

Partners in Preservation

Landowners and conservationists join forces for the future

By Jody Foss

Twenty-two years ago, on Thirty Mile Creek in Gilliam County, 13-year-old Herb Winters threw his line into a shady, swampy pool and settled down on the bank to wait for trout to bite. His little sister, Norie, headed down the bank and into the cool stream.

“We were allowed to just take off and wander for the entire day,” Herb says. “We’d go tromp around and hang out on the creek. We had beavers in the creek behind the house. We built tree houses.”

There were plenty of streams, fields and rugged canyons to explore on the 1,000-acre cattle and wheat ranch where Herb’s father was a hired hand.

Now, as district manager of Gilliam Soil and Water Conservation District, Herb says his boyhood years on the ranch taught him a great deal of what he needs to know.

“I already knew where the fish would be and why they would be there,” he says, “whether it was in a deep pool or in shade and cover. That is where a 13-year-old boy goes to catch fish.”

Herb’s grant-writing and restoration skills are being put to good use as he improves the very environment he grew up in. Ranchers and farmers are benefiting as he and his team develop projects that protect and improve fish habitat, ranchlands and watersheds.

Norie is fiscal manager and sets up the contracts for GSWCD. An avid gardener, she also created a park of native grasses and plants in front of the new Condon Service Center.

Roger Lathrop, who works with Herb in the Condon office as Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program technician, encouraged him to apply for a job at the soil and water conservation district in



The Soil and Water Conservation District/Watershed Council works hard to bring conservation to the lower John Day River. Back row from left, Roger Lathrop and Herb Winters. Front row from left, Norie Wright, Kristina Moore and Jessica Gillen. PHOTO COURTESY OF KLYNN LANE

Wheeler County. Herb worked there for 10 years before becoming district manager at GSWCD in Condon.

The district manages stream and fire break plantings, riparian restoration, spring development and fencing where it’s needed. It also creates beaver dam structures to enhance stream beds.

Thanks to federal and state grants recently awarded to the GSWCD, beaver dam analogs are in the future restoration plans for Butte Creek and Thirty Mile Creek in Gilliam and Wheeler counties, which are in the John Day Basin.

“The beaver dam analogs have been an exciting part of the restoration efforts of the soil and water districts,” Herb says. “When I first started, I thought it was the dumbest thing, and now I am one of the biggest advocates of beaver dam structures on these tributaries in the basin. I watched

it change Bridge Creek, a tributary to the John Day River. It went from being a bowling alley to being this swampy mess, which is what you want to see.”

Steelhead studies show the project to be a great success. Fish numbers have increased, and the fish have thrived in the stream.

“Our strategy is to locate the sections of the creeks that go dry every summer,” Herb says. “We start at the upper extent of a dry stretch and start filling it up like a sponge, slowing the water down enough where it has time to soak into the water table and the flood plain. Parts of Bridge Creek were dry creek beds for decades. Now it flows year-round.”

When the John Day Basin Partnership formed in 2015, conservationists and restorationists came together with their ideas and found strength and fiscal support by



Beaver dam analogs are channel-spanning, permeable structures built with woody debris and fill material to form a pond and mimic natural beaver dams. PHOTO COURTESY OF HERB WINTERS

creating a focused investment partnership.

“We were young, efficient and energized,” Herb says.

In 2018, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board awarded the group \$12 million—the highest amount possible—and the partnership group ranked No. 1 in Oregon out of the 10 applicants. The Natural Resources Conservation Service awarded GSWCD another \$3.9 million.

“We worked for about four years on this project,” Herb says. “To be recognized was really exciting.”

Adrienne Averett of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Amy Charette of the Confederated Reservation of the Warm Springs, Damon Brosnan of the Natural Resource Conservation Service and Amanda Martino of Blue Mountain Land Trust were part of the team effort.

Following the grant award, the group started talking about a regional conservation partnership program through the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service to get ranchers and landowners in the room to talk about needs, desires and future projects.

Herb says former Gilliam-East John Day Watershed Coordinator Hanna Fatland was

instrumental in getting the program going.

“She brought 25 local landowners to the table,” he says. “We asked them what they wanted.”

The Butte Creek Watershed, which goes through the Fossil area, and Gilliam’s Thirty Mile Watershed near Condon will benefit from the grants.

“Most of the folks that work at these tiny conservation districts were raised here,” Herb says. “We are able to communicate with the local ranchers and bring them what they want to improve and preserve the land and the water. Once you have that trust and relationship, you can accomplish a lot. I can’t tell you how proud I am that I am able to try to improve the place where I grew up and where I fish.”

Willows, alders and cottonwoods are planted along the streams. In the uplands, it’s elderberries, currants and mock orange.

“Where there is water, the trees regenerate,” Herb explains, “and where there’s no water, we will install beaver dam analogs to increase the flow.”

One of Herb’s goals is to figure out how to get beavers back into the streams.

“They would help us make it through the severe drought years to come,” he

says. “They used to live all through these ranches. It was a swampy mess and fish thrived in it. So did the beavers.”

Those working on the restoration projects will develop springs for stock water troughs and plant vegetative fire breaks using certain plants that slow raging prairie fires. They hope to develop sites to store thousands of gallons of water to fight blazes and develop software programs that help rural fire departments by making it easier to locate roads, gates and available water sources.

“I don’t have any problem getting out of bed every day,” Herb says. “I love what I do. I feel about as fortunate as I could being able to do what I love and to help the people I grew up with. It’s so rewarding. And these projects bring jobs into the communities.”

Herb, his wife, Chelsea, and their four children—Carlee, Owen, Layne and Scarlett—live in Fossil.

“Every summer I take my four kids down to Thirty Mile to fish for trout,” Herb says.

They sit on the bank together, throw in their lines and wait. ■



Casey McCleary, second from left, is part of three generations of McClearys in the line trade. PHOTOS COURTESY OF CASEY MCCLEARY

On to New Adventures

Wasco Electric Cooperative operations manager calls it a career after 37 years

By Andrew Cutler

Casey McCleary comes from a long line of linemen. His father, uncle and brother were linemen. He has a son who has joined the industry as a lineman, and he has nephews in the business.

“It’s pretty big in our family,” says Casey, Wasco Electric Cooperative operations manager.

While Casey has plenty of relatives to carry on the family tradition, he is coming to the end of the line with his time in the industry. After 37 years—the first 11 as a journeyman lineman and the last 26 as the operations manager—Casey is retiring.

“It’s been a great job, it really has,” Casey says. “It’s had its moments, of course, just like any job, right?”

As operations manager for Wasco Electric Cooperative, which covers 5,000 square miles in five counties, the heart of Casey’s job is to make sure when any of the cooperative’s 3,000 member-owners flip a light switch or plug in a piece of machinery, there is power.

Getting Into the Business

Originally from Gresham, Casey went through an apprenticeship program in the construction trade and worked in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana prior to arriving in The Dalles in 1983. He says his plans didn’t include spending 37 years in the Columbia River Gorge.

“There was a downturn in the economy in 1983 and there weren’t many jobs available,” he says. “There was a journeyman opening at Wasco Electric in

The Dalles. We were going to come for one or two years, and then we got here and decided we liked it. We’ve been here ever since.”

Casey didn’t get into the business intending to work his way up to a management position. But when the position opened, he thought the skills he learned as a lineman could be helpful as operations manager.

“I thought I had the experience from the outside that I could bring into the position,” he says. “There were some things that I thought needed to be done differently. I thought with that knowledge I could facilitate some of that change.”

But his family—especially those who were linemen—was skeptical of the move. Casey says he wasn’t uninvited to Christmas dinner for moving from the unionized world of linemen to the un-unionized management position, but his family offered some words of advice.

“They told me to not forget the crews and remember where you came from,” he says.

Upgrading the System

During Casey’s time as operations manager, the cooperative has made significant upgrades to the system, including substation upgrades, system reclosures, upgrading regulators and as many as 10 distribution circuit rebuilds.

Casey says the bulk of the major system improvements started to take shape in 1996 and 1997. The improvements made the system more reliable, therefore cutting down on prolonged system outages.

“That’s probably one of the things that I strive for the most—system reliability,” he says. “There used to be way more outages, extended outages and more frequent outages than what we have now.”

Casey is proud of how far the cooperative has come in improving its system. Looking back, however, he says when he assumed the management position, he was not prepared for the task of mapping out how to improve the cooperative’s system.

“I went inside thinking, ‘I’m just going to run the line crews’ and realized later on that there was way more to the job than meets the general eye,” he says.

Flood Tests Cooperative, System

While improving system reliability is a goal of any cooperative, Mother Nature can throw curveballs. Casey has had several curveballs thrown his way in 26 years, but two stand out in his mind for the way they affected WEC and its members.

The first was the floods of February 1996, when the Deschutes and John Day rivers—along with the little streams and creeks that flow into those rivers—flooded, leaving much of Wasco Electric Cooperative’s territory underwater.

“They called it a 100-year flood or a century flood,” he says. “We had like 80% of our system out at one point.”

Casey says getting crews around the territory to reset power poles and reroute lines was a challenge with so



Casey and his wife, Shawn.

many washed out roads.

“Just getting to stuff was kind of a major event,” he says. “The flooding was pretty widespread.”

Rebuilding from the flooding lasted approximately three weeks. For cooperative employees, it was all hands on deck.

“We brought in crews from other utilities and contract crews to help us,” Casey says. “It kept us busy, that’s for sure.”

Wildfires Burn Summer of 2018

Casey and the cooperative were put to the test during the summer of 2018 when nearly 250,000 acres in Wasco and Sherman counties were consumed by wildfires.

“We had, it seems, like three months’ worth of fires,” Casey says. “We bounced from one to the other trying to make sure our system stayed intact as best we could. It pretty much consumed the summer.”

Wasco Electric Cooperative crews replaced nearly 200 power poles and miles of burned and damaged line caused by multiple blazes throughout the cooperative’s service territory. It was a big mission for the co-op’s five linemen. For nearly a month, the linemen fought fires, dug holes and set power poles and line for 18 hours straight, then went home for a

quick rest before returning.

“The idea is to restore services as quickly as possible to as many people as you can,” Casey says.

Casey says he remains proud of how the cooperative and its people responded in the face of the emergency.

“It’s always been that way,” he says. “The employees always step up to whatever is needed at the time.”

Nothing Stays the Same

The biggest changes Casey has experienced in his career are the advancements in technology. The cooperative is transitioning to using digital maps stored on tablets and computers—a far cry from Casey’s first days as operations manager.

“When I first walked into the office as the operations manager, there were no computers,” he says. “There were none for personnel. There was a main billing computer and a few terminals for the billing department.”

Casey says as the cooperative has adopted new technology, the hard work and rewards of a lineman career have not changed.

“Those techniques haven’t really changed,” he says. “The crews still go out, set poles and build power lines. It’s made our jobs better, easier and safer, but not changed them.”

Life After the Cooperative

Casey and his wife, Shawn, have three children and five grandchildren. In retirement, Casey plans to spend time visiting family in a recently purchased RV and pickup.

“One of our daughters lived in Arizona,” he says. “We want to travel down there. We want to go back to Yellowstone again, and Montana. We just want to do some sightseeing.”

Casey says his electric cooperative career was a rewarding journey, whether it was working out in the field or managing it all back in the office.

“I like interacting between the crews and the office and our members,” he says. “I really like member interaction. That’s always been something that I’ve enjoyed.” ■

Emma Stutzman and her lamb, Steel, check out the photos and videos they made for the Douglas County Lamb Show's online presentation. Because the live show was canceled by the coronavirus, National FFA Organization and 4-H Club students had to show their lambs online. PHOTO COURTESY OF EMMA STUTZMAN



4-H, FFA Livestock Go Online

With auctions and bidding canceled, kids go high-tech to show their animals

By Craig Reed

There was no show ring and auction appearance for Emma Stutzman and her lamb in June. In August, there will be no show ring and auction for Riley Stutzman and Joseph Buchholz and their respective pigs. The same goes for Leah Silva and her steer.

The COVID-19 pandemic and Gov. Kate Brown's stay-at-home order resulted in cancellation of the Douglas County Lamb Show on June 6 and the Douglas

County Fair scheduled August 4-8. Traditionally, National FFA Organization and 4-H Club students show and auction about 250 lambs, 150 pigs and 50 steers at those events.

Despite the 2020 health crisis, the efforts of Emma, Riley, Joseph and Leah—and the many others around Douglas County who have been feeding, watering and working with their animals the past few months—are not being ignored.

The market committee for the Roseburg Rotary Club that organizes the auctions set up a virtual online show for the lambs and is working on something similar for the pigs and steers in August.

"When the kids found out the lamb show was canceled, they were really disappointed," says Denny Quinby, chairman of the Douglas County Lamb Show. "Luckily,

the adults didn't give up. The Rotary Club and a lot of people stepped it up to make a virtual show happen."

"From the Rotary standpoint, we're always here to support the kids of Douglas County and the world," says Sam Lee of Roseburg Rotary Club. "We had to find a way for the kids to sell their animals—a way that was accessible and equitable for them."

Teresa Middleton, the 4-H education coordinator for Douglas County, agrees there has been disappointment, "but everyone I've heard from is also thankful there is an option," she says.

The show set up for the kids with lambs required each youngster to take a few still photos and a short video of their animal. Those were then submitted online, and a judge graded the animal on its

conformation, awarding blue ribbons for premium lambs or a red to lambs with less conformation.

At the same time, FFA, 4-H and Rotary staff spread the word about the online show and accepted donations that were pooled. Kids with blue-ribbon lambs were awarded a set monetary amount from that pool, and those with red-ribbon lambs received less. The animals earned a price per head, not by the pound, as would be the case in an auction with bidding.

“To earn that premium rate is a way to encourage the kids to stay with their projects,” says Wes Crawford, FFA adviser at Sutherlin High School. “The kids will also receive online written feedback about their animal from the judge. That’s important in their learning experience about raising an animal.”

The kids say they understand why this process has been necessary this year.

“A lot of people attend the auction, and the virus may infect some of those people,” says Emma, who is a member of the Olalla Kountry Kids 4-H Club.

“The fair is something I look forward to, but I understand the circumstances,” says Riley, Emma’s older brother. “Hopefully, there’ll be something like the lamb show because we’ve worked really hard with these pigs.”

Conditions vary, but the cost of buying a lamb, feeding it and allowing for other expenses can average around \$500. The expense of a market pig can be \$700 to \$1,000, and the total for a market steer can be \$2,500 or more.

“We hope to get the kids at least a little more than market value so they don’t lose money on their animals,” Sam says. “We’re taking donations from the public to help these kids out. There’s been no blueprint for this, but the community has been supportive.”

“The market committee has agreed to put together a way to market the hogs and steers. We’ll definitely make something happen.”

Steve Silva, leader of the Calapooia 4-H Club in north Douglas County, says that club had 13 kids with lambs, 10 members with steers, and three with pigs. He says club members are disappointed with the



Because this year’s Douglas County Fair was canceled, Leah Silver, left, and Joseph Buchholz will show their animals online with photos and videos. PHOTO COURTESY OF LEAH SILVER AND JOSEPH BUCHHOLZ

cancellations of their respective events, but they are excited to still be able to showcase their animals, even if it is online.

Steve says he emphasizes to club members who take on animal projects that raising livestock is a risk.

“When the kids sign up, I’m very realistic with them and explain anything could happen to their animals, that there are no guarantees,” he says. “It’s a tough reality, but the value of the experience is better than the paycheck. It’s OK to sacrifice a little money so the kids have this opportunity. The paycheck is a bonus. They are earning experience, and with that comes knowledge.”

Steve says the 73 kids in the Calapooia 4-H Club have seen the hurt created in their community by COVID-19 and the subsequent shutdowns of many businesses. Their schools have been closed since mid-March, resulting in online learning. That has given them a better understanding of



Riley Stutzman works with his pig, Torque, in preparation for making a video that will feature the two. PHOTO COURTESY OF RILEY STUTZMAN

why the live animal shows and auctions have been canceled.

Steve is confident this unique situation can be a learning experience.

“Kids who are in 4-H and FFA, they are leaders of our future,” he says. “They get so many more experiences through these programs. There may be a lot of heartache through all this, but they’re going to learn through the experience.” ■

Wildfire Evacuation Guide

Level 1: READY

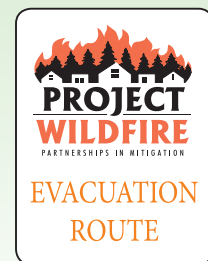
- Level 1 means **BE READY** for potential evacuation. There is a fire in your local area.
- Prepare for any family with special needs, mobile property, and pets or livestock.
- Monitor local social media, news and radio for information.
- Emergency Personnel may contact you via an emergency notification system.

Level 2: SET

- Level 2 means **BE SET** to evacuate. You must be prepared to leave at a moment's notice.
- Level 2 stands for significant danger in your area. Load your **5Ps (People, Pets, Pills, Photos, Important Papers)** and **72-Hour Kit** into the car.
- Relocate to a specified shelter (if activated) or with family/friends outside the affected area.
- You **MAY** have time to gather necessary items, but you must be prepared to leave at a moments notice.
- If you have time, when leaving your home, write **EVACUATED** on a pillow case and hang it at the end of your driveway.
- **THIS MAY BE THE ONLY NOTICE.**

Level 3: GO

- Level 3 means **GO**, evacuate **NOW**. Leave immediately.
- The danger in your area is current, and you should evacuate immediately.
- **DO NOT** delay leaving to gather any belongings or make efforts to protect your home.
- Obey orders of law enforcement and fire department officials.
- Drive calmly and with special attention to emergency vehicles.
- Do not block access to roadways for emergency vehicles or other evacuees.
- **THIS WILL BE THE LAST NOTICE YOU WILL RECEIVE.**



CENTRAL ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE, INC.

Source: Deschutes County Sheriff's Office

Prepare for Wildfires

By Courtney Cobb

As Central Oregon enters another wildfire season, residents can take easy steps to prepare.

Boone Zimmerlee, adapted communities coordinator for Deschutes County Fire, says an essential step requires people to improve the defensible space around their homes.

Residents should focus on three zones: immediate zone (the home and 0 to 5 feet), intermediate zone (5 to 30 feet) and extended zone (30 to 100 feet).

“It’s important to start at the house and work your way out,” Boone says. “This work includes reducing fuels, especially ladder fuels.”

Ladder fuels are fuels that can carry a fire burning in low-growing vegetation to taller vegetation. Reducing fuels involves thinning or removing trees and brush, picking up pine needles and finer fuels, such as dead leaves and grass.

Boone refers people to their local fire department and sources such as FireFree.org—a grassroots community program born after a devastating Central Oregon fire in the late 1990s. In addition to providing FireFree 10 Steps—steps to protect your home from being destroyed or damaged by wildfire—the program offers events for residents to recycle yard debris for free or at a reduced price.

Sgt. Nathan Garibay, Deschutes County Sheriff’s Office emergency manager, emphasizes limiting ignition sources, especially in hot, dry months.

“Be careful with an open flame such as barbecues, burning, fireworks, etc.,” he

Wildfire Planning Resources

▶ How to prepare: Firefree.org, Projectwildfire.org, Firewise.org, centraloregonfire.org or fireadaptednetwork.org

▶ Emergency kits: <https://sheriff.deschutes.org/divisions/special-services/emergency-management/before-a-disaster-emergency-preparedness> or www.projectwildfire.org/kit

▶ Pet/animal evacuations: www.petevacuationteam.com/about.html

▶ Business preparedness tips: www.projectwildfire.org/businesstips

▶ Register for emergency alerts: www.alertcrookcounty.org; Deschutesalerts.org; www.jeffco.net/sheriff/page/citizen-emergency-notification-system

says. “Limit chainsaw use, brush cutting and mowing dry grass, especially after mid-morning to late morning or when fire agencies indicate fire danger is high or extreme.”

Plan Ahead

Planning and preparing now can save you valuable time when an emergency arises.

“Since we live in a fire-adapted ecosystem, it is not a matter of if, but when, a fire is in our backyard,” Boone says. “This can and does happen quite unexpectedly. The more we can prepare, the better our response will be.”

Critical to preparation is knowing the ins and outs of your neighborhood to evacuate, making special arrangements for animals, and creating a 72-hour kit, also known as a go-bag.

The bag should include food, water, medicine, emergency essentials and copies

of important documents, such as credit and identification cards.

See the pullout box for links on kits and more information.

Boone also recommends staying connected with friends and neighbors, and sharing information and plans with them.

Evacuation: Ready, Set, Go

Oregon has a statewide program called Ready, Set, Go. When the Ready (level 1) notice is issued, residents are encouraged to be prepared and have a plan to evacuate.

When bumped up to Set (level 2), residents need to be prepared to leave. This level means there is a significant danger in the area, and residents should load their go-bag in the car and be ready for departure. If time permits before leaving, write “evacuated” on a pillowcase and hang it near the end of your driveway to let emergency personnel know everyone has left.

If the Go (level 3) notice is issued, all citizens should evacuate immediately, with no time to grab emergency kits or make efforts to protect property.

Boone says the program helps prepare citizens, and clearly outlines the steps to take when a wildfire occurs.

“Having this plan aids in orderly evacuation along with helping to calm nerves,” he says.

Nathan encourages people to register for their local emergency notification system.

“It helps emergency services notify you if there is a need to evacuate,” he says. “Each county in Central Oregon has an opt-in system that allows people to register for critical alerts.” ■

WOOF WOOF



Dog-friendly businesses make summer days more fun

By Kelsey Bozeman

If spending quality time with your furry friends is one of your favorite activities, you are in good company.

Hello, fellow dog lovers!

Any place you visit is often more fun when your four-legged companion is by your side. A furry friend's excitement over the places they want to go often motivates us to get out and explore.

If you're seeking a tail-wagging jaunt, grab your leash and prepare for an adventure. From parks to dog

treat bakeries and beaches, the Southern Oregon Coast has many amazing places to visit.

To get you started, here are three places on the Southern Oregon Coast to be admired by owners and dogs alike.

Brookings Dog Park

Topping our dog-friendly list is the newly built dog park in Brookings. The yet-to-be-named park is an easy jaunt past the front gate of Chetco Point Park and is accessible by foot or paw.

Open from dawn to dusk, the park is approximately a half acre. It features fenced areas for both timid and more boisterous dogs, allowing your furry friends to enjoy the facilities regardless of their energy level.

Amenities include a restroom facility for humans and doggy bags to clean up after your furry friends.

Future additions will include a dog-friendly water feature, an obstacle course and picnic tables.

Best of all, this park

overlooks stunning views of the rugged shoreline and the Pacific Ocean.

"This is one of the most beautiful dog parks you'll find on the West Coast," says Jay Trost, city of Brookings Public Works director.

The mixture of incredible views and off-leash activities is a nonstop festivity for dogs and owners alike.

Woof's Dog Bakery

Next on the list is Woof's Dog Bakery in Brookings and Gold Beach. These family-owned independent stores offer human-grade homemade baked treats for your furry friends in a variety of fun shapes and sizes.

There is also a wide selection of anything your dog might need, such as toys, beds, bowls and food. The owners and staff are experts in natural food and supplies for your dog.

A self-serve dog wash offers all the soaps and tools you need to have your dog looking



Your dog will bark for joy at Woof's Dog Bakery.



ABOVE: The Brookings Dog Park offers fenced space for dogs to run and make new friends.

LEFT: Arizona State Beach offers a sheltered beach that is often less crowded than other area offerings.

fabulous.

Woof's Dog Bakery is a member of Coos-Curry Electric Cooperative's Co-op Connections Card program. Get a 10% discount when you show your Co-op Connections Card. It's free to join at www.connections.coop.

Don't forget to visit one of the dog-friendly businesses in Brookings such as Dutch Bros. for a pick-me-up drink for you and a puppuccio for Fido before you head north on Highway 101.

Arizona Beach State Park

No list of dog-friendly places would be complete without Arizona Beach State Park outside of Port Orford.

This dog-friendly beach received its name from the

warm temperatures that are unusual for the Oregon Coast.

Two-thirds of a mile of sandy beach is sheltered from the wind by two rocky headlands. The park is 68 acres, leaving lots of space for you and your No. 1 companion to roam.

This park requires dogs to remain on a 6-foot lead and is perfect for letting your dog romp through the sand and ocean. Arizona State Beach offers fewer crowds than other state parks in the region, making it the perfect place to enjoy some one-on-one time.

Hopefully this list of tail-wagging places gives you and your enthusiastic furry friends a peek into the variety of places in the area to enjoy on any given day, rain or shine.



Check out all the great things the Southern Oregon Coast has to offer for you and your dog. ■



Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District Training Chief Will Steinweg, Fire Chief Joe Kaczinski and Division Chief Nick Berg from the Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD discuss training tactics and logistics during a joint wildland firefighting drill in May.

Preparing for Wildfire

As wildfire season gets underway in Columbia County and across Oregon, the Vernonia Fire District takes part in a joint wildfire drill

Story and photos by Scott Laird

Summer in Oregon means many things, but for the firefighters of the Clatskanie Rural Fire Protection District, summer means wildfire season.

According to the Office of Oregon State Fire Marshal, in 2017 Oregon had one of the worst wildfire seasons in recent memory when more than 380,000 acres burned in 218 separate incidents.

The next two years saw more incidents, but fewer total acres burned: more than 90,000 acres in 306 incidents in 2018, and almost 78,000 acres in 258 incidents in 2019.

Close to home, in July 2017 a 30-acre wildfire broke out near Highway 47 on privately owned timberland protected

by the Oregon Department of Forestry, about 5 miles south of Clatskanie. CRFPD responded, along with multiple other agencies, and helped contain that blaze.

In 2019, an 8-acre wildfire within the Clatskanie Fire District boundaries erupted in early August and had to be contained.

CRFPD also responded to a 17-acre fire the same summer.

Overall, Columbia County had eight wildfire incidents in 2019.

Those numbers are why, in mid-May this year, the Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District participated in a wildland firefighting drill in coordination with CRFPD and Mist-Birkenfeld Rural Fire Protection District.



In a wildland fire, firefighters locate a nearby water source, transport the water to the site of the blaze and store the water in a portable tank before pumping it into hoses used to control the flames.

The wildland fire drill began with a briefing for all agencies at VRFPD headquarters at 8 a.m. Volunteers, officers and staff were taught safety and potential hazards, and were given their assignments to fight the controlled and prescribed wildland fire.

The participating fire districts' apparatus were staged and then alerted by C-Com—the county emergency dispatch system—to a training exercise brush fire on recently logged and replanted private timberland near milepost 10 on Apiary Road. Water tenders, brush rigs and command rigs from all three districts were activated and moved into position at the scene.

Clatskanie RFPD Training Officer Gabe Wiggins served as incident commander for the drill. Mist-Birkenfeld Chief Joe Kaczenski served as safety officer, and Division Chief Nick Berg

was the coordinator and property liaison. Vernonia's Training Chief Will Steinweg oversaw operations, and Rob Davis served as public information officer.

During the drill, members of the Banks Fire District were in Vernonia to provide local coverage in the event of an emergency.

Upon arrival, volunteers were instructed in the proper techniques to cut a handline by digging and clearing the brush down to bare dirt in a circle about 3 feet wide around several burning slash piles of wooded debris, which were lit for the drill.

Other volunteers worked to lay out a progressive hose line, with 200 feet of trunk line—the main supply for the hose line—and with 100-foot lateral hoses with nozzles to provide several options for reaching and controlling the fire.

Meanwhile, a nearby water source was established. Water was pumped into water tenders, transported to the site, emptied into portable water tanks and pumped to the hoses. The incident command team practiced communication and logistics among agencies.

"In a real situation, the first firefighters on scene would work on setting up our progressive hose line first and then follow with a handline around it," Will says. "That

Stay Smart, Stay Safe

The Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District reminds everyone to be cautious about summer wildfires. One way to protect private property is to create a defensible space around any structures. The area should be at least 30 feet wide and landscaped and clear of debris so fire can't travel through it quickly.

way we can knock down the main flame of the fire and then line around it. It's really good for us to work on our line-building skills, because that is the main work of wildland firefighting."

Often in logging areas, firefighters might use nearby equipment—such as a dozer or loader—to help build the line.

"None of the fire districts in Columbia County are big enough to handle a major emergency all by ourselves," Gabe says. "We all work with and assist each other on these types of calls. So these chances to train together ahead of time makes it much more comfortable. When someone shows up from another agency, it's a familiar face. We learn what apparatus different agencies have and their capabilities. We have a little better idea about how things are going to go, so when we're working a real call, we're already familiar with each other from that training environment." ■

SURPRISE VALLEY



A Different Brand of Work

**Story and photos
by Jean Bilodeaux**

In old cowboy movies, there's usually a scene where the bad guys rustle some cattle. The good guy rides in and saves the day, and the cattle.

That was then, but what about now? Does that sort of thing happen today?

One man in Modoc County knows the answer to that question. Tony Frutuozo is a brand inspector for the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Animal Health and Food Safety Services.

"I was a little hesitant about even applying for the job, but Jack Grove and Shorty Crabtree (former brand inspectors) encouraged me and became my mentors."

Tony's job is to protect cattle owners in California against loss of animals by theft, straying or misappropriation. He inspects cattle that are sold or transferred to a new owner or when cattle are moved out of state, to auctions, feedlots or slaughter.

Tony is one of two full-time brand inspectors in California. The other is in San Luis Obispo County in central California.

Tony started his career as a cowboy on a ranch, then as a ranch manager. He has been a brand inspector for the past 20 years.

He and his wife, Kendra, live on a ranch south of Cedarville.

Tony's territory includes

Modoc County and all Bureau of Land Management allotments, Modoc National Forest and parts of Lassen County. Until a few years ago, he was also the brand inspector for northern Nevada.

"I'm not too busy in the spring," Tony says. "There's usually just a few head to inspect at a time. In the fall, things change. Then, at times, I will inspect up to 7,000 head a week."

When confronted with huge numbers of cattle, Tony calls in part-time brand inspectors.

Tony recently inspected 20 cattle on three different ranches.

"One of the great things about being a brand inspector is that you get to visit all the ranches," he says. "It's interesting to see the outfits that have really nice cattle and learn how they raise them."

In huge herds, each cow is inspected, usually while being herded through a chute. If there's a question, Tony marks the animal and examines it later.

The seller must furnish proof of legal ownership of each head. Proof of ownership may include a recorded brand registered in the name of the person selling the animal, a brand inspection certificate, a bill of sale from the owner of the brand on the animal or, if unbranded, a bill of sale describing the animal.

There are many other laws pertaining to cattle:

- It is a misdemeanor to



ABOVE: Tony Frutuozo is one of two full-time brand inspectors in California. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Tony spends his days visiting ranches and ensuring cattle branding laws are followed.

willfully or negligently allow livestock to be unattended upon a public road.

- There are various special inspection permits and fees required on cattle.

- An owner may recover four times the value of the cattle, plus interest and reasonable expenses, from one who has wrongfully taken, killed or driven cattle off its usual range.

- Any person that is not the owner or does not have the right of possession of any cattle that is found driving such cattle off its usual range, without the consent of the owner, is guilty of grand theft.

Brand inspectors have the right to impound any animal that does not comply with these and other laws.

There are nearly 22,000 brands registered in California, and two full-time

and 48 part-time inspectors looking at more than 3.2 million head annually. The program is funded entirely through brand registration and inspection fees paid by cattle owners.

Cattle rustling still happens.

Sometimes the brand on the animal is smudged, as if another brand has been branded over the original. Sometimes there's no proof of ownership. When confronted with these discrepancies, there usually is an excuse.

"I know of a few ranchers that at times can't provide me with proof of ownership or the brand is difficult to read," Tony says. "Mostly, they just tell me there's been a mistake. Through the years, I have found that certain ranchers make more mistakes than others. I watch them more carefully." ■

LEADERSHIP SKILLS



Lane Electric board president brings her people skills to the boardroom

By Craig Reed

Susan Knudsen Obermeyer readily admits she's always had a fear of electricity just because she didn't know much about it.

But she does know about working with people, having served in various capacities for the U.S. Forest Service in the Oakridge/Westfir area for 35 years. She has also been involved in numerous community service projects.

When Susan received a postcard encouraging her to apply for an upcoming vacancy on the Lane Electric Cooperative Board of Directors for the Oakridge District, she wasn't sure how to respond. With additional encouragement from a second postcard with the same invitation, she applied.

After interviews with the co-op, she was selected in December 2013 from six applicants to fill the position.

"I know about working with people, working in groups," Susan says. "I knew I could learn about electricity. I figured I might have something I could contribute."

Seven years later, the 65-year-old Forest Service retiree is now in her third year as the board's president.

"I have leadership skills that I previously used as a supervisor with the U.S. Forest Service and as president of the (Oakridge) school board and that I can now use as president of the co-op board," Susan says. "I've learned a lot about electricity. I've taken fundamental electricity courses.

But I probably spend more time and energy taking board classes, how to run meetings, managing policy, making sure bylaws are in place, making decisions and making sure we have the time, money and people to do upcoming projects."

Kathy Keable, the board's vice president, speaks highly of Susan and her leadership skills. The two have known each other for years, having met while working on Forest Service projects. Kathy worked in the McKenzie District.

"I think Susan has done a great job making decisions for the co-op," Kathy says. "She always keeps in mind what is

best for the members when it comes to board decisions.

"She always hears from every board member. She listens to people. That's a great skill to have, not just in personal conversations, but in group discussions."

Susan says initially she figured being a board member would be a part-time job. She now admits it takes a lot of work. In her first year in 2014, she attended a national conference and discovered most co-op board members are retirees because they have the time to attend meetings, read and study information, and make decisions on behalf of their members.

In her seven years on the board, Susan has participated in the hiring of two general managers for the co-op, endured along with the rest of the staff and members the major snow event of 2019 and the subsequent extended power outages, and is now dealing with the "Stay at home, stay safe" order caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It has been challenging," Susan says of the situation.



LEFT: Susan Knudsen Obermeyer takes a moment with her granddaughter June while helping out with the 2017 Christmas basket program.

BELOW: Susan presented Dave Ramsey with his Lane Electric Member of the Year award at the 2019 annual meeting.



The co-op's monthly board meetings have been held online, but not all of the board members have been able to get on video. All have had audio access.

Susan's quarterly talk with General Manager Debi Wilson was also online.

"I really appreciate the leadership Susan brings to the cooperative," Debi says. "She faces challenges head on and is not satisfied until an issue has been seen all the way through."

Susan says she is thankful power to members' meters has not been disrupted during this time.

Susan says her goals include keeping electricity rates as low and as sustainable as possible, being prepared for lengthy power outages and improving broadband service to co-op members.

"Everybody would like free electricity," she says with a laugh. "But it doesn't work that way. Cost of supplies and equipment go up. Wages go up. The board has to balance those factors and do the best job we can regarding rates and services for our members.

"Being on the board has been fun, interesting and also sometimes frustrating.

Serving Her Hometown

Susan is no stranger to community service and doing the kind of work the co-op board position requires. Serving her home community of Oakridge is near and dear to her heart.

Susan was born and raised in Oakridge, graduating from Oakridge High School in 1973. She took classes at Lane Community College in Eugene and went to work for the U.S. Forest Service in 1974, initially as a seasonal worker in the Oakridge District. It wasn't long before her energy and work ethic on the job earned her a full-time position.

Eventually, Susan cruised, appraised and laid out timber sales. She became the timber pre-sale supervisor. She retired in 2011 as the operations staff officer for the district's timber division.

Susan also found time to serve 12 years on the Oakridge School Board and took a turn as chairwoman. She and her husband, Bob, have a son and a daughter. Both went through the Oakridge school system.

Susan also coordinated and organized the Senior Citizens' Christmas Basket Program and the Oakridge Mini-Olympics program, and helped at the outdoor school program for students. She and Bob are on the Oakridge Museum Board.

During her Forest Service career, Susan was a steward for the Forest Service union. She continues to serve on the Oregon State Forestry Advisory Committee for Western Oregon, and is a member and the treasurer for the Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative Board.

We don't always agree in our discussions and decision-making, but we still like each other at the end of the day. That's important." ■



Born to Be a Rancher

Pam Detering loves her job

By Craig Reed

With white clouds scattered across the blue sky overhead, Pam Detering sits on an ATV in a green pasture and talks about her passion for cattle.

She is in her element, in her favorite place. Her herd of 100 purebred Black Angus cows graze on the green grass around her.

"I love the cows," she says.

"I think I was born to do this. Sitting here on an ATV among the cattle ... it's a beautiful scene."

Pam was born into the cattle industry. Her parents, Bill and Lois Stevenson, owned and operated the Knee Deep Cattle Co. of Coburg. She helped on that ranch as soon as she was able.

Liz Stevenson, Pam's younger sister, agrees the ranching lifestyle is perfect for Pam.

"She has loved cows and horses all her life," Liz says. "She was born into it and has

always been riding horses and taking care of cattle."

Liz remembers during their teenage years when Pam got on a barn roof despite a broken leg and shoveled snow off of it so it wouldn't collapse on the livestock taking shelter under it.

"Everything she did was about taking care of her cows and horses," Liz says.

Pam and her husband, Ron, own the Rock'n D Ranch a few miles northwest of Junction City. Pam manages the cattle side of the ranch and Ron the grass seed side. They help each

other out when the workload requires an extra hand or two.

Lois, now 92, also helps Pam with the cattle.

"Mom is still cowboying on a Honda," Pam says.

Jac, a border collie and "a good cow dog," is the final member of the daily work crew, helping move the cattle from pasture to pasture as Pam uses a rotational grazing program over 100 acres to keep the herd on fresh grass.

"The industry is changing all the time," Pam says. "I've been learning all the time. I've



TOP: Pam Detering and her mother, Lois Stevenson, who still works the ranch. **ABOVE:** Pam with her beloved cattle. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Pam and Jac keep watch on the herd.

learned to efficiently graze the grass I have, to build up the soil's organic matter. The cows are moved almost every day and the pasture rotation is about every 21 days."

Pam focuses on producing quality purebred Black Angus bulls and heifers. She partners with Donald Fleckenstein of Dynamite Farms in Brownsville. They host a bull and heifer sale on the second Saturday each March at the Rock'n D Ranch. Through the years, Rock'n D bulls and heifers have found homes on ranches around Oregon, California and Washington.

"There's a need for good quality genetic bulls," Pam says.

"I've probably been at it the longest in the valley."

Pam has been an avid student of and user of genetics as that aspect has become more prevalent in the cattle industry.

"A few years back, you could genetically map animals," she says. "We go the extra mile and DNA our cattle so we know their parentage, we know their tenderness, their birth weight, their weaning weight, their marbling.

"Folks are looking for cattle that can make it on grass, and most of my customers want docility in their cattle,—cattle that are easy to handle, easy to be around," she adds. "It's in their genetics."

"I love the cows. I think I was born to do this. Sitting here on an ATV among the cattle ... it's a beautiful scene."

—PAM DETERING

Pam has been a member of the Willamette Valley Grazing Group for 10 years. The knowledge gained through that group has helped her be efficient in growing pasture grass.

"She's always learning about new ideas and concepts," Liz says of her sister. "She's very detailed in her knowledge about cattle. I'm amazed by it."

Pam has always been willing to stay up with the latest trends.

After graduating from Sheldon High School in Eugene in 1968, she attended and graduated from Oregon State University in Corvallis in 1973 with a degree in animal science. She worked on the university's Berry Creek Ranch during her college years and lived at the beef farm during the summers to take care of the livestock.

She was the only female on the OSU Farm Service Agency crew that provided workers for maintenance jobs around the school's livestock facilities.

"I was the only girl, but it was fun," Pam recalls. "I think I was one of the first women to go into production agriculture in the real world."

She remembers that getting a ranch job was difficult after graduation because she was female, but finally she was

hired by a ranch in Eastern Oregon and then later by a ranch in Utah. In 1977, she returned home and married Ron, who owned the Rock'n D.

Ron had a small herd of purebred Angus, but he also grew some grass seed and had a major vegetable operation, with contracts to provide those crops to Agri-Pac. Pam took over management of the cattle and increased the herd size, and Ron concentrated on the farm crops.

When Agri-Pac shut down, Ron turned his side of the business into all grass seed.

"This is all I ever wanted to do," Pam says. "It's always a challenge, putting all the pieces together to be successful. I go to sleep thinking about it and wake up thinking about it.

"We've taken mediocre ground and now it's teeming with life. Cows are a part of that. We're big on grass-fed beef. It's quality. It's wonderful."

Liz, who is a hospital administrator, says she's never seen anyone more dedicated to a profession than her sister.

"Some people have jobs," Liz says. "Pam has a calling. This is what she does and she's really good at it. That's a joy of having her as a sister, somebody who really loves her job." ■

Ending a Career in Rural Education

David Kerr retires after a long career that includes stops at La Pine, Prairie City and North Lake

By Craig Reed

David Kerr has worn many hats during his 44 years in education: teacher, coach, administrator, athletic director, carpenter and general construction worker.

He has now hung his hat up, after retiring June 30 from the North Lake School District superintendent position that included being principal at the high school and middle school.

“My heart tells me it is time,” says David, 70. “Everything has a shelf life, and I think mine has expired. It will be bittersweet. I’ve worked with some incredible people in this journey. My job has been to help people and students be successful. I hope I have. That’s education.”

David came from a poverty background and says he was told more than once, “You can’t do that.” In his work with students he has emphasized, “You can do it.”

“I think every teacher cherishes those experiences where students come back and thank them for helping them,” David says. “I have dealt with many kids in abusive environments and tried to help them get the assistance they needed to get them into safer places.”



North Lake School District Superintendent David Kerr, right, and North Lake student Keith Swan look through some of the gifts and letters the senior received to celebrate his graduation at the May 8 ceremony. PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAVID KERR

In addition to youth, David was involved with numerous facility projects during his career. His final one is an \$8 million project at North Lake that includes a new gym, bus maintenance facility, classroom addition and expansion of a modular building.

David and other staff members worked on this project for about four years before construction started this spring.

“I believe it’s been a labor of love with him,” says Gail Buermann Neumann, who is succeeding David as North Lake

superintendent. “Now that construction is underway, I think he feels more comfortable retiring at this point. He was the driving force behind the whole project.”

David had plenty of experience in such projects before spending the past seven years at North Lake. He worked at La Pine High School for 29 years, arriving as a teacher and coach in 1978 during construction of the new high school and its athletic fields and original cinder track.

He says a lot of volunteers helped build the athletic facilities.

“There was enormous pride in helping build those,” he says. “A lot of sweat equity went into those fields.”

David says those projects have always been a “we” action.

“To build and leave facilities is like leaving monuments that kids can use for generations long after we’re gone,” he says.

Billie, David’s wife of 51 years, says her husband went into the education profession because it allowed him to be involved in sports. After four years in the Navy (Naval Air) and two deployments—his last to DaNang, South Vietnam—he earned a degree in health and physical education with a minor in biology from Cal State Northridge in Southern California. His teaching and coaching career started at a junior high in the Los Angeles City School District—a school that was surrounded by housing projects where gangs, drugs and violence existed.

Thanks to several trips to Bend to visit relatives, David and Billie knew of Central Oregon. When there was an opening to teach health, physical education and science at La Pine, David applied and was hired in 1978. He also coached baseball and football and helped in other sports.

He was named athletic director shortly after that first year and had the task of supervising the development of the athletic facilities.

After 15 years in the classroom, David became an administrator in La Pine for 14 years. He accepted the superintendent position for the Prairie City School District in 2007.

“It was a terrific five years there,” David says. “It was a great place to be, and to help them make some essential changes before I left was satisfying.”

David retired from Prairie City in 2012 and returned to La Pine, but hardly had a chance to get settled before people he knew in North Lake recruited him to apply for the soon-to-be vacant superintendent position. He was hired in March 2013.

Now he has retired again.

With his long career in small, rural school districts ending, David says the advantage of those districts are students



David retired from the North Lake School District office June 30 after seven years of leading the district. David had a 44-year career in education, 41 of them in rural Central Oregon schools.

can be involved in anything they want. It is harder for students to get lost in the student body, so it is easier to monitor each person’s progress.

“I will miss my working days with Mr. Kerr,” says Gail, who was the North Lake Elementary School principal and special education director. “He’s a very wise, insightful superintendent with excellent managerial and problem-solving skills. I’ve learned from him. He’s been a great administrative partner.

“I hope to do a fabulous job, but he’s a tough act to follow, that’s for sure.”

Billie says David is taking retirement well. The couple plans to visit the families of their four grown children: David, Diana, Daniel and Darrin. They have 17 grandchildren.

David says he is grateful for Billie being by his side as they survived his military deployments, his college years and his teaching, coaching, athletic director and administrator years.

“She’s been my strength and my inspiration,” he says. “I owe her more than



David and his wife, Billie, at their son Darrin’s wedding in 2012.

I can ever repay. I hope she keeps me.”

Billie acknowledges that David will miss being in education.

“Education has been his life,” she says. “He has so much experience and knowledge with education in small rural schools. He’s very good at finding ways to make situations better. I’m glad he’s retiring, but I don’t know how long he’ll be done.” ■

A Career of Caring



Dale Anderson, center, Caring Neighbors board president, presents a check from Caring Neighbors to Marie Borth, left, Parks & Recreation board chairwoman, and Krista Krause, Parks & Recreation treasurer. PHOTO COURTESY OF DALE ANDERSON

Dale Anderson reflects on time as BBEC employee and continuing service through Caring Neighbors

By Katelin Davidson

Dale Anderson first the Big Bend Electric Cooperative staff almost 20 years ago. He joined the Caring Neighbors board nearly a decade later. He did not know the effect the job would have on his life, or the impact his work could have on the community.

In 2018, Dale joined his wife, Yvonne, in retirement, and left his BBEC position. He says he is fortunate to have worked in a job that he truly loved and enjoyed daily, which made the decision to retire a difficult one.

“I’m missing the people I worked with and the members I dealt with, missing those conversations,” Dale says. “Those were pretty valuable to me. I miss that portion of it, but you have to move on. I enjoyed that job for a long time, and now it’s time for someone else to enjoy it.”

Dale’s career has had many stops. He worked on the family farm and at the Lind Grange before working as a teacher and coach. He worked at Consolidated Grange Supply as the agronomy manager and eventually transitioned to BBEC.

Dale says his experience with agriculture helped him connect with many BBEC customers, especially those in rural areas or those running their own farms. His work provided him with an opportunity to meet new people and learn about the industries and products created within the BBEC service area.

Dale’s work with BBEC was varied, but his main charge was to run the conservation program. He also coordinated the company’s advertising and completed the educational components, including

narrating safety demonstrations, coordinating the annual Youth Tour and assisting with scholarship applications.

“I would go to the area schools and narrate the safety demonstration, and the lineman would do the hazardous stuff,” Dale jokes. “I always did a little entertaining and the kids loved it.”

One of Dale’s lifelong passions has been working and positively influencing youth, primarily in schools or through coaching.

Dale’s other main passion is sports, and he remains active with youth sports through coaching and volunteering at local sporting events. He also writes a weekly sports column for the local newspaper.

The desire to help coach youth sports stems from the life lessons many of Dale’s coaches instilled in him when he was competing. Dale also likes being able to follow the growth of the athletes he coaches; both in sports and their personal development into young leaders.

While Dale’s role with BBEC concluded in 2018, he remains active with the Caring Neighbors board. The Caring Neighbors board is comprised of five members who represent communities throughout the BBEC coverage area. Caring Neighbors is a nonprofit organization formed by BBEC to help local nonprofits through charitable donations and to assist low-income members with paying their electric bill.

Every BBEC member is automatically enrolled in the Caring Neighbors program, and every electric bill is rounded up to the nearest dollar every month. The rounded-up amount is then forwarded to the Caring Neighbors board to distribute on a quarterly basis. Members can opt out of the program by contacting BBEC.

Dale joined the Caring Neighbors board in 2011, representing the Lind and Ritzville communities. At the time, there was a board vacancy, and Dale was already coordinating photos and articles for Caring Neighbors. It was a natural fit.

“We have a good board of people who work together and know how important it is, and how serious it is,” Dale says. “We can do some good things. We want to try to fund everything. We aren’t there to fund 100%, but we can help.”

The start of the COVID-19 pandemic forced Dale and Yvonne into a more isolated way of living. It also provided him with a chance to revisit old hobbies. He started welding for the first time in years and helping with projects around the farm. Yvonne sews avidly and took the opportunity to start creating and donating cloth face masks to local health care facilities and fellow church members.

Retirement has allowed Dale to commit more time to volunteer activities. As life returns to normal, he plans to dedicate his time to ensuring the future of the museums in Ritzville, as well as supporting nonprofit organizations through his role on the Caring Neighbors board.

Dale says he is enjoying retirement and appreciates living on the land his grandfather homesteaded—and in the family’s house that was built in 1901.

In reflecting on his work with BBEC, Dale fondly remembers his coworkers, members and friends who helped create the best job of his life.

“I appreciate the opportunity to work with great people, and work with great board members,” Dale says. “I was very fortunate to have that job.” ■



Arturo Martinez, foreman at Bickford Orchards, manages a crew of 25 workers who tend 160 acres of pears, apples and grapes. All workers now wear masks and practice other health precautions. PHOTO BY DREW MYRON

Coping With COVID-19

Hood River Valley growers work through new rules

By Drew Myron

Maija Yasui is searching for toilets.

At the peak of harvest, her family farm employs 140 workers, and she is working hard to keep them safe.

“We need more port-a-potties,” she says, calculating the sweeping changes a pandemic brings. “They must be no more than one-quarter mile apart or 1,200 feet, and that’s 400 steps. We’ll need 16. We’ll have a physical distancing monitor, a handwashing monitor and a bathroom

cleaner. That’ll be me. I’m going to be running around with bleach.”

Maija is not alone. From fines to guidelines to health concerns, Hood River Valley farmers are busy working out the ramifications of the COVID-19 crisis.

In response to the coronavirus, in late April Oregon’s Occupational Safety & Health Division handed down emergency rules for agriculture workers. Designed to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, the rules center on three areas of concern: field sanitation, labor housing and

transportation. With just days to comply, local farmers quickly reworked operations to meet the new demands.

The rules will reduce the ability of many growers to fill labor housing at approved levels due to space and bunk bed limitations, says Mike Doke, executive director of Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers. The organization is working with the governor’s office and the Oregon Department of Agriculture to find ways to offset OSHA’s temporary restrictions.

By the time this story is in print, cherry

harvest will be in full swing. Workers will have made the transit from Washington to California to Oregon, arriving for harvest in June for The Dalles and July for the Hood River Valley. In August, pears will be ready for picking, followed by apples and grapes.

Though many areas of farming have transitioned from manual to mechanized, cherry harvest is still a hands-on task—and a massive endeavor. As a result, labor housing is a pressing issue in the Columbia River Gorge.

The local harvest is fortified with the labor of more than 6,000 workers in Hood River and The Dalles. Oregon has 309 registered labor camps, according to Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers. Of these, nearly 40% are in Hood River County and about 27% are in Wasco County—nearly two-thirds of the state’s registered labor housing.

The new rules are a challenge. Typical worker housing is dorm style, but now bunk beds are only allowed for those who are related, and each must be 6 feet apart. This changes the number of people who can occupy labor housing.

“Many growers now have substantially less housing than they anticipated because of this rule,” Mike says. “As a result, much of the crop may go unharvested—a substantial blow to a pear industry that’s already struggling with increased production costs. With new OSHA temporary rule space restrictions, a local grower previously certified for 75 occupants has seen their housing reduced to 37 workers.”

That is a loss of more than 50% of the work force unless alternatives can be developed.

“Because all growers will add labor as harvest approaches, it won’t take long for any alternatives to be exhausted,” Mike says. “A reduction in labor translates in a reduction of harvested crops and fewer paychecks.”

While the U.S. Department of Agriculture earmarked \$19 billion in May to help farmers during the coronavirus pandemic, most of the money is going to corporate farmers, not small-scale farms in the Hood River Valley.



“There are challenges at every turn,” says Lisa Perry, of Cody Orchards. She and her husband, Ricardo Galvez, operate a 14-acre farm west of Odell where they grow peaches, pears, nectarines and more. PHOTO COURTESY OF LISA PERRY

Along with funding and logistics, another pressing challenge is communication. Next Door Inc., a Hood River-based nonprofit organization, has enlisted more than 100 health workers to serve as outreach to the farming community, primarily a Latino population. Health workers share the importance of precautions and practices, such as physical distancing, hygiene, community transmission and more.

“It’s not just translating these messages into Spanish,” explains Maija Yasui, who serves on the board, “but into user-level information that is understandable and clear.”

One Community Health, a nonprofit medical organization, offers on-site worker education sessions, orchardist support and farmworker health clinics with COVID-19 screening.

Farms, fruit stands, processing plants and wineries are also reinventing. Drive-by wine, curbside cider and produce subscriptions may be the new normal.

“It’s easy to distance in the orchard and to mask-up in the wine processing,” says Don Bickford, who runs Bickford Orchard

and co-owns, with his brother Steve, Mt. Hood Winery. “But it’s the winery, with the tasting room being closed, that’s really taken a hit.”

Farming is tough in the best of times, says Lisa Perry of Cody Orchards.

“There are a lot of things going against farms in this state right now,” says Lisa, a fifth-generation farmer who offers weekly produce boxes in a subscription system. “As for small veggie farms, they can’t just scale up overnight. There are a handful of serious small-scale farmers that have been able to rise to the occasion of more demand for local food due to this pandemic, but even they are struggling. There are challenges at every turn. I don’t know what else to do but put my head down and get the work done that I can.”

“Keep going” is a message heard throughout the Hood River Valley.

“With COVID, every situation has this ‘What do we do?’ component,” Maija says. “We can’t greet each other with hugs and homemade cookies, and that’s the hard part. That family feel is gone. Still, there’s that feeling among farmers that we’re all in this together.” ■



The McDermitt electric vehicle charging station is at the Quinn River Merc. It can take from 30 minutes to an hour to charge an EV at these newly installed fast chargers. PHOTOS COURTESY OF HARNEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

All Charged Up

Harney Electric installs electric vehicle charging stations

By Lauren Brown

Traveling through northwestern Nevada in an electric vehicle just got a little bit easier.

Thanks to funding from the Nevada Office of Energy, Harney Electric Cooperative installed two electric vehicle charging stations: one in McDermitt and one in Orovada.

The money funding the installation of the two stations came from a lawsuit involving Volkswagen and vehicle emissions. The states involved in the lawsuit each received a settlement from the auto manufacturer.

According to Jennifer Taylor, deputy director for intergovernmental relations

for the Nevada Governor's Office of Energy, Nevada received \$24.8 million from the VW settlement.

"Those funds were intended to make states whole from the environmental harm caused by VW's sale of vehicles with emissions 'defeat devices,'" she says.

A portion of the money from the Volkswagen settlement was intended to support the development of electric vehicle infrastructure. States were allowed to set aside a maximum of 15% of the total amount for electric vehicle infrastructure development. That infrastructure funding totals about \$3.7 million.

The state of Nevada has been working

to fortify the Nevada Electric Highway by focusing on building out five corridors: Highway 95, Highway 93 and Highway 50, and Interstate 80 and Interstate 15. Installing EV charging stations along these five corridors allows EV drivers to travel throughout Nevada without experiencing range anxiety.

The stations in McDermitt and Orovada are part of that fortification program.

“Having those stations that Harney Electric was able to be the host utility for is a key part of completing the highway infrastructure from the northwest part of the state,” Jennifer says. “It’s part of our amazing partnerships with utilities and host sites.”

When the Nevada governor’s office approached Harney Electric about installing two EV chargers in northwestern Nevada, HEC suggested McDermitt and Orovada as potential sites. Harney Electric Operations Manager Jason Hill says they researched which chargers could be installed that satisfied the criteria of the VW settlement funds.

The cooperative also had to get permission from the Quinn River Merc in McDermitt and the Sawtooth Station in Orovada to install the EV chargers on those properties.

Harney Electric designed the pads for the chargers and obtained the necessary permits from Humboldt County. John Tingue and his crew from Retrievers LLC built the concrete pads. Gamma Electric did the electrical work, then Harney Electric built the service and installed the chargers on the pads. The chargers were up and running in February.

The Nevada Governor’s Office of Energy provided \$300,000 to install the stations in McDermitt and Orovada.

At first, Jason was a bit skeptical the chargers would see any use in these rural areas.

“You never think you’re going to see an electric vehicle going up and down the road, but one of Harney Electric’s employees already has an electric car,” he says.

The chargers have been used, and the cooperative can track that use on the back



The EV chargers in Orovada are at the Sawtooth Station on Highway 95.

end of the software. As of the beginning of May, the two new chargers had been used for 23 separate sessions.

“That’s 235 kilowatt-hours used and 461 pounds of carbon dioxide saved,” Jason says.

Reducing the state’s carbon footprint is the broader goal for Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak.

“This project is a critical piece and a priority for the governor because it looks at the totality of how we reduce emissions from our transportation sector, which is now the largest source of carbon emissions in this state,” Jennifer says.

Because Nevada is a keystone state in the intermountain west, it is also looking to help electrify regional transportation corridors. Jennifer notes the McDermitt and Orovada stations will help EV drivers hook into the Interstate 5 corridor. Thanks to an agreement among Washington, Oregon and California, the corridor has EV infrastructure in place from the northern tip of Washington to the southern tip of California.

In a small way, the EV charging

stations installed in rural areas also have the potential to provide some economic development, Jennifer says. Charging an electric vehicle can take from 30 minutes to an hour.

“Rather than running in, buying a Pepsi and a bag of chips like you might while you’re filling up for a few minutes with your traditional petroleum vehicle, this takes a little bit longer to charge,” she says.

That longer stay gives host locations a chance to take advantage of that time with more food and a higher spend point while the consumer is there.

As more electric vehicles hit the road, these rural charging stations will help drivers navigate Nevada and provide fast-charging respites. They will provide rural communities with opportunities to cater to those customers as they stop along their journey.

“On behalf of the Office of Energy and this project that we’re working on across the state, I really want to thank Harney Electric for being one of our great partners and for helping build out the highway,” Jennifer says. ■

How Sweet It Is

Ryan McEuen is happy to call Rupert—home of Crystal the colossal sugar beet—his home

By Dianna Troyer

Tall and pleasantly plump, Crystal has been snagging social invitations since her New Year's Eve debut on Rupert's historic town square.

The illuminated 12-foot-round, 22-foot-tall metal replica of a sugar beet, was lowered slowly by a crane to ring in 2020.

The holiday beet drop established her celebrity status, making her sought after for summer appearances. She will be featured at the Fourth of July celebration on the square.

"Boise has a giant potato drop to celebrate the New Year, and New York City has a crystal ball, so we wanted to start a unique holiday tradition to showcase what's special about our area and to bring our community together," says Rupert resident Ryan McEuen.

Ryan orchestrated the celebratory evening with his two business partners, who own and run Gem State Entertainment. Mike Christensen, owner of a local metal fabrication shop, had his employees build the two-story tuber. Ryan's brother, professional musician Jonathan McEuen, and others performed

on stage with Crystal nearby.

"We had a great turnout," Ryan says. "The square was packed with people of all ages from all walks of life. We'd like to plan more community events like this."

Watching the beet drop "was like being in a 1950s Hallmark movie," says Kelly Anthon, Rupert city administrator. "Families were having a great time. I had no idea what to expect because it was the first time. I'm sure it will become a tradition."

Rupert Mayor Michael Brown says the beet drop was a great event to showcase the newly remodeled square, which was dedicated last summer.

"The folks in charge of it did an amazing job in the construction of the beet and operation of the entire event," Michael says.

On its Facebook page last December, Gem State Entertainment introduced its newest creative talent and christened her Crystal—a nod to farmers who grow beets and a nearby sugar beet factory.

"She was easy to name because she's a sweet thing," says Mike, who keeps Crystal at his business, Christensen Machine Inc.



Ryan McEuen, who envisioned Crystal with his business partners, says Rupert is a sweet place to live.

Ryan and Mike have been fielding invitations for Crystal to appear at local and statewide venues such as fairs, rodeos and community celebrations. She is scheduled at the Western Idaho Fair in Boise in August.

Mike built a framework for Crystal, which allows her to be freestanding wherever she's booked.

"That way people can enjoy a good long look," Mike says.

For Ryan and Mike, it was natural to honor the sugar beet. The sweet commodity has been a mainstay crop of southern Idaho's economy for more than a century.

Farmers plant about 170,000 acres of sugar beets annually, with a yield of about 6 million

tons valued last year at \$322 million, according to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Amalgamated Sugar's factory in nearby Paul was built in 1917. It is the largest beet processing plant in North America, granulating 1,400 tons of sugar daily.

To create Crystal, Mike and Ryan envisioned her on a computer assisted design program and used a custom numerical computer to laser-cut her parts. Mike estimates his employees worked more than 120 hours to build her.

While welding the interior framework, they included beams to attach lighting. The exterior of perforated metal

has a white powder coating and resembles a sheer fabric. To make her massive leaves, sheet metal was cut, bent and powder-coated green.

The seeds for Mike and Ryan's collaborative creativity were planted eight years ago when they met. Ryan helped repair a CNC lathe at Mike's business. While working on the three-month project, Ryan stayed in a room at the nearby Drift Inn overlooking the square.

"It looked like a living movie set or a Norman Rockwell painting," Ryan says of the grassy square with stately trees and small businesses lining the surrounding streets. A renovated art deco theater built in 1919 anchored the square.

Mike says he invited Ryan "to stick around and help plan our Minidoka County centennial. It all started there, and we established Gem State Entertainment."

To contribute to the centennial celebration, Ryan arranged for his father, John McEuen, co-founder of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, to have the band perform at the fairgrounds.

As he became more enamored with the town, Ryan moved from Salt Lake City to Rupert in 2013.

"It was easy to leave the city, and Rupert felt like a place to call home," Ryan says. "I was tired of an urban lifestyle. It was relaxing to be based here and travel for work."

In addition to being a CNC technician, Ryan ran a production company for musicians.

Two years ago, he started running a deli on the east side of the square for local entrepreneur Charlie Creason.

"I hired Ryan because he's creative and enthusiastic, which is what you need starting a new business," Charlie says. "He hopes to see the town flourish and has lots of ideas like the beet drop celebration."

Ryan is encouraged by comments he still hears about the beet drop and hopes to organize future festivities to complement traditional popular events.

At the square, he envisions an event, A Taste of Southern Idaho, featuring cuisine samples from regional chefs.

"I've been a foodie since I was 6 and my mom taught me to make lasagna," Ryan says.

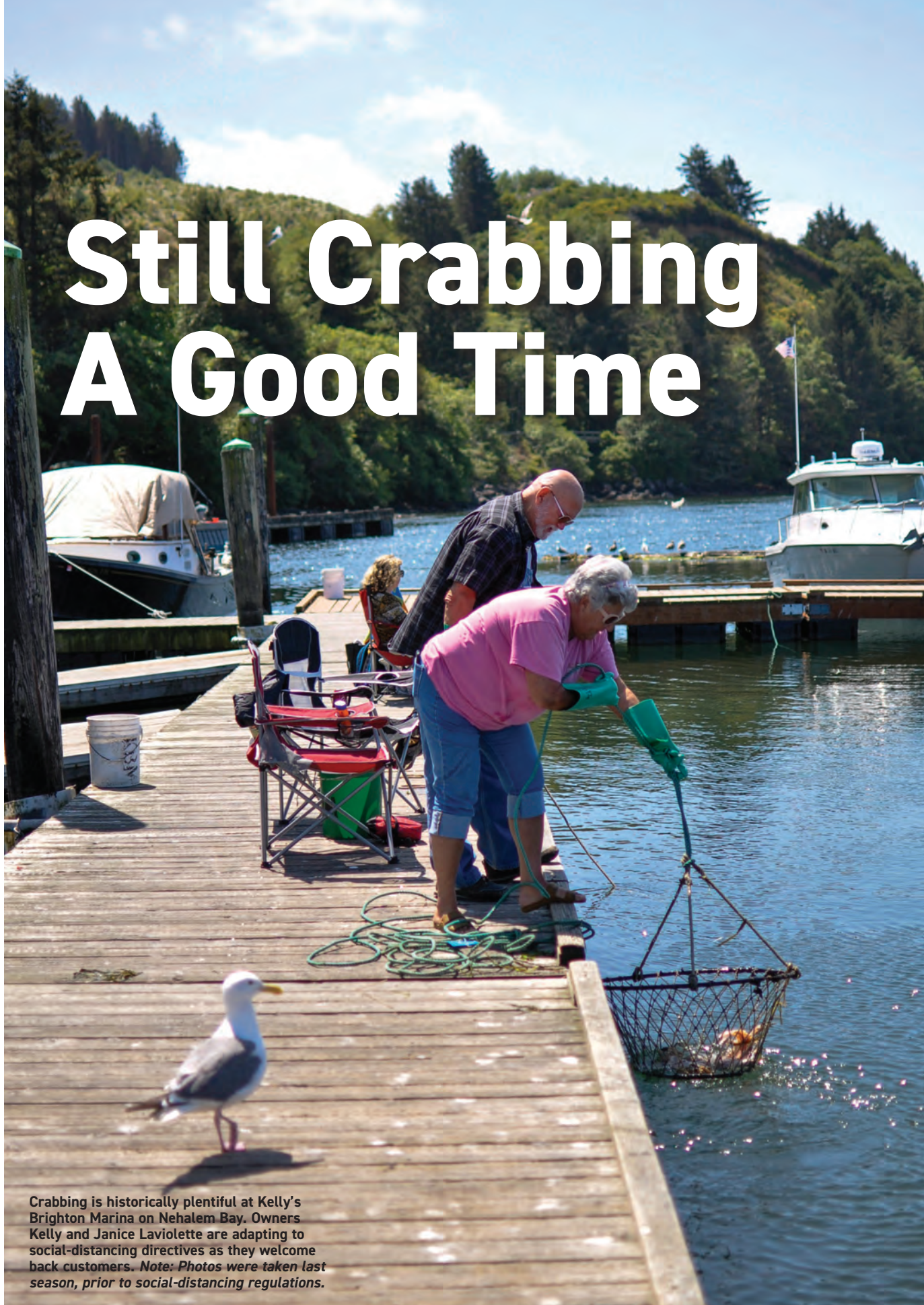
He is also considering turning the main floor of his home, the Masonic Lodge a block off the square, into a recording studio or retreat center for artists and musicians. He says it could be similar to a studio in Muscle Shoals—a small town in Alabama that attracts nationally renowned musicians who appreciate its ambiance.

"I grew up in the entertainment industry," Ryan says. "Performers from Nashville, Austin or LA would appreciate Rupert's character. Whatever I do, I have aspirations of bringing the community here together." ■



Crystal is lowered to ring in the New Year at the square in Rupert. The 22-foot-tall metal replica of a sugar beet was created to honor the mainstay crop that farmers grow in Minidoka and Cassia counties.

Still Crabbing A Good Time



Crabbing is historically plentiful at Kelly's Brighton Marina on Nehalem Bay. Owners Kelly and Janice Laviolette are adapting to social-distancing directives as they welcome back customers. *Note: Photos were taken last season, prior to social-distancing regulations.*

Kelly's Brighton Marina celebrates a decade

Story and photos by Denise Porter

It was difficult buying their business a decade ago—and this past spring has also been a tough one due to the COVID-19 pandemic—but after 10 years, Kelly and Janice Laviolette say they're still “crabbing” a good time at Kelly's Brighton Marina on Nehalem Bay between Rockaway Beach and Wheeler.

In 2008, the couple offered to buy the historic Brighton Marina. But the recession hit, crashed the local economy and caused a two-year stall on their plans, Janice says.

“We took over ownership on July 1, 2010, right before the biggest holiday of the season with no employees,” she says. “That was stressful.”

Now, as seasoned owners and following a spring without visitors due to the pandemic, Janice says she and Kelly are excited to see some of their old friends back on the coast.

In a typical summer, Kelly's Brighton Marina offers both RV and tent camping, crabbing, boat rentals and dock fishing. This year, the marina is following social-distancing directives from the state, which means it will host fewer customers than a normal year—and restrictions are in place for customer safety—but Kelly and Janice say they are happy to be able to open.

A self-professed people person, Kelly has worked hard to make the marina a place for both conversation and camaraderie.

“I was a sales guy,” he says. “I've always been a talker. You can meet so many people if you just talk to them.”

Kelly also promotes stewardship of natural resources. He talks about conservation of the ocean's bounty, picking up litter and respecting nature to all his patrons and staff.

Janice describes her husband as part gypsy because he loves both traveling and talking to people. He also loves the lure



of the ocean. The marina attracts visitors from all over the world, which suits Kelly to a T.

Kelly's childhood was similar to those of children born into military families. His parents hail from Canada. His father was a hard rock and vertical shaft miner. The family followed mines—and work—across the country, even into Africa.

Along the way, they saved money and were “always looking for a small business—a little store or a gas station to own,” Kelly says.

In 1979, they bought Jetty Fishery Marina in Wheeler.

Kelly graduated from Neah-Kah-Nie High School in 1981. He met Janice while studying at Eastern Oregon University. She is originally from Rainier, where her high school was a rival to Kelly's.

“He's in my senior yearbook,” she says, chuckling.

The couple married in 1987, had their son in 1990 and made Portland their home for a time before returning to his parents' Jetty Fishery Marina to help manage it for 16 years. Kelly and Janice bought the neighboring Brighton Marina, rechristening it Kelly's Brighton Marina.

Today, Kelly's brother, Damian, is at the

helm of their parents' original business.

The brothers work together each spring as integral members of the Nehalem Bay Crabbing Derby—a fundraising event for the Mudd-Nick Foundation, which financially supports area youth in many ways.

The derby was canceled this year because of the pandemic, but is expected to return in 2021.

For the 2020 season, Kelly's Brighton Marina offers boat rentals. Visitors can go out into Nehalem Bay and throw baited crab pots over the side. They can also explore the shores of nearby Nehalem Bay State Park.

Janice says Nehalem Bay is very calm, and the friendliest of Tillamook County's three bays. It is also a small bay.

“The beauty of it is that from the marina, if you're on a boat, you're in eye-sight all the time,” she says.

This helps nervous first-time boat customers feel safer, knowing they are being observed from the marina.

For those who do not have the time or inclination to climb into a boat, Kelly's Brighton Marina has historically offered dockside crabbing. The couple hopes to provide this opportunity as social-distancing laws continue to relax into the summer. Kelly and Janice pride themselves on having a friendly staff to help both novice and seasoned crabbers.

In his trademark bright red crab hat, Kelly moves around the marina, engaging with customers, working behind the cash register or visiting with families at the on-site fire pit.

Kelly says the marina is a spot many travelers have made their own. Families come back year after year—and he expects this year will be no exception.

Originally, the couple had planned a party for their milestone 10-year anniversary. Now, they will celebrate their moment quietly, Janice says. Instead, they will focus on helping families connect with each other and make memories together to heal and find peace. ■

For current information on crabbing at Kelly's Brighton Marina, go to <https://kellysbrightonmarina.com>.

A Love For The Land

By Emily Compton

Paul Hardy's love for the Sierra Valley prompted him to found the Feather River Land Trust in 2000, after returning to Portola with a biology degree. With the neighboring city of Reno growing, more and more land in the Sierra Valley was being converted to other uses. Paul and others felt the need to try and preserve some of the open space and ranchlands and the important species that depend on the habitat and the headwaters of the Feather River Watershed.

The Feather River Land Trust is a non-profit organization dedicated to conserving ecologically and culturally significant lands throughout the Feather River Watershed. The FRLT uses two ways to conserve land: i) conservation easements and ii) outright purchases of land. Most of the Feather River Land Trust's protected land is through conservation easements with private landowners. A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust that permanently defines how the land can be used and limits development in order to safeguard its conservation values like wetlands, wildlife habitats, rare plant communities, sustainable agriculture practices and historical features. The owners of the land continue to own and use the land and are also able to sell it or pass it down to heirs.

The outright purchase of land is much how sounds. Sometimes FRLT purchases land outright to guarantee community access to cherished lands and to manage the land for ecological and community benefit.

Land management is also an important part of the Feather River Land Trust's mission. Once land has been protected



Students from Portola participate in FRLT's Learning Landscapes program doing trail maintenance. PHOTO COURTESY OF FEATHER RIVER LAND TRUST

by either a purchase or a conservation easement, the Land Trust works to manage, restore and enhance its natural and cultural resources, now and for future generations. Their stewardship team works in a variety of ways such as working directly on the land, partnering with local cattle ranching operations to graze lands, and doing restoration projects like wetland fencing and invasive weed removal. FRLT also works collaboratively with other

conservation organizations and landowners to preserve the natural and cultural resources of the lands.

Feather River Land Trust's K-12 Learning Landscapes program aims to encourage kids to connect with nature throughout the school year through hands-on learning on FRLT protected lands. This program is successful due to the partnerships the Land Trust has with local teachers, school districts and



At the Sierra Valley Preserve, FRLT partners with a fifth-generation Sierra Valley family to sustainably graze the upland portion of the protected property. PHOTO COURTESY OF FEATHER RIVER LAND TRUST

communities. FRLT is committed to providing natural outdoor classrooms for all public schools in the region to use.

At present, the FRLT owns five preserves throughout the Feather River Watershed: the Sierra Valley Preserve, The Olsen Barn Meadow in the Almanor Basin, The Heart K Ranch in the Genesee Valley, the Leonhardt Ranch Learning Landscape in American Valley and the Mountain Meadows Gateway Preserve near Westwood. These five properties are open to the public. You can learn more about them as well as get directions at www.frlt.org/explorenature.

Currently, one of the FRLT's main projects is to conserve wetland habitat and working ranches in the Sierra Valley. The valley is more than 120,000 acres, roughly the size of Lake Tahoe, and is not just a significant place for local agriculture but

also is home to vital wetlands that form the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the Feather River and support the greatest diversity and concentration of birds in the northern Sierra. More than 40,000 acres of the Sierra Valley have been conserved by ranching families with conservation easements by working with a variety of land trusts including FRLT, the California Rangeland Trust, and the Pacific Forest Trust.

The Feather River Land Trust's work does not stop at just conserving land. A main part of their work also includes helping restore people's relationship to the land. Whether through improved access to lands, educational material about the history of lands, or participating in volunteer events, the Land Trust is always working to foster lasting relationships to these protected lands. They see this

relationship as critical to community health, building a conservation and stewardship ethic in our communities, and ensuring the long-term success and viability of land conservation.

There are many ways to get involved with the FRLT.

- Stay connected with events and other news by following them on Facebook and Instagram or subscribe to their eNewsletter.
- Attend upcoming events (due to COVID-19, no in-person events are planned for the summer of 2020).
- Volunteer your time and expertise.
- Become a member by making a donation at: www.frlt.org/donate.

For more information, visit Feather River Land Trust's website at www.frlt.org or call 530-283-5758.



PHOTO BY ADRAGAN / ADOBE STOCK

The Importance of Having an Emergency Fund

By Allison Goldberg

An emergency is, by definition, something that is unplanned and can cause upheaval, stress and worry. One way to ease the burden of a serious, unexpected situation that requires financial resources is to have an emergency fund.

Why build an emergency fund?

An emergency fund is a chunk of savings reserved to ease the burden and stress of an immediate need for cash. An emergency fund can see you through several months of unemployment or pay for unexpected health care, car or home repairs. Any amount of emergency savings can be helpful. At the very least, it's meant to absorb some of the financial impact of an emergency situation and, at best, prevent you from going into debt due to unexpected expenses.

How do I build my emergency fund? How much should I save?

Set small, attainable installment goals for your savings, such as setting aside \$10 per week or \$25 per month to reach your larger goal. The installment amount should be whatever you can save—by cutting unnecessary costs, if need be—without going into debt. Put the money into a savings account. If you'll be tempted to use your growing fund to splurge, be certain the account is not linked

to your checking account. You can make saving easier by saving some or all of any income tax refund, cutting expenses, selling unused possessions or picking up a second job.

Most financial advisors suggest a fund, at a minimum, equal to six months of must-pay expenses. For single-earner families, the suggestion is typically one year. Individual circumstances, such as being a one-income household or working in an industry where it would be hard to find new employment, may cause you to consider saving more for an emergency.

When to use an emergency fund?

Your emergency fund should cover unexpected but absolutely necessary bills that cannot be absorbed by your next paycheck. For example, replacing the alternator in your car could cost more than you can spare out of one paycheck, but if it breaks, repair is necessary to continue essential activities, such as going to work. An emergency fund would help you avoid going into debt to cover this necessary expense. On the other hand, buying the latest smartphone to replace your current working phone might be nice, but it likely isn't a necessity and should not be paid for from a fund set aside for emergencies.

Remember, you may not know when an emergency will happen or how much it will cost, but you know that one will eventually come. ■

Veterinarian Makes House Calls Throughout Remote Northern Nevada

By Dianna Troyer

Dr. Hannah Rodriguez's veterinary clinic is wherever her four-legged patients happen to live: an RV park off the interstate, a remote ranch or a small town.

From her home in Deeth 20 miles west of Wells, Hannah drives throughout northern Nevada to treat dogs and cats, cattle and horses, and sheep and goats.

"I don't really have a defined territory," says Hannah, a 2018 alumna of Washington State University's College of Veterinary Medicine. "I knew after graduating I wanted the freedom and flexibility of having a solo mobile practice in northern Nevada."

She named her business Great Basin Veterinary Services and provides wellness care, vaccinations, wound care, deworming, castrations, dentistry, and pregnancy diagnosis for "all creatures great and small," a reference on her website to the best-selling book series of the same name.

The books were written by one of Hannah's favorite veterinarians and authors, James Herriot, the pen name of Dr. Alf Wight, who wrote about his clients and their pets and livestock in the scenic and remote Yorkshire Dales of England.

"After my undergrad, I loved reading his books," Hannah says. "Sometimes, when I'm driving around on calls, I think about his stories."

Although Hannah's career seemed like an obvious choice since childhood in Carson City, she balked at even going to college.

"My dad was a veterinarian, so when I was growing up, I loved tagging along with him when he took care of 4-H animals," she says. "After high school, I didn't know what I wanted to do and thought I'd take time off to explore and see what life would bring. I graduated in May and didn't pick a college until July."

Her choice to study animal science at



Dr. Hannah Rodriguez, owner of Great Basin Veterinary Services, provides mobile veterinary care throughout northern Nevada. PHOTOS BY CAROLLEE EGBERT

Great Basin College in Elko was fortuitous. During summers, she worked for veterinarian and rancher Dr. Boyd Spratling in Starr Valley, where she met her future husband, John, an employee of Spratling's.

"I liked the freedom Boyd had working for himself," says Hannah, who lives a few miles from his clinic. "It's so beautiful here, too, and John grew up in Deeth, so we knew we'd settle here."

Boyd is reducing his workload and says, "There's plenty of work for all of us. I'm 70 and have cut back and just do large animals. Hannah's at the point of building a practice, like I was 40 years ago. I'm proud to see her developing relationships and loyal clientele. She's independent, has initiative, is a good clinician and communicates well."

Her acceptance of the region's harsh winters has served her well.

"She's tough and isn't intimidated by winter driving or unpleasant situations

that come up," Boyd says. "She's been able to balance her family life with building her practice too. I'm tickled for all she's accomplished."

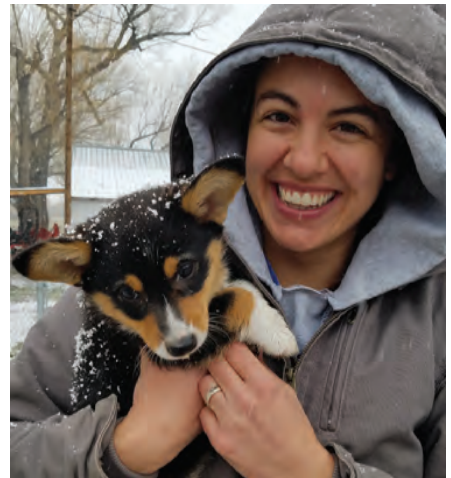
Hannah says her clients tell her they prefer her mobile clinic because they do not have time to drive to Elko to see a vet.

"Livestock and pets are more comfortable at home on a ranch," Hannah says. "Many ranch dogs aren't used to being on a leash or in town and don't like it."

Hannah makes two to six calls a day, Mondays through Saturdays.

Sometimes when a challenging case confronts her, she says she thinks of the courage and optimism of Alf Wight in rural England.

"He was never afraid to take anything on," she says. "He'd see any case. Some vets get in their comfort zone and focus on one or two species. I enjoy seeing all creatures and have had phenomenal experiences



COURTESY PHOTO



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Hannah treats a horse's leg; cradles Miss Pepper during a vaccine clinic in Wells; checks a horse's eyes; and opens her kit during a call.

with clients like he did.”

Some clients insist on giving her freshly baked cinnamon rolls, cookies or bread.

“I work for great people who are so appreciative, especially with emergencies,” Hannah says. “I’ve done Cesarean sections and repaired prolapsed uteruses on cows on subzero nights during calving season and stitched up horses’ cut legs at night too.”

Other patients are routine, such as Miss Pepper, a Pembroke Welsh corgi puppy.

“It was a God thing to find a veterinarian who makes house calls so we don’t have to drive two hours to Elko and back,” says Miss Pepper’s owner Nancy O’Bosky.

She and her husband, Steve, own and operate Welcome Station RV Park, eight

miles west of Wells.

“One of our guests mentioned Hannah has a mobile practice.”

The O’Boskys have been clients of Hannah’s since last summer.

“When we moved here, we needed a vet for our old guy, Tye,” Nancy says of their Queensland McNab shepherd. “She spent so much time with him and prescribed medicine to keep him comfortable until we finally had to put him to sleep. She always answers texts quickly and is caring and knowledgeable.”

Other clients, Phil and Pat Lambert in Deeth, are impressed with Hannah’s compassion and patience.

“I was taking care of a neighborhood

stray cat that had been mauled by a coyote or raccoon,” Pat says. “It didn’t improve and needed to be euthanized. Dr. Hannah didn’t rush me at all about making the final decision.”

The Lamberts’ dogs—Chihuahua-dachshund cross BettyLu, cocker spaniel Jake and a mixed breed Wolfie—get their wellness checks and vaccinations from Hannah.

“Our dogs like her, and they’re a good judge of character,” Pat says. “Dr. Hannah is kind and has a special way about her that calms animals.” ■

Hannah provides information about pet care and accepts appointments at www.greatbasinvet.com or at 775-388-2294.

Dr. Boyd Spratling was first featured in the February 1984 edition of Ruralite. Read the story at www.wrec.coop/theflyingvet.



La’Ney Hughes, a beekeeper in Kittitas Valley, has found that honey helps combat her hay allergies. PHOTO COURTESY OF JORDAN HUGHES

How Sweet It Is

Kittitas Valley is home to a hive of beekeepers

By Cris Ellingson

Kittitas is now home to beekeepers of all skill levels. Local beekeeping instructor Colleen Wadey had to open a second class this spring after so many people wanted to learn from her.

Learn about the buzz around the busy pollinators from three local beekeepers.

La’Ney Hughes

“I heard bees are in crisis, which is one of the reasons I took up beekeeping,” says La’Ney Hughes, who attended Coleen’s spring beekeeping class and has several hives herself.

La’Ney explains the bees work hard and have several jobs within the colony. The females start in the nursery and later are the pollinators, literally working until their wings disintegrate. Her queen bees have names and include such notables as Queen Latifa and Cleopatra.

“The more I learn, the more I want to learn,” La’Ney says. “There is something wonderfully calming about the buzzing of a bee.”

Kittitas County is known for its hay.

After doing allergy tests, La’Ney found she was severely allergic to hay. She now eats honey with pollen from her own backyard so she can better function during hay-cutting season.

“My youngest son would also get croup every year,” La’Ney says. “Taking in local honey as well as applying a honey salve have helped.”

She has turned her hobby into a profitable family business. La’Ney works as general manager of Perkins restaurant. During the pandemic, she sells products, including honey and bee pollen, from a food trailer she and the Perkins owner operate.

Each week she tries to make a new product, including lotions, tinctures, lip



LEFT: Olson’s Honey has traveling beehives, including these near State Route 97 outside Ellensburg. RIGHT: La’Ney Hughes sells products made from the honey her bees produce, including lotions, tinctures, and candles. PHOTOS BY CRIS ELLINGSON

balm and candles. One of La’Ney’s sons, Jordan, takes photographs of the bee operation. Another son, Brandon, takes product photos for their website, www.beyondbees.life.

In addition to keeping bees, La’Ney raises wiggler worms from four worm towers on her property, adding the good nutritional worm castings to her soil.

She does not claim a green thumb, but says the plants in her yard have improved as a result of having the bees and worms. She would like to see more beekeepers in the area and hopes her efforts inspire others to help the planet.

Paul Jones

Paul Jones got into beekeeping almost a decade ago.

“A friend and I got started as a project with our boys, who are homeschooled,” Paul says. “We started with two hives, one each. Bees are fun to watch and to see their pecking order.”

Paul’s son has asthma, and some of Paul’s friends recommended using raw honey to assuage some symptoms.

“We would sneak it in with the peanut butter, syrup for pancakes here and there,” Paul says.

Paul’s hobby has grown to 12 hives, each a separate colony. He loves catching swarms, noting that when they are swarming, they are docile.

Paul harvests about 5 gallons of honey a year from each hive. Approximately 10 gallons get left in the hive for the bees.

For beginning beekeepers, Paul suggests not being afraid of the bees and looking at the colonies up close.

“Maybe feed sugar water coming out of winter,” Paul says. “Buy a package of bees and check on the queen from time to time.”

Queen bees live an average of two to four years, so beekeepers need to buy a new queen occasionally. The new queens need to be kept in the hive, but separated from the worker bees for three to five days. Worker bees may perceive the queen as a threat at first, so they need time to recognize her pheromones and accept her.

Paul suggests attending the Ellensburg Bee Club meeting as a good first step if you are considering beekeeping. The club meets at 6:30 p.m. the third Thursday of the month at Dannon School and can be found on Facebook as Bees in the Burg.

Matthew Shakespear

Matthew Shakespear owns Olson’s Honey in Yakima, which he bought from Eric Olson in 2016. The company has been operating for more than 43 years.

With 16,000 hives and 10 employees, Olson’s is a wholesale commercial business. Its honey is not sold in pint jars or quarts, but in 55-gallon drums. Customers put the

honey into smaller containers to sell.

One customer makes mead from the honey, and others produce candles and soaps with the wax.

Olson’s hives are moved around to help pollinate different crops—from cranberries in Long Beach and Grayland, to mustard, alfalfa and radishes in Oregon. Hives go as far east as Ritzville, where they pollinate hybrid canola. In the winter, the bees move into an indoor temperature-controlled unit and transported to California to pollinate almonds.

Varroa destructors are mites that attack beehives. These mites are one of the largest threats to bee populations. They weaken bees by sucking fat and transmitting viruses. Matthew says pesticides, if used according to the label, are not a great risk to the bees and can protect bees from the mites. He encourages people to support virus and mite studies as researchers look for ways to improve beehive health.

All three beekeepers encourage people to help the bees. Studies have shown massive losses of wild bumble bees during the last hundred years. If you do not have a hive, consider planting pollen-rich plants, which are good sources of nectar and pollen and can often be found in gardening sections as bee-friendly wildflowers and seed mixes. It is also helpful to offer water sources for bees, such as fountains and birdbaths. ■



Paving the Way to Valuable Skills

Scholarships help local students gain marketable trade skills and earn a living wage—with little or no debt

By Susan Parrish

Lineman schools and trade schools provide excellent opportunities for those who don't want to pursue college, but want to learn marketable skills, work in an interesting living-wage job and carry little or no student debt.

Each year, Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative awards two \$5,000 scholarships to lineman school and four \$2,500 scholarships to trade school.

Applicants must be an OTEC member or a legal dependent of a member with an active meter in Baker, Grant, Harney or Union counties. Applications are accepted throughout the year. They can be completed online via OTEC's website. The scholarships are funded by unclaimed capital credits.

OTEC board member Bob Cargill, who heads the scholarship committee, says OTEC makes it a priority to fund these scholarships.

"We felt some students didn't necessarily want to go to college, but if they go to lineman school or trade school, they'd be qualified to go to work right away," he says. "Many people don't have the plan or resources to go to college. At OTEC, we're trying to provide that resource for our member families."

After completing lineman school, the student has a four- or five-year apprenticeship before becoming a journeyman lineman.

Jeff Pillow, OTEC's La Grande District superintendent, started his career in the electric industry by attending Northwest Lineman College in Oroville, California, when he was 26, and then worked as a lineman for several years. Now, 13 years

later, his job includes supervising OTEC's linemen in the La Grande district.

Jeff says there are many benefits of a lineman career.

"I recommend it to anybody who wants to work hard and do a job they love," he says. "I love the stability and the pace. You do something different every day. You get to work outside. The pay and benefits are excellent."

A Lineman's Day

Linemen work outside in the elements 24/7. They must be in excellent physical condition and be comfortable with heights to climb tall power poles.

There is a lot of variety in a lineman's typical day.

"They might be setting poles, stringing in new services or dealing with an outage by changing fuses, changing out transformers, putting up wire or safely removing trees that have fallen through lines," Jeff says.

Linemen are employed by OTEC and other utilities, but also by telecommunications and construction industries.

Northwest Lineman College trains linemen for careers in electric, telecom and natural gas industries. Courses range from seven to 15 weeks. Programs at NWC's Meridian, Idaho campus are at capacity and have a wait list.

Students split their time between the classroom and hands-on fieldwork. The campus includes classrooms, indoor transformer labs and power poles to practice climbing.

The college's four campuses train about 2,000 linemen a year. NLC President Jeff Wilding says they can't train enough

Apply for one of Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative's \$5,000 scholarships to begin a rewarding career in the utility industry. PHOTO COURTESY OF OTEC

OTEC's Trade School and Lineman Scholarships

Lineman scholarships:

- ▶ Two scholarships offered annually.
- ▶ \$5,000 per student.
- ▶ Apply online at www.otec.coop/scholarships

Trade school scholarships:

- ▶ Four scholarships offered annually.
- ▶ \$2,500 per student.
- ▶ Apply online at www.otec.coop/scholarships

workers to fill the 200,000 jobs annually vacated by baby boomers retiring from the electric utility industry.

In addition to jobs in electrical and gas industries, Jeff says skilled telecom linemen will be in demand as the push continues to bring high-speed internet to rural America.

"Job opportunities abound," he says.

Nationally, linemen earn an average of \$65,000 annually.

Pursuing Trade Careers

Another pathway with ample job opportunities are tradesmen careers, says Jessica Ponaman, who oversees trade apprenticeships statewide for Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries.

"A trade apprenticeship is a viable career path," she says. "With rising cost of tuition for four-year degrees, apprenticeships are a great value. Apprentices complete their programs with little or no debt. They have a degree and skills that are portable anywhere in the world."

Jessica says there are many benefits of a trades career: ample job openings and family wage earnings that often include health benefits, paid time off and retirement benefits. Apprentices are paid well because they are employees doing on-the-job training. Every apprenticeship has a paid job connected to it.

As the demand for trained apprentices in the trades continues to grow, Oregon has expanded apprenticeship opportunities. The trades represent more than 300 occupations. About 10,300 active apprentices across the state are learning and working in utilities, building, construction, manufacturing, information



OTEC offers four \$2,500 trade school scholarships each year. PHOTO COURTESY OF TOUCHSTONE ENERGY

technology and health care, among others. Minimum qualifications for most apprenticeships are to be at least 18 years old and hold either a high school diploma or a GED.

Tradesmen Shortage

Skilled tradesmen are in demand, says Doug Dalton, president of Baker Technical Institute in Baker City. In recent decades, as schools veered away from career technical education, there became a gaping shortage of skilled tradesmen.

Nationwide, 7 million jobs in the trades are unfilled because there aren't enough trained workers. The gap widens as baby boomer tradesmen retire.

"When this happens, wages go up," Doug says. "Benefits go up. These jobs in the trades pay more than they've ever paid, they have the best benefit packages ever offered and the least amount of job applicants. There's never been a more opportunistic time to be in the trades."

BTI offers training programs for those pursuing careers in heavy equipment, welding, transportation and logistics, construction, health care and more. The school's growing apprenticeship programs include journeyman electrician, heavy

Lineman and Trade School Resources

OTEC's lineman and trades scholarships:

- ▶ <https://otec.coop/scholarships>
- ▶ Baker Technical Institute, Baker City: <https://bakerti.org>
- ▶ Northwest Lineman College, Meridian, Idaho: <https://lineman.edu>

Apprentice opportunities:

- ▶ Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries-Trades: <https://stage.oregon.gov/boli/apprenticeship/Pages/apprenticeship-opportunities.aspx>

highway construction and health care.

"Learn a skill, master the skill and learn to find opportunities," Doug says. "The opportunities are excellent. For example, all of BTI's electrical apprentice journeyman have jobs—100% employment."

According to Doug, this is common for many BTI programs. He says they work closely with many industry sectors on a daily basis, resulting in many of their students having job offers when they graduate.

"An added benefit is when these students are offered local employment once they leave, allowing them to stay in Eastern Oregon where often times they want to live and help grow our communities and economy," Doug says. ■



OTEC Uses Virtual Reality to Educate About Electrical Safety

By Lisa Jacoby

Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative continues to use the newest technology to educate communities on how to safely coexist with power lines.

OTEC has finished seven virtual reality videos. Two are focused on safety. The first educates viewers on the proper procedures in case of a downed power line, such as a vehicle striking a pole. The second centers on the importance of agriculture safety around power lines.

The other videos focus on tourism and economic development throughout Eastern Oregon, highlighting outdoor recreation and destinations such as Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort and Copper Belt Winery in Baker County, and the Union County Farm Loop.

“We’ve created a video for each county,” says Lea Gettle, OTEC manager of administration and strategic services.

Golden Shovel Agency filmed the agriculture safety video on a farm in Union County owned by Austin Bingaman—a farmer and OTEC board member.

This virtual reality approach follows OTEC’s commitment to sharing safety tips through radio, print and other media platforms. Virtual reality is the newest addition to the safety campaign and allows viewers to take an active role in learning about electrical safety.

Using the immersive technology of the virtual reality 360-degree video engages the viewer like no other media format. When participants put on a headset, they can look up, down and 360 degrees around the scene while they listen to the safety message.

“The virtual reality is taking it a step further,” Lea says.

Golden Shovel produced the video, which was sponsored by Federated Rural Electric Insurance.

“The video will be used both locally with our member-owners and nationally,” Lea says.

The launch of the video was planned for a safety conference in Florida this spring, but the trip was postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The downed power line video will be available to cooperatives across the country. Lea says OTEC is the first electric company to use virtual reality to share safety messages with the public.

“We’re doing it to protect everyone,” she says.

The safety videos can be downloaded to play on a virtual-reality headset, but a headset is not required. To access the videos on a computer, go to OTEC’s website at otec.coop and navigate to the “safety” tab. While watching on a computer, viewers can use the mouse or arrow keys to experience the scene 360 degrees in nearly every direction.

OREGON TRAIL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

The immersive technology of virtual reality gives viewers a 360-degree angle unlike any other media format. PHOTOS COURTESY OF OREGON TRAIL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



OTEC's virtual reality video implements safety messages, such as staying at least 50 feet away from power lines while operating equipment.

“Virtual reality makes your brain think that you’re really in a new place,” says Aaron Brossoit, CEO of Golden Shovel. “The result of this increased brain activity is that the viewer understands the message and remembers it. Retention of information is so important for training. If you can’t remember it, you can’t use what you’ve learned.”

OTEC owns 20 virtual reality headsets, which will be used for hands-on training.

“We’ll work with local farming groups and equipment rental businesses,” Lea says.

After pandemic restrictions are eased, VR headsets will be available in OTEC office lobbies for customers to watch the videos.

Agriculture Safety Video

Austin volunteered the use of his field and equipment to film the agriculture safety video in June 2019 between cutting hay and harvesting grass seed.

“It was pretty neat,” he says of the process, which took about six hours to film. “I hadn’t thought about using virtual reality for a safety video.”

Working around electricity is a real part of his day, Austin says, with power lines

along the county roads where he accesses fields. Electricity also powers the pumps and pivots that irrigate his crops.

“We have power lines surrounding our fields,” he says. “We’re working around lines all the time.”

This means a reminder about electrical safety is always a good idea.

“We can get complacent and forget to look up,” he says

The safety video notes that technological advances have eased some labor associated with farming, but that working around energized power lines is still a risk.

“One thing that hasn’t changed is that farming can be dangerous, especially where electricity is concerned, if you fail to plan the work,” the narrator says.

Farm workers are encouraged to conduct a safety tailboard or hazard assessment prior to working so everyone involved knows the placement of power lines and how to safely work around hazards.

OTEC’s safety advice is to stay at least 50 feet between a farm implement and a power line, which may require spotters to alert the equipment operator.

Those who must work alone are encouraged to assess all potential electric hazards prior to starting work.

“Look up and note the power lines,” the

narrator explains. “Look around for poles, not only on the edge of fields but in the interior.”

The video also covers the proper procedure in the event a power line falls across a piece of equipment. If caught inside, a worker should stay in the cab until assistance arrives. If the line causes a fire, the operator can jump clear of the equipment, landing with both feet together, and then hopping with feet still together until at least 50 feet away.

While irrigating, the video advises, locate electrical hazards prior to work and keep equipment and metal pipe at least 50 feet away from power lines. When assessing overspray of a sprinkler system, be sure it will not hit a power line.

The video ends with powerful, simple advice. “Remember: Look up to live.”

Corey Parr, vice president of safety and loss prevention at Federated Rural Electric Insurance, sees the advantage of using virtual reality for safety training because it mimics being in the middle of the action.

“You can look over the whole facility and better see the hazards,” he says. ■

To access the videos, go to <https://otec.coop>. Choose the “safety” tab and click on “safety first.” Videos can be downloaded to a virtual reality headset or watched on a computer.



Ginnine Wenisch, a volunteer manager at Mountain Community Co-op, shows off some of the co-op's products.

Grocery Stories

Mountain Community Co-op cares about its impact—from its suppliers to the customers and community it serves

Story and photos by Rick Stedman

Eatonville's Mountain Community Co-op is more than just a member-owned natural foods store.

"A co-op is a like-minded group that cares about sustainable agriculture and supporting local food systems, as well as a business philosophy that values more than the bottom line," says Ginnine Wenisch, a volunteer manager at MCC.

The co-op is community driven, and not just a retail store.

"We also offer classes and try to educate the public about the extensive outreach a co-op has throughout the world," Ginnine says. "There is an extended world out there that you can experience whenever you visit a co-op like MCC."

For example, Riojana wine from Argentina is on the shelves at MCC. Ginnine says that the distributor was visiting the United States recently and offered to make a visit to Eatonville to share samples of his wine.

"I was so impressed that he would take the time to visit our small community," she says. "It was even more impressive when he shared the story about how selling that wine in the U.S. supports many of the residents in his small town, including grape growers and those who harvest the grapes."

For socially conscious co-op members, outreach efforts such as



LEFT: Mountain Community Co-op is proud of the stories behind many of its products, including Rioja wine from Argentina. RIGHT: MCC sells seeds, which often are planted in the Mountain Community Garden.

this have come to be expected.

“It’s refreshing when members explore the story behind the products,” Ginnine says.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted towns large and small throughout the world, including Eatonville. When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit, it resulted in a short-lived boom in business for Mountain Community Co-op.

“People were suddenly discovering the co-op,” Ginnine says. “It seems like people started thinking more about what they ate and being more conscious of their intake. For some reason, bread flour was a popular selling item.”

One offering many members continue to like and appreciate during the pandemic is the weekly produce shares. Every Saturday, the co-op receives produce from local distributors and farmers. The produce is divided into shares that customers pick up that day. Shares are either mixed fruits and vegetables or fruit only, and come in two sizes. The content of the boxes changes from week to week. Even if you are not a member, you can participate in this healthy offering. Call 360-832-2667 for details.

A few blocks from MCC, the Mountain Community Garden has been an Eatonville fixture since 2013. The acre of land at 113 Rainier Ave. North was donated by the Van Eaton family for use as a community garden.

Garden Coordinator Barbara Samora says the garden—which

is included in the MCC’s education and community outreach programs—is open to all in the greater mountain community.

“In addition to encouraging healthy, organic gardening practices, much of the garden is dedicated to growing healthy organic produce for our local food bank,” Barbara says. “We also lease raised beds to gardeners, with all funds going toward the garden’s operations fund.”

Last year, Mountain Community Garden volunteers donated about 1,000 pounds of produce to the Eatonville Family Agency food bank. Barbara says the vegetables grown included kale, chard, lettuce, tomatoes, beans, zucchini and cucumbers. Later in the fall, they harvest winter squash and edible pumpkins.

Community classes are offered at the community garden, including organic and sustainable gardening practices.

“Everything about the co-op is local, which is another testament to the town of Eatonville,” Ginnine says. “Everything is interconnected in some way. The co-op specifically works to maintain a small-town feel, protect the natural environment and honor our cultural heritage.” ■

Ginnine says that in 2019, working member-owners donated and volunteered an average of 400 hours each month. Their labor of love keeps the co-op running. Mountain Community Co-op is always looking for new volunteers for a variety of positions, all of which are outlined on its website: mountaincommunitycoop.coop



PHOTO COURTESY OF
TYLER MCKINLEY PHOTOGRAPHY

2020 TEC Scholarship Winner: Cooper Joy

Her memories from Anderson Island sparked a career of service

By Crista Fitzgerald

Sometimes adversity is the catalyst that propels an energetic, forward-thinking individual onto a life path that both fulfills personal ambitions and provides a needed service to others.

An injury that occurred in the young life of Cooper Joy, a 2020 graduating senior from Kelso High School, seems to have been the starting point of just such a journey.

About 10 years ago, Darren and Karen Joy built a house at Lake Josephine's Riviera community on Anderson Island. They and their two daughters, Cooper and Turner, enjoy summer activities there, frequently joined by extended family, friends and neighbors.

Cooper and her sister became known as "The Lemonade Girls" for their homemade lemonade stand. It was a nonprofit enterprise, with the pair gifting their proceeds to island community organizations.

One afternoon at the island-side ferry dock, Cooper slipped, fell and hit the pavement, biting through her lip. There is no clinic on the island, but good fortune was also waiting for the ferry that day: a dentist was on the dock, and Cooper's lip was stitched up on the spot.

"I had stitches in my mouth, and I've

had my wisdom teeth out," Cooper says.

These experiences sparked an interest in a career in dentistry. Melody Guller, Cooper's aunt and a receptionist at a dental practice in a neighboring town, arranged an observer's visit for her niece.

"I got to see some extractions," Cooper says.

Seeing the practice helped solidify her decision to study dentistry.

In January, Darren noticed an announcement included in his electric bill from Tanner Electric Cooperative about a high school senior scholarship program sponsored by the utility. Knowing his ambitious daughter's plans, he shared it with her. Cooper began the process of presenting her academic, school and community activities to Tanner Electric.

Cooper is the Kelso High School 2020 valedictorian, a four-year member of the National Honor Society and received the Citizenship Award along with other awards. During her four years in high school, Cooper held numerous student offices, including freshman class president, sophomore ASB publicity manager, junior year class president and senior ASB student activities coordinator. She has been DECA vice president, received the Junior Masonic Award and captained three varsity sports: basketball, soccer and tennis. She was also senior homecoming queen.

Most laudable, Cooper graduated with a 4.0 GPA and a variety of college credits. She made time to be of service to others outside her immediate environment, volunteering hundreds of hours to youth basketball and soccer camps, tournaments

and a fundraiser for cerebral palsy.

Kelso High's graduation was online this year. There was no prom, no gathering to celebrate. But Cooper says some friends and she hope to take a senior trip to Sunriver, Oregon, before school begins again in the fall. She also says a trip to Hawaii may be a possibility. Everything depends on so many things beyond what can be predicted.

One thing is easy to predict: Cooper will attend Boise State University in the fall. She will live with her sister, Turner, who is already a student there. And after her Bachelor of Science degree?

"I'm going to OHSU (Oregon Health and Science University) to become an oral surgeon," Cooper says.

In a May email from Lisa Peabody, TEC executive administrative assistant, came a welcome confirmation message:

"You have been selected as the winner of the Anderson Island High School Scholarship."

Cooper is spending most of her summer working as a barista to earn money toward her college expenses. Thanks to her focus on her education, community involvement, and delight in making her high school years full and memorable, she will have a \$1,000 scholarship credit to her student account from TEC.

Cooper has big plans. Part of what makes them real arrived in a bill from Tanner Electric. Cooper encourages seniors to "make sure you stay involved in school. Apply for as many scholarships as you can. And be sure to have fun. Because those four years go by fast." ■



Steve Conway has represented Parkland and the 29th District in the Washington State Senate since 2010. PHOTO COURTESY OF SEN. CONWAY

Representing Parkland

Unincorporated Parkland benefits from dedicated, experienced state legislators

By Rick Stedman

“Representing the 29th District as a legislator is sometimes like juggling an egg, a bowling ball and a badger,” Washington State Rep. Steve Kirby says on his website. “It sometimes takes finesse, sometimes strength and sometimes it turns around and bites you!”

Kirby is a Democrat representing Parkland and the rest of Washington’s 29th District in the state House of Representatives, and he appreciates the quote and how it describes his efforts. He

is joined in his juggling act of representing the 29th District by fellow Democrats Rep. Melanie Morgan and Sen. Steve Conway.

There is not one voice or entity representing the community, because much of Pierce County is unincorporated.

“This presents a huge challenge for state representatives,” says Conway, who has served Parkland’s district for 26 years. “There is no single voice for Parkland, like a mayor or city council, which is why we must reach out and work with the various community groups to get things done.”

All three legislators’ long-standing association with the local community plays an important role in understanding and addressing the issues and concerns of the community.

Morgan, elected in 2018, graduated from St. Martin’s University and lives in Parkland. She says that people who

struggle the most tend to have the least access to the legislative process. This motivated her run for state legislature.

“I use an equity, diversity and inclusion lens when addressing policies and how they may impact the entire community,” Morgan says.

Morgan draws on her wealth of experiences to guide her services to the district. She is a former Franklin Pierce School District board director, a U.S. Army veteran and a former mortgage banker. Morgan has been a housing advocate since 1997, including serving as a safe housing coordinator and a commissioner on the board of the Pierce County Housing Authority.

Morgan currently serves on the Commerce and Gaming Committee.

Kirby says local politics have always been his calling.



Rep. Melanie Morgan, far left, joins Rep. Steve Kirby in representing Parkland and the 29th District in the Washington House of Representatives. PHOTOS COURTESY OF REP. MORGAN AND REP. KIRBY, RESPECTIVELY

“Growing up in Pierce County, I noticed that South Tacoma was the neglected part of the county,” he says. “This gave me initiative as a neighborhood activist.”

That political enthusiasm led to Kirby’s election to the Tacoma City Council in 1979 at age 25—a post he held for four terms. Kirby moved up to the state legislature for the past two decades.

“My best asset as a politician is how well I know my district,” Kirby says. “I offer a lens on everything we do in the state legislature that potentially benefits Parkland. My efforts are clearly for the benefit of the community.”

As a senior member of the House of Representatives, Kirby has served on numerous committees. He currently serves on the House Civil Rights and Judiciary Committee, and as chairman of the Consumer Protection and Business Committee.

He joins Morgan on the Commerce and Gaming Committee.

Prior to serving in the legislature, Kirby spent a decade as finance director for the Sisters of Saint Dominic of Tacoma. During legislative interims, he works as community relations representative at Harborstone Credit Union.

In addition to his official civic duties, Kirby has been a member of the Tacoma Athletic Commission, the Tacoma Executives Association, the Southeast Lions Club, the South End Neighborhood Center Advisory Board and the City of Tacoma Community Development Advisory Committee.

Conway is a former Pacific Lutheran University instructor and a graduate of the University of Oregon. In addition to his master’s degree in history and doctorate in philosophy, he was also a Fulbright scholar at the London School of Economics. He served as a state representative from 1992 until 2010, when he moved into the state Senate.

“I’ve worked with the Safe Streets group to make the community safer and help reduce the drug problems and crimes,” Conway says.

Safe Streets is one of the programs all three 29th District representatives continue to be a part of and support. Created in 1989, Safe Streets unites and inspires youth, neighbors and businesses to build safe, healthy and thriving communities. Conway says the Pierce County Safe Streets initiative has helped reduce the drug problems and crime within the area. ■

Washington State Legislature Quick Facts

- ▶ The Evergreen State features a bicameral body comprised of the Senate and House of Representatives.
- ▶ There are 49 districts in the state, each representing roughly 140,000 people. Each district is represented by two members from the House and one from the Senate. The lieutenant governor serves as president of the senate.
- ▶ The 29th District includes parts of Tacoma, Lakewood and Parkland. Representatives for the 29th District include Sen. Steve Conway, Rep. Melanie Morgan (position 1) and Rep. Steve Kirby (position 2).
- ▶ Every year, the legislature convenes the second Monday in January at the Washington State Capitol in Olympia.



Preparing for Wildfire

As wildfire season gets underway in Columbia County and across Oregon, the Clatskanie Fire District takes part in a joint wildfire drill

Story and photos by Scott Laird

Summer in Oregon means many things, but for the firefighters of the Clatskanie Rural Fire Protection District, summer means wildfire season.

According to the Office of Oregon State Fire Marshal, in 2017 Oregon had one of the worst wildfire seasons in recent memory when more than 380,000 acres burned in 218 separate incidents.

The next two years saw more incidents, but fewer total acres burned: more than 90,000 acres in 306 incidents in 2018, and almost 78,000 acres in 258 incidents in 2019.

Close to home, in July 2017 a 30-acre wildfire broke out near Highway 47 on privately owned timberland protected

by the Oregon Department of Forestry, about 5 miles south of Clatskanie. CRFPD responded, along with multiple other agencies, and helped contain that blaze.

In 2019, an 8-acre wildfire within the Clatskanie Fire District boundaries erupted in early August and had to be contained.

CRFPD also responded to a 17-acre fire the same summer.

Overall, Columbia County had eight wildfire incidents in 2019.

Those numbers are why, in mid-May this year, CRFPD participated in a wildland firefighting drill in coordination with the Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District and Mist-Birkenfeld Rural Fire Protection District.



In a wildland fire, firefighters locate a nearby water source, transport the water to the site of the blaze and store the water in a portable tank before pumping it into hoses used to control the flames.



During a wildland drill, firefighters practice cutting handline—a 3-foot wide path surrounding a fire with all vegetation removed to help contain the spread of the fire.

“Our fire district covers 136 square miles, of which about 50% is timberland, along with a lot of farmland and other private property that is covered with a lot of brush,” says Gabe Wiggins, Clatskanie RFPD training officer. “Our wildland fire hazard is fairly significant.”

“We’ve always been involved along with ODF in wildland suppression in this district,” says Clatskanie Fire Chief Steve Sharek.

The wildland fire drill began with a briefing for all agencies at 8 a.m. Volunteers, officers and staff were taught safety and potential hazards, and were given their assignments to fight the controlled and prescribed wildland fire.

The participating fire districts’ apparatus were staged and then alerted by C-Com—the county emergency dispatch system—to a training exercise brush fire on recently

logged and replanted private timberland near milepost 10 on Apiary Road. Water tenders, brush rigs and command rigs from all three districts were activated and moved into position at the scene.

Gabe served as incident commander for the drill. Mist-Birkenfeld Chief Joe Kaczynski served as safety officer, and Division Chief Nick Berg was the coordinator and property liaison. Vernonia’s Training Chief Will Steinweg oversaw operations, and Rob Davis served as public information officer.

This was the first wildland firefighting training for several volunteers.

“We also had people stepping into new leadership roles and advancing their careers,” Gabe says.

Upon arrival, volunteers were instructed in the proper techniques to cut a handline by digging and clearing the brush down to bare dirt in a circle about 3 feet wide around several burning slash piles of wooded debris, which was lit for the drill.

Other volunteers worked to lay out a progressive hose line, with 200 feet of trunk line—the main supply for the hose line—and with 100-foot lateral hoses with nozzles to provide several options for reaching and controlling the fire.

Meanwhile, a nearby water source was established. Water was pumped into water tenders, transported to the site, emptied

Stay Smart, Stay Safe

The Clatskanie Rural Fire Protection District reminds everyone to be cautious about summer wildfires. One way to protect private property is to create a defensible space around any structures. The area should be at least 30 feet wide and landscaped and clear of debris so fire can’t travel through it quickly.

“A large percentage of our outdoor fires are caused by people,” says Clatskanie Fire Chief Steve Sharek. “Make sure any fires are always monitored and watch the wind and humidity. That goes a long way toward making sure your fire doesn’t escape.”

into portable water tanks and pumped to the hoses. The incident command team practiced communication and logistics among agencies.

“None of the fire districts in Columbia County are big enough to handle a major emergency all by ourselves,” Gabe says. “We all work with and assist each other on these types of calls. So these chances to train together ahead of time makes it much more comfortable. When someone shows up from another agency, it’s a familiar face. We learn what apparatus different agencies have and their capabilities. We have a little better idea about how things are going to go, so when we’re working a real call, we’re already familiar with each other from that training environment.” ■

A Decade of Self Discovery

Ultra-athletes push further than they thought possible

By Dianna Troyer

Tired and short of breath, Sarah Somers wanted to walk instead of run during her first competitive race a decade ago. She debated whether the stranger running beside her was a blessing or a curse.

“She wouldn’t let me walk,” says Sarah, who was running 5 kilometers (3.1 miles) in Alamo in 2010. “The furthest I had run before the event was 2 miles, so this was daunting to me.”

Sarah and the stranger, Kathi Hunt, introduced themselves and finished the race together.

Kathi says she encouraged Sarah because, “I’m the type who cheers people on. I told her, ‘You’ve got this.’”

As they ran together, they learned they had a lot in common.

“We run at about the same speed,” Kathi says. “We both have a sense of adventure and like to explore. We stay positive and have a strong desire to finish whatever we start.”

Kathi happened to live in Panaca, about 12 miles from Sarah’s home in Pioche.

“We became running partners and great friends,” Sarah says. “We both just wanted to get in better shape.”

They are among a group of Lincoln County ultra-athletes who compete throughout the region. They have completed half-marathons, marathons, Spartan contests, and half and full Ironman triathlons. During a half Ironman, competitors swim 1.9 kilometers (1.2 miles), bike 90 km (56 miles) and run 21.1 km (13.1 miles). The distances are double for a full Ironman.

Since embracing fitness, they have surprised themselves by reaching new goals. They share advice about becoming more physically fit and competing.

As Sarah and Kathi became serious competitors, they say they were inspired by ultra-runner Kristal Romans—a breast



Sarah Somers, left, and Kathi Hunt cross the finish line of their first Iron Man 70.3 in St. George, Utah, in 2015. They traversed 70.3 miles: 1.2 miles swimming, 56 miles biking and 13.1 miles running. PHOTO COURTESY OF SARAH SOMERS

cancer survivor who lives in Dry Valley, about 10 miles east of Pioche.

“After I finished radiation treatment, my health issues drove me to pick up running and biking,” says Kristal, 38, a seasonal aide at Echo Canyon State Park. “I decided to fight cancer with exercise. When I started, I could barely run a block, but I kept at it.”

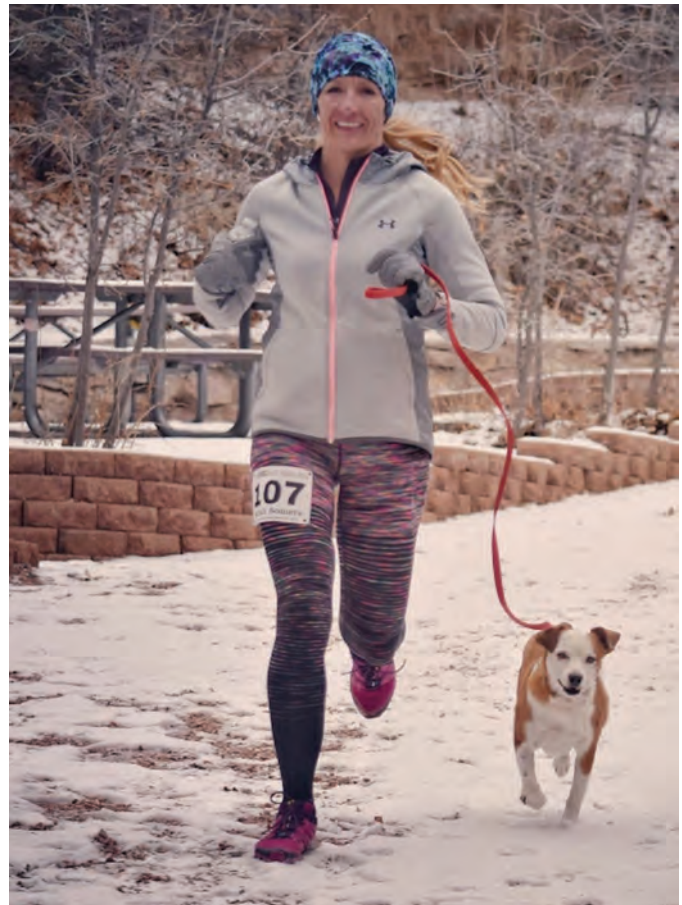
The three women are training for

summer and fall races. Kristal will run solo in the 55-mile Ruby Mountain Relay in August. Sarah plans to run a marathon in September in northern Utah. In October, Kathi plans to compete in a marathon in St. George, Utah.

“Physically, we all have more ability than we give ourselves credit for,” Kathi says. “You’d be surprised at what you can do. At the time of the race in Alamo,



Kristal Romans runs a scenic trail during the 2019 Thunderbird 25K near Cedar City, Utah. PHOTO COURTESY OF KRISTAL ROMANS



Sarah competes in the 2019 Big Dog Little Dog at Kershaw-Ryan State Park. PHOTO BY KRISTAL ROMANS

neither one of us was in good shape. I could barely run two blocks. But I kept at it, and eventually, two blocks became 2 miles and that became 20 miles. It's all about progressing and setting new goals."

Sarah encourages people to run whatever distance they can, recalling she could only run about a mile when she started in 2009.

"I still remember I was so happy when I could finally run a 1-mile loop," Sarah says. "I added another mile and another."

Kristal says when she started competing, she promised herself she would never run more than a 5K.

"Instead, I liked running so much I ran a 10K, then a half marathon," Kristal says. "Then I started ultra-running and did a 36-mile trail run last year. I realized I'm happiest on a trail."

Craving New Challenges

The more they exercise, the more the

"Physically, we all have more ability than we give ourselves credit for. You'd be surprised at what you can do ... It's all about progressing and setting new goals."

— KATHI HUNT

women say they feel energized.

One morning in May, Kathi ran 7 miles, swam 1,300 meters and did an hour-long Zumba workout before 10 a.m.

"Then I spent time with my family," Kathi says. "Most people would think that would be exhausting, but it isn't at all. The more you do, the more you can do."

As her endurance soared, Sarah craved new challenges. Buoyed by self-confidence

after the Alamo run, she registered for a 5K in Bryce Canyon and her first half-marathon in St. George.

"Then I just kept signing up for events strictly to keep me motivated with training," says Sarah, 38. "I set a goal of breaking my personal best times and to always try to place in my age category."

To share the transformative power of running and biking in her life, Kristal started Rocky Road Adventures two years ago, organizing races in Lincoln County. She says the name is for challenging courses and her favorite ice cream.

"People reach out to me about running, and I tell them to not doubt themselves," Kristal says. "It's mind over matter. Your body follows what your mind says it can do. I tell people, 'You can do it,' and point out Paralympic athletes who run."

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LINCOLN COUNTY POWER

Athletes

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Staying Mentally Strong

During tough sections of a race, the women have different ways to push themselves.

Sarah focuses on a motivational motto: “Fate loves the fearless.”

Kathi reminds herself the finish line is close.

“I tell myself I’ll have no regrets about reaching it,” Kathi says. “But if I give up, I’ll have plenty of regrets.”

Kristal tells herself, “Feed your focus. Think about what you want to accomplish.”

Their training schedules vary. Sarah launches her workouts at 4 a.m. so she can finish before going to work as a sixth-grade teacher at Pioche Elementary School. In her garage, she lifts weights and cross trains.

“I probably do an equal balance between that and running,” she says. “My training

has ranged from intuitive and casual when I started to a rigid schedule last year. I followed a strict plan I bought from a coach and did really well at some events.”

Kathi, 38, owns a hair salon in her home. She kicks off her training at about 6 a.m.

“We’re blessed to have a natural hot spring near Panaca, so I can do my training swims there in winter,” Kathi says. “In January, it was 28 degrees, but I was comfortable swimming.”

In May, Kristal began running 20 miles at a time to train for the Ruby Mountain race.

“I like running the trail up Highland Peak,” she says. “It’s tough, but I try to never doubt myself.”

For Sarah, running has become not only a way to maintain fitness, but also a way to expand her comfort zone.

“I’ve done more events by myself than with friends despite being scared to death,” she says. “But I’ve realized nothing bad

ever came of any of them. When I start feeling bored, it makes me want to try something new just so I’ll be nervous and overcome it.”

Sarah says she has realized difficulties are relative.

“Basically you have to do hard things to change your perception,” she says. “A 5K is hard until doing a half marathon, which makes a 5K really easy. Or doing a run that has 2,000-plus feet of elevation gain is really hard, but the next run with 500 feet of elevation gain will be easy because you can now compare it to the much harder run.”

Sarah’s yearly goal is to compete in at least one endurance event every month.

“I usually end up doing more than 12 events,” she says.

Sarah encourages others to discover the joy of becoming more physically fit.

“Start by trying to always beat your own personal best,” she says, “and see where it leads.” ■



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Pioche residents Sarah Somers, Rebeka Lewis, Jaime Cole and Cydney Dwire completed the 2019 Spartan Las Vegas event. PHOTO COURTESY OF SARAH SOMERS



FROM LEFT: Pioche residents Marie Bleak, Sarah Somers, Cydney Dwire and Jaime Cole completed the 2019 Southern Utah Marathon in St. George. PHOTO COURTESY OF SARAH SOMERS



Sunriver Glass employees install protective barriers in the Midstate Electric Cooperative office in La Pine.
PHOTOS BY BAILEY ANDERSON

Back to Business— But Never Shutting Down

Oregon's electric co-ops are transitioning open, but with a new look focused on safety

By Ted Case

To say Oregon's electric co-ops are transitioning back to business is a bit of a misnomer. They never actually closed.

Yes, many employees worked from home, but the business of running an electric utility never grinds to a halt, like much of the economy this spring. But Oregon's electric co-ops are beginning to open their offices—or at least making plans to—in accordance with the different phases of Gov. Kate Brown's Reopening Oregon program.

A snapshot of three different co-ops from three different Oregon regions—coastal, high desert and frontier—reinforces the adage, “If you've met one co-op, you've met one co-op.”

While some co-ops have high levels of foot traffic and are social hubs of their communities, others are more isolated and have fewer people coming through their doors. While each Oregon co-op approaches reopening differently and on its own time frame, the common denominator is, of course, the safety of employees and the public.

Coos-Curry Electric Cooperative has four offices along a long stretch of Oregon's south coast. As the south coast was entering phase one of reopening, Coos-Curry CEO Brent Bischoff talked to a county administrator and asked what county leaders thought of the co-op



Midstate's lobby allows faster and safe transactions between staff and their members. “Our business has not slowed down,” said CEO Dave Schneider.

reopening its doors.

“They told us, ‘We'd definitely like you to do that,’” Bischoff said.

Coos-Curry was already putting safety measures in place in all its offices, including plexiglass and social-distance markings so co-op members know the expectations.

Bischoff said his staff was comfortable with the new alignment and “members of the co-op just want us to get back to normal.” However, there may be a new normal as foot traffic in the co-ops has so far not matched pre-COVID-19 levels.

“Perhaps our members have found easier ways to pay their power bills,” Bischoff said.

Midstate Electric Cooperative, in the high-desert community of La Pine, opened its lobby doors June 15, with

social-distance measures similar to Coos-Curry Electric, including new barriers and roping. The office reopened in accordance with the Deschutes County reopening plan and, for General Manager Dave Schneider, it could not have come soon enough.

“Our business has not slowed down,” he said, noting his staff was busy with account transfers and new accounts, among other duties.

He added that much of this work is paperwork-intensive, and asking members to go to their website and email applications bogs down the process.

“It's been inconvenient to our members,” Schneider said.

He says the new configuration will expedite the paperwork while still keeping everyone safe.

The office opening at Harney Electric Cooperative in Hines has a little more of a frontier feel to it. Like other co-ops, Harney Electric is taking steps to make sure everyone is safe by installing plexiglass, but in June the co-op had what Manager Fred Flippence called a “soft opening” as the county entered phase one and allowed places like restaurants and barber shops to open. The co-op put a sign on a door asking members to knock if they needed assistance, then allowed one member at a time to enter the premises.

Even in a county with few documented cases of COVID-19, the co-op is taking precautions to protect the public and employees by practicing social distancing and wiping down surfaces.

“We also put out a sign that said, ‘If you're sick, we want you to stay out,’” Flippence said. “Out here, we don't beat around the bush,” he added with a laugh. ■