

Oregon on track to register drivers to vote next year

By Jonathan J. Cooper
Associated Press

SALEM (AP) — Oregonians who get their first driver's license or renew an existing one next year will automatically be registered to vote.

Officials from the secretary of state's office said Monday that they're ready to begin implementing a law approved by the Legislature earlier this year.

Beginning Jan. 1, people who are issued a driver's license, are U.S. citizens and are old enough to vote will receive a postcard in the mail that lets them choose to join a political party or opt out of registration.

If they don't opt out within three weeks, they'll automatically join the voter rolls and will receive a ballot in the next election.

"Oregon is once again a national leader in elections," said Jim Williams, the state elections director. "Just as we were the first state to make voting easier with vote by mail, now we're making voter registration easier as well."

State officials estimate they'll process about 10,000 people per month, but say it's impossible to know how many will opt out.

People who are already registered will see changes as well. If they move and change the address on their driver's license, their voter registration will automatically be updated.

Officials are not yet ready to go back and register the

roughly 275,000 people who have recently been issued a driver's license but aren't registered. That will be a separate project after the May primary, Secretary of State Jeanne Atkins said.

State officials say they've gone to great lengths to ensure the data is secure when it's being transferred between the DMV, state election officials and county election offices.

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"We concentrated on that from the very beginning — data security, both in transit and at rest," said Shamus Hannan, who oversaw the development of the technical infrastructure.

It will still be possible for voters to register through the existing methods, a paper or online application. Those methods would likely be faster, so they may be preferred by people getting a driver's license close to the registration deadline ahead of an election.

Sisters looks back at 2015

By Jim Cornelius
News Editor

Sisters had its share of accomplishments and controversies in the year gone by. As the year rolls to a close, one of the biggest concerns Sisters Country faced in 2015 appears to be receding. Heavy mountain snowfall seems to be relieving the drought that plagued the area through 2015. That's a piece of happy news for winter recreation businesses, irrigators — and everyone who values a healthy environment in Sisters Country.

The environment benefited also from a major project along Whychus Creek, restoring natural streamflows along a three-mile reach of creek upstream from town. The Deschutes Land Trust continued its work, acquiring new acreage along the creek, helping to make this area a poster child for restoration.

Three Sisters Irrigation District marked a milestone in a years-long canal-piping effort, opening a new power plant at its Watson Reservoir facility.

2015 saw the Outlaws soccer team take a state championship. 2015 marked the inaugural year for the Outlaw Hall of Fame, honoring the accomplishments of Sisters' many standout athletes. Other athletes had a good year, too. Weightlifter Ryan Hudson continued to smash records, and Greg and Gabe Willitts came home with a trophy from the SCORE International San Felipe 250 motorcycle race.

The arts continued to put Sisters on the map. Alana

Nore of Sisters represented the art program at Caldera at the White House. The Sisters Folk Festival marked its 20th anniversary, while supporting arts education and offering the community free summer concerts. The Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show marked 40 years, while the Sisters Rodeo celebrated its 75th anniversary.

Several new faces were welcomed in local government. Curt Scholl became Sisters' new Superintendent of Schools, as the district's enrollment showed signs of stabilizing after several years of decline.

Patrick Davenport signed on as Community Development Director for the City of Sisters and Darcy Reed became the City's assistant planner. They plunged right in to work, as the City developed fixes to traffic issues at Creekside Park and worked through changes in how it handles transient and temporary business activity.

The City saw its share of controversies through much of the year. Allowing food carts at a downtown business created a contretemps, as did a proposal to provide grants to businesses using urban renewal funds. The climate in the City contributed to the resignation of three city councilors over a period of a couple of months. That situation stabilized toward the end of the year, with Amy Burgstahler and Andrea Blum joining Chris Frye, Nancy Connolly and David Asson in a council that seems to be functioning well as the year closes.

The City signed an agreement with the Oregon

Department of Transportation that clears the way for design and development of a roundabout for the Barclay Drive/Highway 20 intersection. Public opinion is split on the idea, but a test of the roundabout design proved acceptable to truckers, and ODOT concluded that it was the best option for the intersection.

A paved path from Sisters to Black Butte Ranch continued to be the focus of ongoing community conflict. After an attempt at mediation and the involvement of a Deschutes County Commissioner in trying to determine a path forward, the U.S. Forest Service took the whole matter back to the trailhead for new environmental analysis.

Business in Sisters improved in 2015, with numerous new startups and expansions and more on the horizon. The housing market improved — with growing concern about affordable housing, a concern that has grown throughout the region.

With plenty of snow on the mountains, a brightening economic picture, greater institutional stability and efforts toward creating a more civil discourse through the community, Sisters Country looks toward 2016.



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