driver, volunteers must get their CPR/first aid certification and agree to background and DMV checks. There is required minimal training for defensive driving and passenger-assistance safety.

Sabrina, Marla and Shania say they enjoy the responsibility of keeping track of their extended family.

“We have a couple of ladies in their 90s who have lived in Condon most of their lives,” Marla says. “When we go to pick them up, we are concerned about their mobility, and may reach out to help them in the ice and snow. They really do not want the assistance and are very independent.”

GCT is looking to develop weekly trips to The Dalles and Hermiston. The company is open to ideas and suggestions from Gilliam County residents. ■

Need a ride? Call Gilliam County Transportation at 541-384-2252 or 877-253-1645.

Exploring Health Services

Philomath High students sample career paths, perform citrus surgery

By Pam Wald and Steve Gallon

Students in Donna Carter's health occupations class at Philomath High School experienced an operating room in their own classroom. Corvallis Good Samaritan Hospital surgical nurse Jill Dealy introduced students to the procedures involved in brain surgery.

Jill began by answering questions about how she chose her career path, and the educational and vocational steps she took to achieve her goal. Students then donned sterilized scrubs, gloves and masks in preparation for a hands-on exploration of surgical procedures.

To simulate a skull, students were handed a half-sliced orange. Each was also given a sheet of fruit leather to cover the orange, simulating skin. Students then used a surgical drill to open their "skull." Using a sharp surgical knife, they cut

an incision, spreading open the orange using a retractor.

During the process, Jill coached the students, answered their questions and discussed her experience as part of a surgical team.

Students finished up suturing and stapling to close the incision. Some of the students commented how warm it was to wear scrubs. Jill pointed out she also has to deal with being on her feet for up to seven hours during a surgery, and not being able to do simple things such as scratching her nose or taking a bathroom break.

This is just one of the many hands-on experiences available in the health occupations class Donna has taught for 17 years. Students learn basic lifesaving skills such as CPR, drawing blood, checking vital signs, cleaning wounds and learning how to respond to patients under stress.



As part of the class, students take field trips to places such as the local fire department, Western Oregon State University Cadaver Lab and the Corvallis Birth Center. They also do eight community rotations at health occupation sites, along with three to four hospital rotations. During class, guest speakers talk about careers in radiographic imaging, respiration therapy and hospice nursing.

To help students increase their empathy toward people experiencing health challenges, each student chooses four medical conditions to artificially experience during the school day. For example, to help understand how a patient suffering from severe arthritis feels, a student wears metal-fingered gloves with tightened screws that limit their dexterity. Other conditions include being blindfolded and



ABOVE: Philomath High School students in the health occupation program prepare to perform surgery on oranges during a demonstration about brain surgery.



LEFT: Oranges covered with fruit leather simulate what surgeons experience when cutting into a brain.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: A student wears an appliance that simulates what it feels like to have severe arthritis.

OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM: Students gown up for their simulated surgery.

confinement to a wheelchair.

The students all expressed enthusiasm for the class, and have said as a result they are even more interested in pursuing a health-related career.

“I’m learning skills I can use to help people,” Brody Gerig says.

“It’s fun watching my students learn in real life situations,” says Donna. “It matters what you see in the real world. It helps them make better decisions on their career paths. I feel like I am making a difference when I encounter former students drawing my blood and, heaven forbid, weighing me at my doctor’s office.”

When asked what they most appreciated about the class, Brody says he “liked being able to explore lots of options,

relieving pressure to have [my career] all figured out.”

Harlee Oleman added “all the different experiences have strengthened my interest in wanting to pursue pediatric nursing.”

As part of the health issues curriculum, students also explored issues related to death and dying, including the benefits of advance directives for patients in hospital and outpatient settings.

An advance directive allows patients to identify a health care representative who empowered to express their wishes for medical care and life-sustaining treatments at times when patients might be unable to speak for themselves.

Amelia Skinkis says she recently was in a minor car accident.

“If something serious had happened, I would want my mom to know what I want—to ease the pain of having to make decisions for me.”

Hunter Hendrix added, “As I learn more about serious medical conditions that can occur at any age, it makes me think more about what I want.”

During class, students learned that starting a conversation about the kind of medical care a patient or loved one might want in a life-threatening situation is not easy. People tend to avoid talking about such difficult topics.

The students were introduced to several ways to start a conversation about end-of-life wishes. For example, one option is to sit down and ask one of two questions: “What brings you happiness and

makes your life meaningful right now?” or “If you were ill and had only a short time to live, what would you want to be able to do or experience that would make life meaningful?”

The answers to those questions could help clarify an individual’s wishes for end-of-life care.

The health occupations class at Philomath High School has proven to be a powerful learning experience for students as they experience what health professionals in a variety of specialties do each day when delivering care to patients.

Students leave the class expressing gratitude not only for having acquired clearer ideas about a potential career, but also having acquired specific skills and knowledge that benefit them personally. ■



Alan Mooney, owner of Defy Industries, uses three machines—from left, a plastic shredder, an injection machine and an extrusion machine—to recycle used plastic into usable products such as coasters and clips.

Defying the Odds With Plastic

Elkton's Alan Mooney establishes small-scale plastic products business

Story and photos by Craig Reed

Thinking outside the box is nothing new for Alan Mooney. He admits that through his school years, he frustrated more than one teacher by turning in assignments that weren't quite within the given parameters. His finished products were not wrong; they were different.

The 31-year-old is again thinking outside the box as a young entrepreneur. He has registered Defy Industries, a fledgling business in Elkton that repurposes used plastic into usable products such as coasters, clips, letters,

bases for clocks, drawer handles and knobs. Alan hopes to eventually add fence posts, decking boards, and table and bench tops for picnic furniture to his product line.

The word “defy” explains Alan’s penchant to push the boundaries and odds.

“In school, I was always trying to break boundaries on the rules for assignments,” he says. “It was fun thinking outside the box. The teachers didn’t like it, but it was fun being creative.”

When Alan saw plastic recycling eliminated due to lack of a market, he decided to ease the amount of plastic going into landfills, even if on a small scale.

“I wouldn’t say I’m an environmentalist, but I do care about the environment,” he says. “I do care about the Earth.”

The mission statement Alan wrote for Defy Industries is: “Exploring sustainable

alternatives to outmoded industrial methods through recycling, repurposing, crafting and material sciences.”

Alan’s friends in Elkton are not surprised by the entrepreneur’s mission.

“Alan definitely has the motivation and gumption to make this happen,” says Ryan Fall, a shop teacher who has helped Alan with some welding projects. “Alan can make this happen. He’s the right person for this project.”

Nathan Wood has known Alan for four years and has seen his artistry and creativity in other projects.

“He has the ability to think outside the box and to come up with something useful,” Nathan says. “He’s got two things going for him: attention to detail and being process-oriented. What he’s doing doesn’t surprise me too much.”

Alan says he has been thinking about recycling plastics into products for several



LEFT: Alan has made coasters, clips, flower vases and clock plates from recycled plastics. **RIGHT:** Byron Garcia, left, pours plastic pieces into the injection machine while Alan stirs the pieces as they melt. The melted plastic is pushed into a mold to create a coaster.

years, but he didn't decide to develop a business until last year after the market for recycled plastics disappeared. He watched numerous online videos by Precious Plastics, a group of people in the Netherlands who provide starter kits and plans for equipment needed to recycle and repurpose plastic.

"I found them on the internet one day and fell in love with what they were doing," Alan says. "It's very much a community-based program and product. I like being part of a community that is solving a problem."

With little money to finance his goal, Alan posted a Kickstarter website, accepting either pre-sales of products or donations, with a goal of \$2,500. The website raised \$2,600. For reaching the goal, an Elkton resident donated another \$1,000.

Alan used the \$3,600 to buy two machines and several product molds.

"I was extremely pleased with Kickstarter," he says. "Most people just gave money because they wanted to support the cause."

Defy Industries now has three small

machines: a shredder, an injection machine and an extrusion machine. The injection machine requires manual labor to push melted plastic into a mold. The extrusion machine is motorized and pushes the plastic into a mold by itself.

To add to his product list, Alan is interested in connecting with a local individual or business that has a metal lathe or a computer numerical control mill that could make more molds.

To collect plastic, Alan publicized a pickup day. About 40 Elkton residents brought him about 300 pounds of plastic containers in one day. He removed glued-on labels and any debris because the machines work best with clean plastic. Print on the plastic does not have to be removed.

Alan planned to introduce his business and display the machines and products to the public at the annual Earth Day event in Roseburg in April, and the Blooms & Butterflies event in Elkton in June. Both events were canceled because of the COVID-19 crisis.

Despite those delays, Alan says he has loose goals for his new business.

"I hope it is self-sustaining in five years," he says. "I want to be a full recycling business, taking plastic and glass and even cardboard, shredding them, making products or selling the shredded product to other companies."

Alan plans to upgrade and upsize his machines as sales and his income allow. Because Defy Industries isn't self-sustaining, he works seasonally at other jobs in the Elkton area.

Alan's friends believe he has the willpower and creativity to eventually turn his small business into a full-time success.

"He's in a small-scale, new-tech manufacturing business," Nathan says. "I believe he can make a product people want, and that he can make it consistently and at a price people can value. I believe he can do this."

"He's got some great ideas for products that he wants to make," Ryan says. "He's really creative. He's recycling materials and making them into something people will want. It's fantastic to see Alan doing this." ■

Contact Alan by calling 541-529-9193 or email Defyindustriesllc@gmail.com.



Cody Cole, right, received the ultimate gift from his sister, Sara: a healthy kidney. PHOTO COURTESY OF CODY COLE

Giving the Gift of Life

Sibling support takes on new meaning with transplant

Story by Jody Foss

Awake by 4 a.m. to brew coffee in a hunting camp was a normal day for Cody Cole. If he wasn't outfitting, he was running a barbed-wire fencing crew. Always active, Cody had been noticing an increase in aches and pains, which he blamed on an old injury. He had gained weight and was noticing other symptoms.

In January 2016, the helicopter he was flying in ran out of fuel and crashed into the side of Ritter Butte.

"The ambulance ride through the rocks was worse than the crash, but if it wasn't for the crash, I might not have found out," he says.

A metabolic panel at the hospital revealed high keratin levels in Cody's blood—a sign of kidney problems.

"Honestly, it was a little bit of a relief to find out there was a real problem, because I was like, 'Oh there actually is something wrong with me,'" he says.

He was down to one kidney that wasn't fully functional. In 2011, Cody had a nonfunctioning kidney removed by a urologist.

"I learned that my immune system was attacking my kidney and trying to kill it," Cody says. "It was supposed to be a slow, smoldering disease, but the doctor said mine was like a slow-moving forest fire that was starting to take off."

He was treated with steroids and other immunosuppressants but Cody's lone kidney stopped filtering toxins.

"It was starting to taper off even underneath the pills," he says. "I adjusted to a renal diet—no rare meat, low in potassium, lots of salads and rice, and lots of water."

In January 2018, Cody started peritoneal dialysis. He was put on the kidney transplant list—a process that could take five or six years.

A nurse at Fresenius Kidney Care in Bend trained Cody how to hook himself up to a fluid bag.

"Fluids flow from a bag into a port in your belly," Cody explains. "The fluid has

to be body temperature so you don't shock your system."

Back in hunting camp, Cody suspended the bag of fluid from his pickup's visor and self-administered dialysis before guiding hunters on horseback. At night, he hung the bag from a tent pole.

"There were definitely days when it was really hard to get up and ring that bell," he says.

Cody often had to wake up several times in the night to keep the process going, sometimes standing upright for hours. To keep the spare bag of fluid warm enough, he would sleep with it next to his body in his sleeping bag.

"I never really thought 'Poor me,'" he says. "It gave me something to fight, and I took it on as a challenge."

Cody says he could not have succeeded without the support of his family and friends, who helped him get back and forth to appointments and encouraged him throughout the process.

"The way we were brought up in our family is to face things head on," Cody says. "It's a kind of grit. My cousin and I like to say, 'This is no time to weaken!'"

Part of Cody's journey was getting on the transplant list and finding out he was a candidate.

Cody was a patient at Oregon Health and Science University. OHSU's kidney transplant program began in 1959. It has served more than 5,000 patients. Contributing new transplant technologies in areas such as organ retrieval and donor and recipient matching, OHSU helps the patient and donor through all aspects of the transplant process.

"We knew we were in good hands," Cody says. "The transplant center is one of the best in the world."

Of friends and family who offered to donate a kidney, Cody's sister, Sara, turned out to be the most suitable donor.

"You had to fill out a questionnaire to see if you fit the criteria," Sara says. "From the get-go, they always said a full sibling would be his best match."

Cody and Sara both have type O blood and are a 50% match genetically.

"OHSU only takes the healthy of the healthiest," Sara says. "If you have any



Cody, far right, received support from his family during his kidney-transplant procedure and recovery. From left are Cody's sisters, Sara and Kayla; and his parents, Debbie and John.
PHOTO BY JODY FOSS

underlying health problems, you will need both of your kidneys. They have a team of advocates that are for the donor only. As part of their rigorous screening process, they require you to see a social worker to see if you are mentally and emotionally stable enough to donate."

There were blood tests, X-rays, more blood draws, an MRI and a CT scan. The screening process took close to a year.

"Their job is to go about finding out and be sure that I can go the rest of my life with one kidney," Sara says. "I really liked that about the program. It was to protect my health."

With summer rapidly approaching, Cody and Sarah got the green light and grabbed the first available date.

"I donated the kidney," Sara says, "but it was my family that made it all work."

Sister Kayla postponed her wedding and took care of Sara and her husband David's four children. Mother Debbie and grandmother Linda helped out with the cooking. David and the children took care of Sara during the recuperation period.

Sibling rivalry and a competitive spirit came into play following the surgeries.

"Cody slowly walked two doors down to my room rolling his apparatus with

him with a big smile on his face," Sara says. "What are you doing?" I asked him. A while later, I walked into his room fully dressed and ready to go. He might have gotten up out of bed first, but I got dressed and unhooked first. That was the one-upper!"

Cody says he enjoyed the experience.

"I learned a lot about the medical system and how it works," he says. "I learned a lot about my body and learned a lot about my fortitude. I learned how much you can go through and still be standing. It's important to have the right mindset. It makes all the difference in the world." ■

Consider Organ Donation

Of the nearly 120,000 Americans waiting for a lifesaving organ transplant, more than 3,000 live in the Pacific Northwest. A growing shortage of living and deceased organ donors means not all will receive their transplant in time.

For more information about the donor registry and organ, eye or tissue donation, call Donate Life Northwest at 503-494-7888 or 800-452-1369, or email info@donatelifenw.org.

RIGHT: Following a retrofit project, Sisters Habitat for Humanity Thrift Store is saving money with all-LED lighting.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Before the commercial lighting upgrade, the thrift store had a combination of lighting features, including fluorescent bulbs, can lights and spotlights. PHOTOS BY KANDIS BRAY



New Lighting Saves Local Nonprofit Money

Commercial and Industrial Lighting Process

Contact Central Electric Cooperative before starting your commercial lighting project. There is a preapproval process for all commercial lighting projects.

A lighting specialist will contact you about your project.

Once a lighting project is approved materials can be ordered and installation can begin.

Upon completion, CEC will collect all final invoices and schedule a post-verification visit.

After post-verification is completed, the project will be closed and CEC will issue an incentive check.

By Courtney Cobb

As he walked through the old Sisters Drug and Gift store at the corner of East Cascade and South Fir streets, Sisters Habitat for Humanity Board Member Bob Buchholz says he looked up at the ceiling and started counting dollars.

“I just looked at the number of lights, and the electrical meter went off in my head,” he says.

Bob and several other board members walked through the property before they bought it and counted 550 outdoor and inside lights.

Sisters Habitat needed a new space for its thrift store. The board bought the building and agreed to update the lighting before opening.

Fun fact: Central Electric Cooperative has lighting incentives available to help offset the cost of any lighting upgrade project for an existing building or a new construction commercial site.

“I knew there were incentives out there,” Bob says. “We thought this might be an opportunity before we opened to get more energy-efficient lighting.”

Bob, who had gone through a similar process with another project years ago, searched the web and learned about Central Electric Cooperative’s Commercial & Industrial Lighting Program. He contacted CEC, who immediately put him in touch with CEC Commercial & Industrial Lighting Specialist Kandis Bray.

In addition to being a lighting expert,

Did you know: A lighting specialist helps customers and trade allies throughout the entire commercial lighting project process, including helping with CEC's required paperwork to simplify the process.

Kandis is an avid customer of the Sisters Habitat for Humanity Thrift Store and Restore. She says she couldn't wait to help the local nonprofit find savings.

"What was great about the project was Sisters Habitat kept all the same fixtures on site, but they retrofitted them all with new LED lamps," Kandis says. "So it was an inexpensive retrofit project as far as cost was concerned, but they were still able to save the same amount of energy, if not more, by going with all new LED fixtures."

Bob researched different types of lighting before starting the project, but says Kandis' expertise helped them with what would work and where.

The thrift store's new facility had a combination of 4-foot fluorescent fixtures, recessed can lights or can lights, track lighting and spotlights. Kandis spoke to Sisters Habitat about getting credit for decommissioning some of the existing track lighting and spotlighting, which would aid in the overall project.

"She knew what she was doing," Bob says. "Once we said, 'Yes, we want to go forward,' she worked with an electrical supply company in Bend to order the lights, and we basically just had to pick it up and do the installation."

In just four hours with a group of volunteers, Sisters Habitat replaced 400 4-foot fluorescent bulbs, 120 canned lights, and exterior and exit lights.

"We had about 90% of them installed and then used a lift to do the higher ones," Bob says.

While the nonprofit doesn't have any history to compare savings, based on Kandis' recommendations and CEC incentives, the project will pay for itself within six months.

"With 550 lights on 10 hours a day, the savings can quickly add up," Bob says.



Fun fact: The average annual utility cost savings ranges from \$500 to \$5,000 for a commercial lighting project. According to CEC Commercial & Industrial Lighting Specialist Kandis Bray, the average project saving ranges from 10,000 to 50,000 kilowatt-hours.

With its savings, Sisters Habitat for Humanity will use the funds to help more people in the community.

"We get our income from the thrift store and Restore to help us build more houses," Bob says. "With the money we aren't spending on utilities, we can help build more affordable housing, which we need a lot of in Central Oregon."

Kandis says most lighting projects have a payback of five years or fewer, and some are closer to three years.

"The majority of the CEC lighting projects that we see have a three-year or

less payback," she says. "Moving forward with a lighting project is a great way to get started with energy-efficiency upgrades for a commercial business."

Bob says the entire process was seamless from start to finish, and Sisters Habitat enjoyed working with Kandis. He says he would recommend the Commercial & Industrial Lighting Program to other businesses in the area.

"To me, it's a no-brainer," he says. "Kandis handled 90% of the process. All we had to do was the installation. You are saving energy, it's good for the environment and it's good for your pocketbook. It is just a win-win for everybody." ■

For more information about Central Electric's Commercial & Industrial Lighting Program, go to www.cec.coop or contact an energy specialist today 541-548-2144.



Vernonia senior citizens anxiously await the completion of a new senior center so they can begin enjoying congregate meals and other activities together. Currently, meals are prepared by Vernonia restaurants and delivered by volunteers.

Feeding Seniors at Home

Providing meals for Columbia County's senior citizens takes a concerted effort—and is especially challenging during the pandemic

Story and photos by Scott Laird

Senior centers in Columbia County communities have traditionally been a place for local senior citizens to congregate, participate in group activities and socialize with friends.

One of the main functions of local senior centers in Columbia County has been to provide a noontime meal—both congregate meals in the center's dining area and meals delivered to homebound seniors.

While the COVID-19 shutdown has created additional challenges for senior meals programs, local senior centers were

already struggling to meet the needs of their senior populations.

“Senior meals are a very important program in our communities, but they are probably not something that most people think about a lot,” says Juliann Davis, manager of senior programs with Community Action Team for Columbia County. “But those meals programs are there when people need them, and we try to serve as many people as we possibly can.”

During the shutdown, Home Delivered Meals programs have become even more essential. Juliann says meal delivery drivers can check in on homebound seniors and

provide some social connection to their communities.

“Home Delivered Meals serves a population that is at the highest risk for loneliness and depression,” she says. “And we know from the social determinants of health that those things can cause other chronic diseases to become more rampant. Just having someone who comes by once a day helps them to feel like they're not alone.”

In March, 4,158 meals were delivered to senior citizens at homes across Columbia County.

Juliann oversees and distributes funding for Home Delivered Meals programs in

Columbia County through the countywide Area Agency on Aging, which holds the contracts for Home Delivered Meals and makes policy decisions for senior services.

AAA is comprised of representatives from each of the county's senior centers, along with members of the general public and representatives from other area agencies that deal with senior issues.

AAA contracts with the senior centers in Clatskanie, Rainier and Vernonia to deliver meals in those communities. The St. Helens Senior Center delivers meals to seniors in St. Helens and Scappoose.

The meals are prepared in senior center kitchens and delivered by community volunteers. Additional volunteers are needed.

Each month, about 175 meals are delivered in Vernonia.

Across the county, 16% of Home Delivered Meals recipients are veterans, 95% have a life-limiting chronic illness (they cannot leave their homes or cannot cook for themselves), 5% are caregivers for a senior and 54% are people living alone.

AAA receives funding through the U.S. Older American Act for senior meals programs. Each senior center AAA contracts with for meals receives \$200 a month to support its programs, along with \$1.25 for each meal it serves. Julianne says the average cost to provide a meal in Oregon is \$8.94. That leaves each senior center with a large funding gap to close.

"The funding through the Older Americans Act is really just pennies on the dollar," Julianne says.

Julianne says most senior centers fundraise and hold raffles throughout the year to support their meals programs. The Rainier, St. Helens, and Vernonia senior centers operate thrift stores, which provide regular income and help fund both their congregate and home delivered meals programs.

Vernonia does not have a senior center or offer congregate meals. Local seniors are eagerly anticipating the completion of a new facility.

"We're all really excited to see what it looks like," Juliann says.



Juliann Davis, far left, and her Community Action Team manage senior programs in Columbia County—including the Home Delivered Meals Program, which delivers more than 4,000 meals a month to local senior citizens. From left are Juliann, Mandi McFarland, Kyrsten Black and Marge Tuomi.

Currently, meals are prepared at local restaurants and delivered to seniors at their homes.

"Vernonia is getting closer to having their own building again, and is looking forward to serving congregate meals and having some of the activities for seniors," Julianne says.

The Vernonia seniors are hiring a cook and gearing up for a grand opening at the new center once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

During the pandemic, there is concern many seniors are not eating properly and may be experiencing isolation and loneliness.

"We know people rely on their senior centers for those congregate meals and that's their source of any kind of real nutrition for the day," Juliann says. "We also know some of them have been feeling pretty cut off from the rest of the world during the shutdown, so we're looking forward to getting those congregate meals up and going again."

In February, 189 Columbia County seniors received Home Delivered Meals. That number jumped to 221 in March.

"We saw a slight decrease at first because some of our clients didn't want people coming to their homes for fear of

the virus," Juliann says. "We did personally call each of them and talk to them about what we're doing to make the delivery service as safe as possible for them. We offered to deliver them a food box once a week, or every other week, to help limit their contact. As time has gone on, we've had them come back and have also seen additional people sign up because of the loss of congregate meals."

During the coronavirus pandemic, financial funding has dried up. Private donations are often needed to make up the difference.

"Our centers do a magnificent job of trying to keep costs as low as they can, but we're always short of funds," Juliann says. "The support from our centers, their volunteers, the cities where they operate, and their donors is really the heartbeat of what we do and really helps keep costs down. We actually get meals out the door at a lower cost than some of the other Home Delivered Meals agencies in Oregon and across the nation, and it's because of the support of our communities." ■

To help support the Home Delivered Meals Program in Vernonia, send a check to Vernonia Senior Citizens, 939 Bridge St., Vernonia, OR 97064.

From Journeyman Lineman to Silversmith

Story and photos
by Toni Bailie

When Steve Michael retired after traveling for 55 years as a journeyman lineman, he had racked up enough experiences for two lifetimes.

The last six years, he has been a silversmith, crafting high-end bits and spurs in his workshop west of Lakeview.

As a young man, Steve followed in his father's footsteps. Glenn Michael, who was born in 1894, served in World War I, then returned to France after the war to help rebuild power distribution lines.

"As a journeyman lineman belonging to International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, my father worked for about 60 years all over the world," Steve says. "He helped construct power right-of-way in the Everglades"

Steve started line work at age 18, studying apprenticeship books and receiving on-the-job training. As a member of IBEW,

Steve hired on with contractors building transmission and distribution lines.

"I worked four years as an apprentice, and passed my IBEW journeyman lineman examination," Steve says. "We would change out 400 to 500 poles. We used massive equipment. There weren't any bucket trucks in the '60s. We climbed all the poles, many 115 feet tall"

Steve worked big projects in California, helping rebuild electrical systems in King City and Morrow Bay, installing 500-foot towers along the Columbia River. He learned how to bid jobs, supervising 300 men on 93 crews. Sometimes he worked for five contractors in one year.

"I always liked to travel," Steve says. "I would go where the work was: Oregon, Nevada, Washington, California and Arizona. They called guys like me boomers. Everywhere I went I learned something new. I always wanted to see over that



next mountain."

Steve met his wife, Bonnie, at a summer street dance in Truckee, California, while she was working for her father. Her dad was a road contractor building portions of Highway 80 over Donner Pass. When he was courting Bonnie, Steve drove his 1955 Chevy from Battle Mountain, Nevada, to Anderson, California, almost every weekend. They were married in 1963.

"We moved 26 times before buying our place in Lakeview so Mary and Danny could go to school," Bonnie says, referring to the couple's two children.

"The challenge of the line work was almost like a sport to him."

Steve's enthusiasm for his career led to his son Dan and daughter Mary's son, Michael Padget, both choosing to be journeyman linemen. Michael's father, Steven Padget, and grandfather, Roy Padget, are both journeyman linemen.

Steve stays in touch with the crew that works for Surprise Valley Electric.

"They have a top bunch of guys working at the Lakeview yard," Steve says. "They go out and get the work done and don't complain."

Between stints as a contract



lineman, Steve dove into other activities. He became a pilot in 1968. He bought a plane for \$900 and learned to perform aerobatics.

"I met Glen Plato, a World War II fighter pilot, who introduced me to crop dusting," Steve says. "I learned how to fly at all altitudes and was a pilot for 47 years."

Another sideline was a five-year stint running a salmon trawler from Morrow Bay to Coos Bay during the three-month fishing season.

At his Lakeview ranch, Steve showed cutting horses and bridle horses, competing in Oregon, Nevada and California. The equine experience drew him into his current avocation as a silversmith.

"I'd been around horses all my life," Steve says. "Les Voght showed me how every piece of a bit works on the horse and how to design them. I went to study

with Wilson Capron in Texas and came home to practice."

"Carl Norris of Fallon, Nevada, is an extraordinary engraver and silversmith who has inspired and helped me so much," Steve says. "He is always there for me with his cherished friendship. I also appreciate the support I receive from my wife, Bonnie, and daughter, Mary."

Steve also trained with Rusty McCullough, a bit and spur maker from Ione, Oregon.

"Rusty really inspired and encouraged me," Steve says. "He has been a moving force for me."

During the training, Steve wrote out step-by-step methods to fashion a Nevada-style spade bit. This involves cutting steel pieces, drawing intricate designs and inlaying silver over steel.

Steve plans to attend Rusty's classes in all areas of silversmithing, with buckles and jewelry next on the list.

Steve's shop is outfitted with all the equipment of his craft.

It can take him 80 hours to finish a bit. He has spent 11 hours before just sanding the finish.

"When I'm designing, I throw the clock away and go into my own world," he says. "I spend a lot of time with reference design books."

Steve sells his handiwork across the country, fashioning bits and spurs for horsemen and ropers. He often takes special orders, consulting with the customer on unique designs. A recent bit he made for a Warm Springs tribal member incorporates an eagle feather design.

"I want my bits to be one-of-a-kind, something to be treasured," Steve says. ■

To contact Steve Michael at Northwest Bits and Spurs, call 541-417-0050 or email Tazzie41@hotmail.com.



TOP AND ABOVE: Silverwork by Steve Michael. He has honed his craft studying under several teachers.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Steve in his workshop, where he makes a variety of items, including horse bits and spurs.

Graduating During a Pandemic

Lowell and Oakridge classes of 2020 finish school careers in unexpected way

By Craig Reed

The seniors in the class of 2020 are going to have unique memories of their final year. Unlike past years, there's expected to be no graduation ceremony, no skip day, no senior trip, no senior pranks, no baccalaureate service, and no final day of classes filled with hugs and well wishes for this year's high school seniors.

The coronavirus health crisis and the "Stay home, stay safe," order canceled the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year and those special events that honor the senior class.

Lowell High School senior Melinda Winters and Oakridge High School senior Hunter Ketch agree the situation for themselves and their senior friends is frustrating and disappointing, but that "it is what it is."

Lowell has a senior class of 32. Oakridge's class of 2020 numbers 36.

"I think for the most part everybody is doing pretty well," Melinda says. "We've talked about how this could have happened, but we've also talked about staying calm for another two to three months and hopefully this will have blown over by then."

Hunter says the seniors miss seeing each other.

"Most of us realize those special events are just not going to happen," he says. "We're each pretty much just doing our own thing now. We missed out on saying our goodbyes, on hanging out together."

These feelings and thoughts are prevalent at all high schools, where there are usually numerous events and parties to celebrate the graduation of young adults who are ready to move on to another stage of life, whether that is the workforce,

college or the military.

Graduation ceremonies are a highlight of the year, especially at smaller schools such as Lowell and Oakridge, where everybody knows everybody and the communities know their students.

Kay Graham, the Lowell High School principal, and Greg Chapman, the Oakridge High principal, are optimistic the seniors can handle this unique situation. Schools are using technology to stay in touch with seniors, to help them complete graduation requirements and provide online classes for underclassmen.

"This particular group has been very responsible its whole high school career," Kay says. "They've been motivated to meet all their requirements to graduate.

"I am optimistic that this is just a moment in time for them. It's hard for them to miss out on the fun things at the end of the year. But they've got a good up to 70 years ahead of them. They'll be fine."

Greg says Oakridge staff have used technology to have numerous meetings with each of that school's seniors. He has been impressed with how well those students are dealing with the situation.

"They largely have positive attitudes," he says. "They are concerned, they are disappointed, but they realize it is nothing they could have anticipated."

Greg says he has explained to the Oakridge seniors that they'll have unique memories of this time.

"Because nobody else has gone through this, people are going to be talking about the graduating class of 2020 for years," he says. "Part of that is because it is weird and part of it is because this community is really rallying around these kids."

School administrations, teachers, seniors, parents and communities have been discussing ways to celebrate their 2020 seniors for several weeks.

Since it is hard to predict what the health situation will be in late May and early June when most events for seniors are held, options were considered in April. Those options include a drive-thru

graduation, a parade with residents applauding the seniors from the sidewalk or out on a football field with social distancing.

"We certainly hope to have some sort of ceremony," Greg says, adding that one student suggested a cap, gown and mask graduation ceremony.

"We want to celebrate the seniors in some way," Kay agrees. "We'll see how things transpire and then adapt however we need to adapt. We're not going to lose sight of our seniors and some closure for them for their senior year. We'll just have to be creative in how we give the seniors special moments that are going to be different."

Some communities have put up yard signs, banners and flags, some of them individualized and some for their respective 2020 class, to recognize the seniors.

Melinda and Hunter say technology such as Facebook, FaceTime, Zoom, Instagram, Twitter and email has helped them stay in touch not only with their teachers, but also their friends. Chat groups and online photo galleries for senior students have been set up at some schools.

Melinda says a schedule has been created so seniors can individually return to their school and add their hand print to the school rock.

Most of Lowell's senior class have been together since kindergarten, so this time of distancing has been especially tough for those longtime friends, Melinda adds.

"Hopefully, we'll be able to come back together soon," she says.

Kay expects the 2020 seniors to still have wonderful memories of their high school days and to make the best of how the final months of school evolved.

"Again, it's just a moment in time," she says. "These kids will move on quite quickly. They've got future plans."

"If you consider their entire K to 12 career, this virus has just been a blip," Greg says. "These seniors are going to go on and be hugely successful as we know most of our kids are. We'll get through this." ■



ABOVE: Senior members of the Lowell football team and coach Pat Todd, right. LEFT: Today's Lowell seniors on their last day of eighth grade in 2016.



ABOVE: The Oakridge senior class. LEFT: Oakridge Senior Class President Madaline Maher. BELOW: Oakridge senior Hunter Ketch.



SAFETY FIRST

Greg Pierce's job is to make sure linemen go home to their families at the end of the day

By Craig Reed

After almost 40 years working in different aspects of the electric cooperative industry, Greg Pierce is experienced when it comes to safety issues facing workers.

He has used his experience as a lineman, tree trimmer, operations manager and safety trainer—and additional education—to present and encourage safe practices for both outdoor and indoor work for employees at six electric utilities.

Greg has been safety director the past two years for Blachly-Lane Electric Cooperative, Consumers Power, Douglas Electric Cooperative, Emerald People's Utility District, Lane Electric Cooperative and Salem Electric.

"The goal at the end of the day is to help people make decisions that keep them safe," Greg says, "to help them enhance their judgments and then all go home safely at the end of the day. My main focus is to provide services

and assistance for each utility to establish and maintain a self-sufficient safety and risk management process."

From his home in Eugene and his base office at CPI in Philomath, the 61-year-old travels a few times a month to each of the six utilities that comprise the Cooperative Safety Group. His classroom and field presentations cover about 50 subjects, from chain saw safety and hazard trees to fire prevention and underground electrical installations.

For the past few months, however, Greg has presented his safety programs via video because of the COVID-19 virus and Oregon's stay-at-home order.

"I'm a liaison between the utility and regulatory agencies such as OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) and Oregon's Public Utility Commission," Greg says. "I help the utilities stay in compliance with them. I keep my eye on changing rules and regulations. I meet



and talk with OSHA and OPUC regularly. I can have conversations with them about something touchy and get a fair interpretation of the rules without using a utility's name."

He then passes those rule interpretations on to the utilities.

"I have to trust the information I give is distributed throughout the utility," Greg says. "I have no authority to mandate the information. I serve as a consultant, and then the utility can do what they want to do with what I distribute."

Mary Locke, operations and human resources manager at Blachly-Lane Electric Cooperative, says the co-op has worked to develop a culture of

safety, and Greg has helped in the process.

"He provides good dialogue and learning experiences," Mary says. "He provides relevant topics. He never lets safety slide. There's no compromising safety in order to get work done."

Mary says Greg's many years of experience in the industry gives him credibility when presenting and discussing safety issues.

Todd Sherwood, operations superintendent at Douglas Electric, says it is important for the utilities to "keep our heads in the game regarding regulations."

"Greg's reminders of what we need to do, what we need to look out for, are important,"



Greg Pierce

Todd says. “Our business is pretty hazardous. There are a lot of little factors where things can go wrong. His training helps us keep our heads where they need to be.”

Greg says he tries to be available to every employee and respects confidentiality when speaking to them. He has been informed of work concerns through confidential conversations and then offers alternatives to the situation without revealing names. He

ABOVE and OPPOSITE PAGE: Greg Pierce, wearing all black, works with Blachly-Lane crews on safety procedures during a training session. PHOTOS COURTESY OF BLACHLY-LANE

says a concern at one utility can easily provide a safety discussion at all of the utilities in the group.

Greg checks for incidents and accidents in the electric industry across the U.S. and includes them in his safety presentations. He says near-miss situations need to be discussed because even if there is no injury, one small detail could have made it a serious situation.

“I share real incidents without using names so I don’t embarrass anybody,” Greg says. “I never try to show any disrespect, but I ask probing questions. Let’s revisit and rethink the situation. What changes can be made so this

doesn’t happen again? Did we identify the root cause and what we can do to change that?”

Greg doesn’t limit his safety presentations to the outdoor crews. He also provides information for office staff, including education on fire extinguishers, emergency evacuation plans and tripping hazards.

In 2019, he gave an active shooter presentation to each of the utilities. That training could help both inside staff dealing with upset members at the front counter and field crews dealing with members while working on private property.

“We need to know how to de-escalate aggression,” Greg says.

Greg has dealt with many of these safety issues since he became an apprentice lineman in 1980 at South Central Public

Power District in Nelson, Nebraska. Five years later, he migrated west to Oregon and took a job as a tree trimmer for CPI. He eventually became a lineman, operations coordinator, systems operator, operations manager and director of operations for CPI.

In 2007, he was hired as operations manager for San Miguel Power Association in Ridgeway, Colorado. Two years later, he traveled west again after accepting a safety trainer job for Columbia Safety Services in Washington. He provided safety services for eight utilities and the city of Port Angeles in Western Washington.

He moved again in 2011, returning to CPI as its engineering supervisor and later to director of operations.

All of that experience and being CPI’s representative on the six-utility safety group set Greg up for being a candidate for the safety director position when John Gander retired in 2017. Greg accepted the position and began his new job early in 2018.

“It makes it much easier for me to put myself in their shoes,” Greg says of his past experiences. “I don’t know how you could do this if you hadn’t been in the industry.”

“While there are always great ideas and problems to solve, you always have to consider the safety element. It’s all about going home safe at the end of the day.” ■



From left, Natalie, Clair, Morgan, Drew, Amelia and Mallory McKinney operate McKinney's Farmstead. PHOTO BY KATELIN DAVIDSON

Producing Together

McKinney's Farmstead in Paha grows not only produce, but a family.

By Katelin Davidson

Set between the steady stream of traffic on Highway 395 and trains on a nearby railroad track, the unincorporated community of Paha goes unnoticed by most. Upon a closer inspection, a business is growing there.

McKinney's Farmstead began growing produce just over a year ago. For the last three years, business owners and husband-and-wife duo Drew and Natalie McKinney had informally bought and sold produce from other local farmers. They purchased this farmland to help expand the business

and build on their dreams.

Their farm is a labor of love that is managed by their family: Drew, Natalie, Clair, Morgan, Mallory and Amelia. Their daughters continually learn about farming practices, assist with daily chores and help sell the produce.

"Drew and I complement one another by doing our own tasks and fill in when the other needs it," Natalie says. "Our kids help us sell the produce and provide customer service. Morgan loves the money. Clair likes to sample, as do the other girls. We often find our girls covered in peach juice."

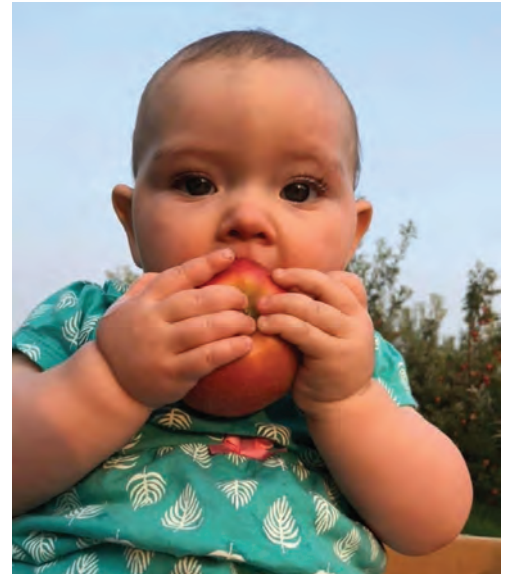
The family primarily sells produce in the Lind, Ritzville and Davenport communities. The McKinneys also make weekly direct deliveries to customers in Lind, Ritzville, Davenport and Sprague. They post their schedule on the

McKinney's Farmstead Facebook page. Their local produce selection is one of the only options for fresh produce aside from area grocery stores in these towns.

"All of our products come from Washington state," Natalie says. "We want to support local farmers. We want to be able to find it and then be able to supply it to people for a good price and fresh from farm to table. We also enjoy knowing where the food comes from and its growing practices"

Along with providing high-quality produce, the family focuses on education surrounding farming practices and the nutritional value of their products.

"We want the people to know that our products are organic or naturally grown," Natalie says. "If we are not growing it, we are buying it directly from the farmer and sometimes out harvesting ourselves. All of



ABOVE, LEFT: McKinney's Farmstead sets up a booth at many local events, including the Wheat Land Communities' Fair. **RIGHT:** During harvest, Mallery McKinney takes a snack break to bite into an apple. PHOTOS COURTESY NATALIE MCKINNEY

our product is extremely fresh and the best quality."

Drew and Natalie had different experiences with farming growing up, but share the same passion for agriculture. Drew was raised on an organic apple and cherry farm in Royal City. Natalie's grandparents were dairy farmers, and Natalie was active in FFA during high school.

Natalie says there is no greater compliment than seeing return customers. This year, the family started raising hogs to sell through the farm. In the future, the McKinney's plan to offer more produce, as well as fresh cut flowers.

"We also offer delivery services," Natalie says. "This service is really nice for members of the community here getting out to shop can be a struggle. We have delivered to elderly members, individuals at work, and parents who are home with children. It's rewarding to us knowing we can help anyone get good groceries from the farm to their tables."

The business continues to grow from the passion the couple and their children have for farming and supplying healthy products to customers. Natalie says watching their children learn and develop skills they will use for the remainder of their lives has been the best reward from the entire experience.

"The girls learn how plants are grown

and how we harvest," Natalie says. "They help me to start seeds, they learn to water the plants and watch as the plants grow. We love spending time in the garden and seeing the fruits of our labor.

"They get opportunities that not every kid gets by being out here on the farm. Mallery is our alarm clock every morning. She's diligent and very adamant about heading out to do the chores. As a mom it makes me feel so good seeing my children willingly wanting to help with the chores. There are plenty of learning opportunities out there and they learn responsibility."

Drew and Natalie say their dream is to open a permanent produce stand on their property at the Paha exit on Highway 395. They want to reach not only local consumers, but travelers passing through Adams County.

"We want the local schools to come visit our farm and learn from us," Natalie says. "We want to host educational events and offer as much to our community as we can," Natalie says. "We encourage learning and are always coming up with something new to learn about.

"During times like these where staying home is an order, for us, it's an everyday occurrence. We love staying home and being farmsteaders. We appreciate the small things, work hard, and hold family very close." ■

How to Buy From McKinney's Farmstead

McKinney's Farmstead plans to keep a schedule similar to last year, and will be in Lind on Wednesday evenings, in Davenport on Thursdays and in Ritzville on Friday and Sunday. They also regularly sell produce at the Wheat Land Communities' Fair, Lind Combine Demolition Derby, Adams County Harvest Festival, My Farm Your Table and Health Fair events in area communities. Due to the pandemic, many events have been canceled, and the McKinney's will post on Facebook regarding the events they will be attending this year.

Seasonal products include asparagus, cherries, apples, plums, peaches, cantaloupe, watermelon, onions, bell peppers, jalapenos, cauliflower, broccoli, carrots, zucchini, cucumbers, tomatoes, pumpkins, squash, corn and blueberries.

The McKinneys accept cash, check, debit and credit card payments. They gladly accept pre-orders, especially from individuals who are looking for large quantities for canning.

Light Reflecting, Water Swirling

Pine Grove artist captures natural beauty

By Drew Myron

Sue Moore sees in trees: alder, oak, fir, pine and more.

“I like the woods, being around the trees and nature,” says Sue, a Pine Grove painter inspired by the natural world. “It’s where I find peace and serenity and the whole workings of the world. It’s where I lose myself.”

Working primarily in watercolor and pastels, Sue blends realism with impressionism to capture the beauty and mood of natural places. Her work has been shown throughout the Gorge, including the Columbia Gorge Center for the Arts and Providence Hospital in Hood River.

It’s no wonder Sue finds solace in a forest. Born into a timber family and raised in Corvallis, Sue grew up among trees. Those towering giants with strong limbs and lanky reaches were both natural beauties and workhorses providing jobs and food for her family.

From early on, nature called to her. As a child, Sue would visit her grandparents, who lived on a farm with a creek and woods along the Coast Range in the small town of Alsea.

“I would disappear to the creek while the other girls played with the babies and dolls,” Sue recalls. “I always loved being out in the woods or beside a stream. Most of my paintings are based on nature, probably because of all the hours I spent as a child by my grandfather’s creek watching light reflecting, water swirling around rocks, and alder leaves glowing when backlit by the sun.”

Her early curiosity led to lifelong creativity. As a child, she says, “I was told that I was always making something. Teachers encouraged me, and I took as many classes as I could. Growing up, I always felt like I wanted to create.”



Sue Moore blends realism with impressionism to capture the beauty and mood of natural places in and around Hood River, then interprets in paint what she has experienced.

Influenced by both the grandeur and small details of the outdoor world, Sue sketches and snaps photos while in the field, then draws from those images when she returns home. In the art studio nestled in the corner of her bedroom, windows provide natural light and a serene view.

Sue draws on the beauty of the Hood River Valley, where she has lived for more than 50 years. She lives on a farm with her husband, Pat—a longtime member of the Hood River Electric Cooperative Board of Directors and a shareholder of Moore Orchards, a family farm for 85 years and four generations.

The couple have four children and nine grandchildren.

“Pat is a wonderful support,” Sue says, noting the studio he created for her and the perspective he lends to each of her works.

Sue is largely a self-taught artist who has built her skills and



LEFT: Sue captures memories of Utah in this watercolor. **RIGHT:** Sue's love of trees shines in the light and details featured in her watercolor work "Matriarch."



found support from years of art workshops. Though she has worked in oil, pastel, mosaic and cloisonné enamel, her favorite medium is watercolor.

"I love the crispness of watercolor and the fun things that happen with pigments," she says.

Watercolor is a form that requires an artist to "think backwards" to the desired result, Sue says, noting the challenge is matching her vision of the finished work with how the materials choose to wander.

"I can get tight and controlled about my work, but watercolor doesn't let you do that. With watercolor, you have to go with the flow. You have to do what the watercolor wants you to do," she says, laughing. "Art stretches your brain."

In addition to following her instincts, Sue says the support of other artists has deepened her work. She is a member of the Hood River Art Club—a group that meets weekly and is open to artists of all ages and abilities. The group shows their work at galleries and businesses throughout the Gorge and offers workshops with local artists as instructors.

"Sue Moore's art is beautiful," says Joyce Uezen, president of the art club. "She captures glowing light in her pieces. Her work is luminous with feeling of depth and emotion."

Hood River Art Club

Founded in 1949, Hood River Art Club meets weekly at FISH Food Bank in Hood River. The club has 25 members with a range of skills, experience and style. Artists from throughout the Columbia Gorge are welcomed and encouraged to join. The club offers art workshops, demonstrations, group exhibitions, and opportunities to mix, mingle and learn. Membership is \$25 per year.

"Most of all," says club president Joyce Uezen, "we have fun, relax and draw on one another's creativity."

For more information, contact Joyce Uezen at joyce.ucezen@gmail.com

The group has been supportive and encouraging, says Sue. In fact, the art club helped resurrect her creative practice. Years ago, while caring for her aging mother, Sue had little time or energy to visit her easel. Her paints dried, her canvas curled and she did not paint for six years. When she finally returned to the art club, she felt a wash of enthusiasm and relief.

"Painting again was like coming home," she says. "It was wonderful." ■



Players, parents and fans cheer Crane High School girls' undefeated 2020 season on March 7 in Baker City. PHOTO BY DEBBIE RANEY

The Road to the State Championship

By Stephanie Bowen

At the end of February 2019, many Harney County residents traveled to Baker City, Oregon, or gathered around televisions or computers to tune into the first round of the state basketball tournament to watch the No. 10 seeded Crane High School girls battle the No. 2 Powder Valley Lady Badgers.

Fans cheered as the Lady Mustangs—starting two freshman, two sophomores and one senior—put the first points on the board. Some fans cried a little when the bucket taken at the buzzer to tie the game did not fall, and the Crane girls started the tournament with a two-point loss.

The young team had a solid fourth-place finish and set their gaze on the next year. Meanwhile, the St. Paul Buckaroos topped off their undefeated season with the championship.

That title became important as the 2019-2020 season began. It quickly became clear St. Paul would remain the team to beat. The Lady Mustangs, still young, still explosively quick and fiercely aggressive, started out tough and rarely let their foot off the gas. Many games became blowouts, but Crane fans still came in blue and white, driving to every home game—and many away games—because of the thrill of watching these girls play.

One of the draws of attending a game

this season was the first two minutes of each game. The Mustangs' tough defense allowed them to pick off steal after steal, and there was almost always a 3-pointer or two. Those first two minutes when the girls played so hard was the most exciting two minutes of many fans' winter week.

A bonus that kept fans cheering all season was the intensity as players came off the bench. The next girls up were ready to play just as hard.

That's not to say there weren't some challenges. As any small-town dweller knows, residents hear about personal hardships faced by team players. As the season went on, the girls faced many tests, both on and off the court. However, they



1A Coach of the Year Stub Travis celebrates his second state title. PHOTO BY RHETT LANDON PHOTOGRAPHY

had a whole community rooting for them.

When the girls showed up in Baker City again in 2020, this time undefeated, they did not just want to win state. They wanted to beat every team by 20 points.

St. Paul had different ideas. They had lost midseason to the Mustangs at a neutral site and were primed for payback for their only loss in 59 games.

The state was also starting to take a hard look at shutting down large gatherings, such as sports events, to flatten the curve of COVID-19.

While the girls took care of business against Country Christian to open the tournament, Joseph briefly took the lead in the third quarter of game two. Crane finished the game on a 9-0 run that sealed its chance at the championship.

It seemed the girls had worked out any hesitation at the start of their matchup with

St. Paul. The Mustangs dominated the first quarter, 16-3, against the Buckaroos. St. Paul held on, but ultimately Crane Coach Stub Travis, who received 1A Coach of the Year accolades, led the Lady Mustangs to his second state championship, 16 years after the first.

Assistant Coach Tomika Doman describes the way the girls made their journey to the 2020 state championship.

“I loved that our girls have shown so much class this year both on and off the court and that we were able to win the sportsmanship award as well,” she says.

Tomika attributes an amazing season to “an incredible group of girls, parents and community.”

Travis acknowledges the circumstances that prevented the community from celebrating this team’s accomplishment properly due to pandemic closures and limitations, but says, “We can be grateful that we had the chance to play.”

Many around the state and country, with tournaments the following weekend and beyond, did not get that opportunity.

Crane capped its undefeated season and 1A state championship with several team and individual awards, including a state sportsmanship trophy, Les Schwab

team of the month for March and placing in the top 10 for academic all-state teams. Sophomore Kelsie Siegner was an all-state co-player of the year. Three other players—Riley Davis, Shelie Doman and Dani Clark—made first, third and honorable mention all-state teams, respectively.

Athletic Director Jamie Siegner extends thanks to “players and community supporters that showed everyone how to win with pride,” describing the sportsmanship trophy as “a special honor that reflects our entire community.”

The girls will be looking for another shot at the big game next year. With no starters graduating this year, it will be another exciting season for Crane Mustang fans.

Uncertainties in the coming months surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic will likely challenge the resourcefulness of these athletes, their families, school staff and community members. But these girls do not seem afraid of the challenge. They know how to work hard and have shown the community what excellence looks like.

Looking forward, as the late UCLA basketball coach John Wooden said: “Winning takes talent, to repeat takes character.” ■



Retirement Not A Show-Stopper

Retiring Public Works Supervisor Ken Day will still volunteer at cherished community events

By Dianna Troyer

Ken Day had carefully planned his career when he moved to Mackay 37 years ago to work at a local fish farm.

Instead, his career veered down a different path—a diversion he has embraced. He became Mackay's public works supervisor.

Ken retires from his 29-year career this month.

While many retirees search for an idyllic place to live, Ken says he already lives in a piece of paradise: the scenic Lost River Valley.

"There's so much to do here in the mountains," says Ken, 64, whose retirement officially started June 1. "Life will still revolve around volunteering at community events. My calendar will always be marked with what I've enjoyed doing for years."

He will shoot off the Fourth of July fireworks show, help roast 2,000 pounds of beef to serve at the town's free barbecue in September, coach the Mackay Wrestling Club next winter and volunteer at Mackay Community Church.

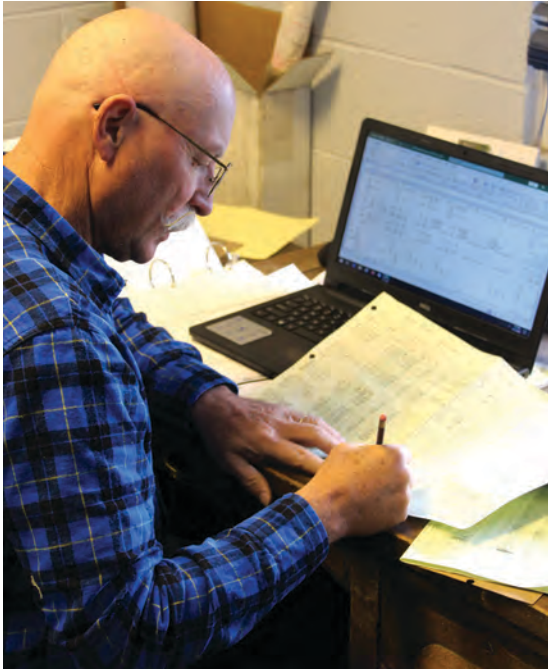
Mayor Wayne Olsen says Ken has a complex skill set and will be hard to replace.

"We're grateful he's not moving away and will be on retainer," Wayne says. "He has the expertise of a plumber, electrician, heavy equipment operator, truck driver, horticulturist, and operator of sewage and water treatment systems. Roll all that into one person and that's Ken."

To ensure a smooth transition, Ken has worked with his assistant, Duane Jernberg, who will replace him.

Ken says he decided to retire after being diagnosed with Type II diabetes last year.

"It was a reminder of my mortality," he says. "It was scary and came out of the blue. I went on a low-carb diet, lost 45 pounds and now have my blood sugar under control without meds. I'd had high blood pressure for 10 years, too, and was taking several medications



ABOVE: Ken tabulates the monthly log of flows and daily chemistry samples for a monthly wastewater treatment discharge report. In 29 years, he has never missed submitting the monthly report to the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Wearing his trademark pith helmet, he is easy to pick out in a crowd.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Ken, assistant fire chief of the South Custer Rural Fire Department, will continue shooting the Fourth of July fireworks show at the Mackay Reservoir. PHOTOS BY CHASE GREEN

for that. Now, I'm down to a half dosage of one medication."

With renewed energy, Ken plans to keep wearing the many hats he has worn for decades. Wherever he volunteers, Ken is easy to spot wearing his distinctive pith helmet, a popular hat in the tropics.

"I bought one for fun at an Army surplus store years ago, and now people tell me it's my trademark," he says. "It's genuine—made from the pith or inner bark of a cork tree. It's great for keeping the rain off my neck and sun out of my eyes."

He will be wearing it this month when he finalizes and choreographs the Fourth of July fireworks show as the assistant chief of the South Custer Rural Fire Department.

Ken will continue fighting fires, too.

"We have about four calls a month—more in summer with wildland fires," he says. "I can still dig a fire line as well as a 25-year-old."

Once the fireworks are checked off his calendar, Ken says he looks forward to being a spectator at two popular events in August. He and his wife, Phyllis, always go to the Custer County Fair and the Idaho Soaring Regatta at Mackay Airport to watch glider pilots from the region fly their aircraft.

"Even though we live in a rural area, there's always something to do," Ken says. "When we moved here, we realized there are so many groups to join, no matter what your interests are. People invite you to participate."

About 30 years ago, he accepted an invitation to serve on the planning committee of the Mackay Free Barbecue—a longtime tradition scheduled the third Saturday of September. Volunteers serve a free barbecue beef lunch to about 3,000 people in the town's Tourist Park. About 1 ton of beef is roasted overnight in a

12-foot-square stone oven built in 1938.

To prepare the oven, Ken and other firemen burn five cords of wood in it. When the temperature reaches 1,100 degrees and the wood has turned to ash, Ken and others slip into their firefighter gear and shovel out the ashes. With the oven's thick walls retaining heat, the beef is rolled inside on metal racks and the oven doors are closed.

When his fall commitments are complete, Ken says he looks forward to coaching the Mackay Wrestling Club.

"Our season was cut short with the coronavirus, so hopefully next year we'll be back to the usual routine," Ken says.

He has been involved with the wrestling club since it started in 1987 and his son Mark competed.

"When the coach moved away, I kept it going with the help of other parents," Ken says.

He began volunteering after moving to town in 1983 to work at a local trout farm. When his employment at the farm ended, he and Phyllis decided to stay in the valley to raise their children: Mark, Sarah and Robin. He found a job at the public works department in March 1991.

"I could have looked for another fisheries job, but we wanted to raise our kids here," Ken says. "Being members of the Mackay Community Church was important to us, too."

He teaches adult Bible studies, is an elder, chairman of the church board, and plays oboe while Phyllis plays piano.

When Ken's volunteer duties are done this summer, he already has plans.

"I'll have more time for our kids and grandkids to do what we love: camping, fishing, and hiking around here," Ken says. ■

Beware of Scammers

The energy industry is undergoing rapid change, and technology is paving the way for innovation in the way energy is used, produced, stored and shared.

Smart homes and apps make managing energy use and paying your electric bill more convenient than ever.

While the changing energy market has created more options for consumers, it has also resulted in more utility scams and misleading information.

Utility scams are common because consumers are often anxious about the threat of disruption to their electric service, and scammers exploit that anxiety. Additionally, new products and services in the energy industry provide an opening for scammers and pop-up companies to provide misleading information or shoddy products and services.

Avoid Phone Scams

A common tactic for scammers is to “clone” phone numbers to create the appearance that the call is from our cooperative. The scammer will claim you have a past-due account and threaten to disconnect service

or take legal action. They typically demand you use a prepaid debit card or money order, often within a short, urgent timeframe, to pay the “past-due” amount.

You can protect yourself by being aware of the status of your account. Our smartphone app provides you instant access to your account information. You can download the free app by searching Mt. Wheeler Power wherever you buy apps. Once you authenticate your account, you can see your billing history, current account status and make a payment right from your phone.

Never give your banking or personal information over the phone to someone you did not call. If you have a question or concern about your energy bill, call us directly at 775-289-8981 or 800-977-6937. Do not use the phone number given by the scammer.

Other Types of Scams

Another scam involves rooftop solar. Homeowners may receive a sales call offering solar, an accessory, upgrade or extended warranties for existing equipment.

The calls could be from



crooks claiming to represent a solar company, promising to replace faulty or broken parts or improve efficiency. Again, if you are not expecting the call, don't be fooled. These calls offering misleading information are likely a scam. Call the company that installed the solar array if you

think there may be a problem. Other than occasional cleaning, correctly installed rooftop solar is virtually maintenance-free.

If you are considering alternative energy sources for your home, make sure you are working with a reputable company. Because this is still



PHOTO BY ELNUR / ADOBE STOCK

an emerging industry with evolving technology, there has been a proliferation of pop-up companies in the market looking to make a quick buck. Representatives of these companies may have more sales experience than actual knowledge of the energy industry. Their primary

goal could be making a sale and moving on to the next prospect.

Mt. Wheeler Power can offer a candid assessment to determine whether alternative energy options are right for you. After all, Mt. Wheeler Power has a different bottom line that is not directly tied to

the sale of a product or service. We take a more holistic, objective view of how to achieve energy and cost savings for our members.

In this ever-changing environment, it is important to remember you have a trusted energy adviser: your local electric cooperative. We

are a community-focused organization that works to efficiently deliver affordable, reliable and safe energy to our members.

Remember, we're just one call or click away, so please reach out with any questions about your electric service or bills. We're here to help. ■

RIGHT: Astride his horse, Gabe Spratling holds a calf, while Cody Gibbs keeps pressure on the rope and Ian Spratling, front, and his dad, Blake, pull the calf to the ground.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The Spratling's branding crew, from left, Boyd, Gabe, Isaac, Ian, Quaid, and Blake Spratling, Ben Patterson and Cody Gibbs.
PHOTOS BY SARAH SPRATLING



A Rite of Spring in Cattle Country

Branding season is time for camaraderie, humor

By Dianna Troyer

To rancher Blake Spratling, his branding iron is much more than a piece of metal used to designate ownership of his family's cattle.

"Picking a brand is a rite of passage in our family," Blake says.

The 44-year-old raises Black Angus cattle in Starr Valley west of Wells on the ranch his grandfather, Max Spratling, founded in 1962.

Blake remembers picking a brand as a teenager for the fledgling cattle herd he started as a 9-year-old in 4-H, selling market animals at the county fair every summer to pay for college. He recalls his grandfather Max's sentimentality when he picked

a brand with the letters M and J—for Max and Joyce, his wife.

"I was practical instead of sentimental," Blake recalls of looking through a registry of discontinued brands. "The T Double Bar caught my eye. It's made of lines with the bar over the T, so it's easy to see and wouldn't blotch or become blurred with time. For me, having a brand meant I was continuing a family tradition in an occupation I love, raising cattle to feed people. It's gratifying to know our kids will be the fourth generation to eventually rely on the ranch for their livelihood."

In May and early June, Blake and other ranchers in northern Nevada look forward to branding season. Crews brand, vaccinate and castrate calves,

preparing them to be moved to their summer range.

Ranchers cherish the centuries-old tradition for the camaraderie of working and laughing with family and friends who help with the task, the optimism for a new calf crop and the sense of accomplishment once the job is done.

"It's a joyous time—the first time we get a close look at our new calf crop and identify the calves as ours," Blake says of the first branding in May.

A crew of about 10 branded 75 calves one morning, using the corrals Max built decades ago.

"We brand about five or six times to get it all done," Blake says.

By the time Blake moves his



cattle to summer range north of Deeth, hundreds of calves will have the T Double Bar brand.

Besides Blake and his wife, Sarah, the Spratlings' branding crew includes their sons, parents, neighbors and friends.

"It's not hard to find people to help," Sarah says. "We all look forward to it. Our neighbors and longtime friends bring their grandkids. After a long winter, it's good to see people you haven't seen for a while. Blake's mother, Audrey, is a big reason we get such a good crew because she cooks awesome meals."

Their crew puts a sense of



play into the work. After ropers secure a calf, family friend Ben Patterson challenges the Spratlings' sons to crouch like a sprinter beside him and race to mug the calf and help hold it down while the brand is applied.

"Ben's in his 60s and has been to countless brandings and can still make hard work fun for the boys," Sarah says.

For Blake, the branding tradition triggers childhood memories of being entrusted with progressively more difficult tasks.

"I remember branding with Grandpa, and my first job was getting the ear tags ready," he

says. "When you're older, you learn to give vaccinations and to rope."

When he went to college, Blake planned to be a full-time veterinarian and part-time rancher like his father, Boyd.

"Coming home from college, I realized I was more interested in ranching here full time than in being a vet," says Blake, who earned a master's degree in animal nutrition at Utah State University.

"Grandpa worked hard to establish the ranch, and we're glad to keep it going. Dad ran it for 30 years, so now we're leasing it from him."

Last year, Ian, 19, a



The Spratling family brands: Blake's T Double Bar and son Ian's Lazy S Hanging Cross.

freshman at Great Basin College, picked out his brand: a Lazy S Hanging Cross. Eventually, his brothers—Gabe, 16; Isaac, 15; Quaid, 11; and Barrett, 4 months—will

pick out their brands.

When his neighbors and friends call for some help, Blake will be there for others.

"Branding is something we all look forward to," he says. ■

First OTEC-EOU Rural Scholarships Awarded

Four-year scholarship focuses on keeping local students in Eastern Oregon

By Susan Parrish

Four high school seniors who live in Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative's service area are the first recipients of a new scholarship program focused on retaining local students at Eastern Oregon University. The OTEC-EOU Rural Scholarship Program pays all tuition and fees for four years to complete a bachelor's degree at EOU. It is valued at an estimated \$10,000 per year per student for a total of \$40,000.

The scholarship requirements include being a member of OTEC or the legal dependent of an OTEC member who has an active meter within OTEC's system in Baker, Grant, Harney and Union counties; must maintain 3.0 or higher GPA in high school and college; and must participate in an internship program to learn about the electric industry and gain real-world experience.

This scholarship was conceived by OTEC CEO Les Penning and EOU President Tom Insko, who were brainstorming a solution to EOU's low graduation rate, which sits at 27% compared to 63% of public universities statewide. Much of that attrition is due to students starting at EOU but transferring to another college to graduate.

The four-year scholarship was developed by OTEC and EOU as an incentive to retain local students at EOU through graduation—and perhaps keep them in Eastern Oregon for their careers.

"We are very excited about this partnership between OTEC and Eastern Oregon University," Les says. "As part of our strategy we've prioritized community support and growth, and we see EOU as an important part of the success of our



Four local students will stay in Eastern Oregon to continue their educations as EOU Mountaineers. PHOTO COURTESY OF EASTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

communities. By allocating four of our scholarships annually to this program and leveraging a matched investment from EOU, we can invest into our local communities directly, support local students and return value to OTEC member-owners through the internship projects that the students will complete through their four years at EOU."

Recognizing that each dollar kept and spent in the local economy returns that money back to local communities, this scholarship program incentivizes high school graduates from OTEC's service area to complete their degree at EOU.

EOU Vice President for University Advancement Tim Seydel says, "Tom and Les were discussing ways to encourage

high school graduates from the region to stay in the area, attend EOU, and be part of the economy and our communities. Leveraging scholarship resources made sense, and our teams at EOU and OTEC started working to make it happen.

"Even at a competitive school like Eastern, the cost of a college education is a challenge. Many of our students are working and attending school at the same time. Every scholarship makes a big difference for students and their families, and it certainly helps when you can graduate without significant debt."

OTEC board member Bob Cargill, chairman of the Scholarship Committee, explains, "We want to encourage our kids to go to EOU—and stay local."

2020 OTEC-EOU Rural Scholarship Recipients



Andrew Lusco

Hometown: John Day; Grant Union High School

Career goal: Math teacher

EOU path: Bachelor's degree in mathematical studies, then master's degree in teaching

Family: Both of his parents are EOU alumni.

Andrew: "This scholarship will allow me to get through school without so much debt. I'm very grateful for this opportunity and how much it's going to help me out. I'm excited to put it to work to earn my degree."



Nathan Reed

Hometown: La Grande; La Grande High School

Career goal: Small-business owner

EOU path: Bachelor's degree in business administration

Family: Both parents and his older siblings attended college.

Nathan: "The phone call from OTEC telling me I got the scholarship was probably the best phone call I ever got. I was ecstatic. I'm super thankful that I grew up in this community with a cooperative like OTEC that gives so much back to the community, helping local kids out in this way."



Emily Inselman

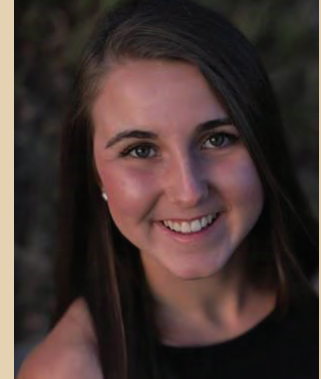
Hometown: Burns; Burns High School

Career goal: Nurse

EOU path: Bachelor's degree in nursing at Oregon Health Science University's nursing program at EOU

Family: Both parents attended college. Emily is the youngest of four children, but first to attend college.

Emily: "I've been thinking about college my whole life. I have so many more opportunities because of this scholarship. The nursing program is one of the best in the state. I'll be able to go to school and won't have to work full time. My dad is so proud of me! As soon as he heard I got the scholarship, he about cried. I'm grateful for this opportunity."



Josie Bornstedt

Hometown: Summerville; La Grande High School

Career goal: Graphic designer

EOU path: Bachelor's degree in art

Family: She is following a family legacy. Both parents graduated from college. Her mother, uncle, grandparents and her great-grandmother are EOU graduates.

Josie: "When I learned I got the scholarship, I was speechless—and grateful. When I was a high school freshman, I wanted to go away to school, but gradually I realized I wanted to stay close to home and attend EOU. I grew up here and I love our caring, generous community. I want to continue to be a part of that."

The cost of funding the scholarship will be split by OTEC and EOU. OTEC's portion will be funded from unclaimed capital credits set aside for youth scholarships.

Through the years, OTEC has awarded local students more than 450 scholarships totaling \$1.4 million. On top of the four OTEC-EOU Rural Scholarships this year, OTEC awards \$5,000 scholarships to 22 high school seniors or returning students,

in addition to funding four trade school and two linemen scholarships. Many of these students attend colleges out of the region or state.

"We wanted to set aside some money for students to attend Eastern Oregon University, which is right in our own neighborhood—and is such an asset to our own communities," says OTEC Board President Charlene Chase. "This scholarship fits nicely with OTEC's

commitment to community."

"We were excited to work with OTEC to partner with them on this new scholarship," Tim says. "This is an example of how two organizations can work together to do something not only for our own organizations, but also for the people we serve." ■

Turn to page 28 to see the other 2020 OTEC college scholarship recipients.



The Changing Stable

Mt. Si Stable is a reminder of older times that has become a modern community hub

Story and photos by Anne Herman

At Mt Si Stable, things change. The property, the community, and the lives of the people and animals who congregate there have all transformed over time.

According to Steve Sieker, Will Hawk and his family built the original log cabin about 100 years ago. The Hawks added the first barn in the early '60s and the building that houses the arena in 1974. The indoor arena is the largest in the Snoqualmie Valley, offering plenty of room for lessons and indoor training. The barn, corrals and horses—and the lifestyle that revolves

around them—represent a rural North Bend that seems to be vanishing as the town grows.

Steve and his partner, Jerry James, bought the property in 2001. They already boarded a horse at the stable when they learned the property was for sale. “We only meant to have a place to keep our horse,” Steve says. “But there were already boarders there. So we kept them on, and over the years things just grew.

“Owning a horse is a lifestyle. It demands total involvement, serious



OPPOSITE: Jerry James, left, and Steve Sieker own and operate the Mt. Si Stable. **ABOVE:** Jerry and his horse Sa'Diek have won many competitions together, and Sa'Diek was inducted into the Washington State Horseman's Hall of Fame in 2012.

commitment.”

Steve grew up going to a barn with his sister. He progressed to leading pony rides at Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, and later lived on a cattle ranch. These days, he rides purely for fun. “It seems like in all parts of my life there have been horses,” Jerry says.

Jerry learned to ride at age 5 on his granddad's plow horse. “I think that's why he's bow-legged,” says Steve, and Jerry laughs. Jerry's background includes almost anything a person can do on a horse. He was a professional rodeo rider for a while, and in his cowboy hat and boots he looks the part. But he also rides English and trained in Europe to do dressage—a style of riding in which the horse performs complex moves with barely visible signals.

He says he once took a two-week vacation in Germany to train with an expert there. “He didn't speak English and I didn't speak German,” Jerry says. “It was interesting.” Jerry has become one of the best-known horsemen in the area.

Jerry's horse, Sa'Diek, is descended from the famous Arabian horse, Witez II. The book “And Miles to Go,” by Linell Smith, describes how Witez II, born in Poland, survived the Nazi, Russian and American invasions and eventually came under protection from General Patton.

Jerry demonstrates Sa'Diek's training in the arena. With no halter or lead rope, Sa'Diek changes gaits and direction with only voice commands from Jerry, and comes when he's called. The pair has won championships in many horse shows together, and in 2012, Sa'Diek was inducted into the Washington State Horseman's Hall of Fame.

Jerry's skill as an instructor attracts clients, and sometimes that leads to changing more lives. Steve tells of a young girl whose family knew nothing about horses when she started taking lessons with Jerry. The girl showed natural talent, and her parents wanted to support her.

She kept taking lessons and started going to horse shows. In 2014, she became a junior champion. Later, when Jerry had health issues, the girl's family took over the business end of Mt. Si Stable for a while. They sponsored 4-H groups and held cookouts and horse shows, turning the stable into more of a community hub. The family eventually bought horses and property in Maple Valley.

That spirit of community lives on, with people boarding their horses at the stable and coming for lessons, bringing their friends and families. Even the elk like to hang out there, grazing on the grass out front and lying on the manure pile in the back. The stable also takes in rescue horses. One of those is G Man, a miniature pony who was abandoned by his owner. “He's our little lawnmower,” Steve says. “We just leave his stall open and let him paddle around. He goes in and takes a nap, then comes back out and cruises around.”

“You own a piece of property and you think it's your place,” Steve says. “But then all these people show up that you've never seen before and you find out it really isn't. It belongs to the boarders.” ■



A Tap-In For Fun

Parkland Putters has 72 unique mini-golf holes that have given many area visitors an enjoyable afternoon out

Story and photos by Rick Stedman

Some form of outdoor playtime will be the first order of business for most as the coronavirus eases its grip. Those lucky enough to live in the Puget Sound region can head to Parkland Putters, a miniature

golf landmark that is ready for more memories to be made.

The iconic putt-putt golf course is located just off Interstate 5 at the intersection of Highway 512 and Steele Street. This Parkland establishment has been a local favorite for more than half a century.

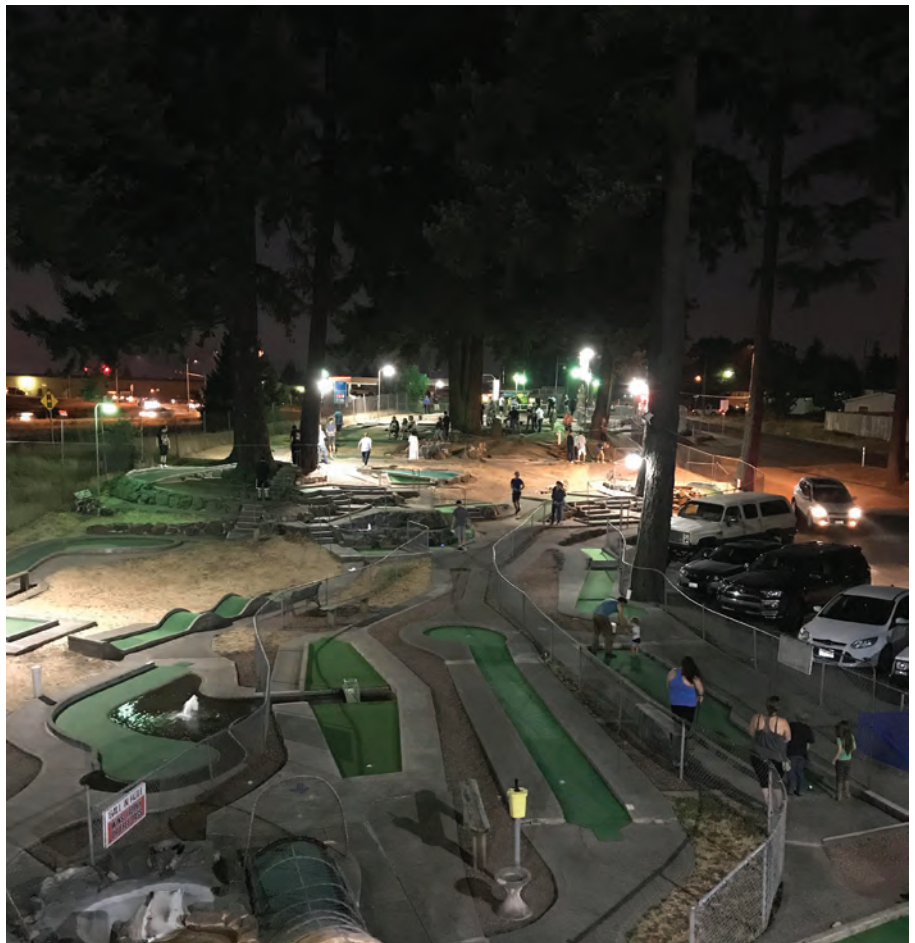
“Parkland Putters has been a family-owned and operated business since it was established in 1967,” says Jessica Garza, Parkland Putters’ operations manager. “In 2015, we heard the owners were considering selling the property, tearing down the putt-putt golf courses, and replacing them with houses. We just

couldn’t let that happen. So, my mom, Chrisie Meyer, bought Parkland Putters and our first full season was 2016.

“We created and generated a lot of interest and excitement about Parkland Putters, and many of the locals were happy to know that this fun place that’s always provided a good time would remain vibrant and available for years to come.”

Parkland Putters is open March through October, weather permitting. The 35,000 to 45,000 annual visitors at Parkland Putters come in all ages and abilities, and have lots of options and challenges to choose from.

“I really like the boat hole, it’s just so much fun,” says KayLee Wiest. “I always



LEFT: Jessica Garza and her family purchased Parkland Putters in 2015, preserving the local landmark established in the 60s. **ABOVE:** Parkland Putters has four 18-hole courses of increasing difficulty, and has between 35,000 and 45,000 visitors annually.

have a great time when I visit.”

What makes Parkland Putters so entertaining is the variety of courses available. Unlike most putt-putt courses that offer just one course, Parkland Putters features four courses.

“Since we rescued this facility from the bulldozer in 2015, we have kept the courses pretty much the same,” Jessica says. “We know that many fond memories have been created here, and we hope to continue that trend for years to come.”

On the last hole of each 18-hole course, golfers can win a free pass or a keepsake trophy to take home, proving to friends and family that you indeed made a hole-in-one!

The Right Course is the easiest of the four. It features easy holes for beginner play. This is also the course where you navigate the boat on one hole, which is a hit with the kids!

The Center Course is considered a medium to easy course. As its name indicates, this course runs directly through the middle of the property, offering a little bit more challenge—though it’s still relatively easy for beginners or children. On one of the last holes, water comes into play. Golfers traverse over a bridge en route to the hole.

The Back Hill Course is where things start to get interesting. Jessica says this track is the medium to hard course. Each hole presents its own challenge, with a hill and other obstacles to tackle.

The Left Course is the hardest and most challenging course at Parkland Putters. This popular course straddles the left side of the property. Golfers must negotiate a sand pit on the first hole. On the back nine, challenges include a curved hill that swirls to a crest where the hole sits on top of a steep mound.

In addition to the putting courses, Parkland Putters offers other amenities, including music, a full snack bar, and a party room in the clubhouse, which has hosted numerous birthday parties and other private functions, including a few wedding proposals.

Parkland Putters also gives back to the community. For the last three years, they have hosted a fundraiser called the Ducky Open. The event benefits Out of the Gray, a nonprofit organization helping caregivers.

“We let them host a putt-putt event for free, and all proceeds made that day go directly to them,” Jessica says.

Jessica says her family had a hand in the mini-golf course before they bought it.

“A few years after buying Parkland Putters, we learned that my grandpa, Bill Sager, helped build some of the courses,” Jessica says. “So, I suppose you could say that it is still a bit owned by our family!” ■



Meeting the Moment

Oregon electric co-ops take extraordinary steps to help their members in extraordinary times

The first in a series on how Oregon electric co-ops are helping their members through the global pandemic.

By Ted Case

Electric co-ops know this is not business as usual. Extreme unemployment, shuttered businesses and school cancellations brought on by the coronavirus have created unprecedented challenges for American families.

Oregon's electric cooperatives have attempted to meet the moment by—among other innovative solutions—providing energy bill assistance, helping

consumers navigate complex federal guidelines for loans and offering broadband to students who otherwise would have no access.

Throughout the state, electric co-ops are enhancing or creating assistance programs to help consumers who are having trouble paying their electric bill. For instance, Salem Electric is supporting members impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic by offering a one-time \$150 bill credit to residential and general service members.

“We’ve heard from numerous members and know the pandemic is hitting them hard,” said Salem Electric Manager Tony Schacher. “We hope the assistance will provide them some relief.”

Salem Electric—like all of Oregon’s electric cooperatives—has suspended any residential disconnections of electric service and is waiving late fees for nonpayment.

Umatilla Electric Cooperative in Hermiston has developed an innovative program for area businesses that need help applying for the federal Economic Injury Disaster Loan and the Paycheck Protection Program. The co-op created the UEC Business Resource Center to provide free assistance to area business owners applying for federal grants and low-interest loans available to businesses experiencing negative effects from COVID-19.

“During this period of uncertainty, I’m pleased the newly developed UEC Business Resource Center can offer assistance to our business community,” said UEC General Manager Robert Echenrode.

“Although we cannot change what is occurring globally, we do have the ability to work toward improving the economic viability of our communities,” added UEC board member Bryan Wolfe. “UEC is committed to this.”

In UEC’s popular online sessions, economic development expert Greg Smith tells consumers he will help them “understand the difference between these programs to give you the best chance of success to your hard-earned tax dollars.”

Access to broadband has been particularly important as schools have shifted toward online learning. However, access to reliable internet is not always an option in many rural and remote areas. Roseburg-based Douglas Electric Cooperative has been working with local school districts to make sure students are not on the wrong side of the digital divide.

The electric co-op’s internet business, Douglas Fast Net, launched a program



called DFN Cares specifically for remote education. It provides two months of free internet service and Wi-Fi to students who do not have access.

“We’ve seen an uptick for needs of students,” Douglas Fast Net CEO Todd Way told The News Review. “Once we realized that it was going to be an extended (school closure), that it wasn’t going to be one or two weeks, we needed to step up.”

By late April, the company had received 70 orders to connect students to the internet.

A similar situation occurred in the Hood River Valley, where the county school district contacted Hood River Electric Cooperative seeking help with providing internet access to low-income student households in small communities such as Odell. General Manager Libby Calnon thought the request offered HREC—which provides fixed-wireless and direct fiber broadband internet service to

ABOVE: UEC Business Resource Center staff Emily Cecil, left, and Ashley Garcia Sandoval help business owners apply for federal grants and low-interest loans available to businesses experiencing negative effects from COVID-19. PHOTO COURTESY OF UMATILLA ELECTRIC CO-OP

OPPOSITE PAGE: Salem Electric Cooperative Manager Tony Schacher described the co-op’s one-time bill credit at its online annual members’ meeting. PHOTO COURTESY OF SALEM ELECTRIC

much of the Hood River Valley—a unique opportunity to help their community. The cooperative has wired about 45 homes for internet that otherwise would not have access.

“We are connecting these homes so these kids don’t miss out on online learning opportunities,” Calnon said.

Calnon said serving those who otherwise would not be served is why cooperatives exist.

“It’s a rewarding project to be a part of,” she said. ■