

**GALLERY:** Artists captured the essence of the Deschutes

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aren't too dark and the highlights aren't too bright. I did it with my technical camera and a slow exposure."

Schmidling, manager of Sisters Gallery & Frame Shop, also inspired by the falls, submitted his photograph of Steelhead Falls, just as stunning, but with dramatic differences.

"It's been a hard journey for me getting back into photography and looking for something that really inspires me. I stood there with my camera in that same spot on the bluff for about 30 minutes just looking out at the falls, and it finally hit me that this was really a beautiful spot, it truly inspired me," Schmidling said.

The Upper Deschutes Watershed Council teamed up with Clearwater Gallery during the art show as Educational Director Kolleen Yake and Executive Director Ryan Houston talked about their approach to restoration projects for the river.

The Watershed Council has worked on over 40 watershed enhancement projects since 1996 in the Upper Deschutes area.

"We are working in two primary areas, one is stream restoration and the other is education. You've probably read in your local paper about some of our restoration projects; we removed a dam in the upper Pine Meadow Ranch last summer, and we've also been involved in some of the big restoration downstream at the Camp Polk Meadow Preserve. We are really trying to protect water quality and promote fish and wildlife habitat and trying to bring places like Whychus Creek back to their full potential in terms of their ecological integrity," Houston said. "We like to focus on collaborative solutions with the community."

Houston introduced Yake, who is managing the restoration program.

"Our primary goal is to get kids outdoors and connect them with the rivers and streams. We work with over 3,000 local students every year, providing hands-on stewardship experiences designed to educate and inspire students of all ages," explained Yake.

The warm spring weather brought folks out and into the galleries that line Hood Avenue for the late afternoon stroll. Hood Avenue Art's Early Spring in The High Desert exhibit highlighted the best new work of the season during the art stroll, and Tony Lompa provided the music.

# Sisters' 'invisible' population

By Sue Stafford  
Columnist

Some people in Sisters claim we don't have a "homeless problem" here. Recently, there was a complaint about "aggressive panhandling" near Ray's. In several recent meetings I have heard reports of a couple of problems with homeless people in the public restrooms in Sisters. A few neighbors who live near Clemens Park are concerned that the proposed restrooms slated for the park will attract an "undesirable element."

Many of us, including me, extoll the virtues of Sisters' natural beauty, and our community "can-do" spirit when one of our neighbors faces a devastating illness, disaster, or accident. To the casual tourist driving through town or stopping for a meal and some shopping, or attending one of our storied annual events like the folk festival, quilt show, and rodeo, Sisters appears to be an idyllic small town full of charm and friendly people.

What most casual observers and a certain percentage of our residents don't see, or see and don't acknowledge, is the less-visible side of our town. There are those among us who face a daily struggle to find a place to sleep, to fill their empty stomachs, to meet the most basic needs.

Yes, we do have the homeless among us. But even the label of "the homeless" dehumanizes them and

their plight. With no name or face and no first-hand understanding of their struggles, it is easy to put them away in a tidy box with a lid on it. Maybe if we don't acknowledge them, they'll just quietly slip away and we won't have to deal with any uncomfortable feelings that our collective conscience might feel.

The numbers don't lie. In 2014, 900 people in our small town were connected by FAN to needed services. So far this school year 33 school-aged children in our district have been identified as homeless. Some of those families have moved out of the district due to no available affordable housing into which to transition. Six of those students are camping in the woods with their families. Five are living in RVs/trailers/campers, and two are couch-surfing.

This has been a mild winter by Sisters standards, but it still often drops well below freezing at night and we have experienced several snowstorms. For those of you with children and grandchildren, imagine tucking them in at night in a tent with ice forming on the inside and insufficient blankets in which to wrap them.

There is an organization in Sisters, staffed by two dedicated women who daily meet, get to know, and provide help to our homeless neighbors. The Family Action Network's (FAN) Theresa Slavkovsky

and Dawn Cooper exert a Herculean effort to meet the growing needs of our citizens who find themselves homeless and who need help with shelter, food, healthcare and clothing.

The Kiwanis Food Bank and Westside Church offer food assistance year-round. The local medical/dental/vision providers are generous in offering their services. The Sisters School District, Sisters Park & Recreation District and Habitat for Humanity/ReStore all help to meet the needs of those who are struggling. The City provides assistance with water/sewer costs and NeighborImpact offers energy assistance for those who do have some sort of housing.

There are a number of exciting new programs across the country developing new approaches to this age-old problem. Right here in Central Oregon the Homeless Leadership Coalition has been tackling this challenging problem since the 1990s. There is a man in Bend who saw a need and met it by outfitting a shower truck for use by the homeless, a small version of the trucks that service firefighting camps. He has expanded his efforts with a website which connects those with needs to individuals who can help.

I hope Sisters will never

adopt the laws and regulations of other U.S. cities that make it illegal to sit or lie in public. If you are homeless, what are your options? Being homeless is not illegal.

With all the good efforts being made in Sisters to assist the homeless to get on their feet, there is so much more we could do as a coalesced, concerned community to reach out to our neighbors who find themselves without a stable home.

My hope is that we, the good citizens of Sisters, will come together with the same commitment, enthusiasm, and goodwill that we have brought to other community endeavors, to tackle the issue of homelessness, and decide what we can do to ameliorate its crushing impacts.

A good start might be a local coalition of churches, service clubs, City representatives, a representative of the homeless, local builders and developers, the Community Garden, Habitat, interested citizens, local businesses, the school district and SPRD, veterans and elders. Possible projects could include a warming hut, a homeless shelter, temporary facilities in town made available for the coldest winter nights, constructing more affordable housing, and tiny houses for the homeless.

Let's think outside the box....

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