

Circle of Friends welcomes new associate director

By Jim Cornelius
News Editor

Nothing is more critical to the health of a community than the well-being of its youth. For years now, Circle of Friends has been providing the community's most vulnerable children a nurturing and sustained relationship with a volunteer mentor. Those mentors teach positive values and have attainable expectations for each child to become a healthy, productive member of the community.

The organization recently announced Kelly Davis Martin as its new associate director. In her role, the "homegrown" Sisters coach and health advocate will recruit and train new mentors, develop programming for the kids, and track data to properly gauge the program's effectiveness.

Davis Martin brings a formidable range of qualifications and experience to the role: she's been a health advocate and wellness coach, is currently an athletic coach and has taught at COCC. But perhaps most importantly, she is committed to helping kids. She's been active with the

Boys & Girls Club program "Girls On The Run," which encourages third- through fifth-grade girls to be physically active.

"Any girl in Sisters will be able to participate," she notes. Girls involved with Circle of Friends will be eligible for scholarships in that program.

And Davis Martin is also a Circle of Friends mentor. Actually — her whole family is mentoring. Davis Martin has young children, and she sees Circle of Friends mentorship as valuable leadership experience for them.

And, she notes, she is an example of the kind of person who might not think they're in a position to mentor — but actually are: "People like me — working families ... it's possible to mentor a child," she says.

Davis Martin was initially interested in mentoring or being on the board of directors of Circle of Friends, but when the position opened up, she was excited at the prospect.

The long-term vision of Circle of Friends is that every child in Sisters who needs a Friend, has a Friend. Friends provide consistency

and long-term relationships for the children they mentor. Circle of Friends works collaboratively with the Sisters School District, other service providers, and the community to create a plan and support those children most at risk. The result is that all children are provided experiences and opportunities that will contribute to their current and future success.

That lines up with everything Davis Martin believes in.

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— Kelly Davis Martin

"It's just a match of personal and professional philosophy and community connections and wanting to help kids," she said.

Davis Martin truly is a homegrown Sisters product. She did her entire k-12 education here in Sisters. She was

teaching at COCC when she decided to take a sabbatical and move with her husband to New Zealand. But when it came to raising a family, she wanted that Sisters experience.

"We just really wanted that small-town connection again," she said.

She has an 8-year-old and a 10-year-old, who attend school at Black Butte School — and who are fully involved in her family-style mentorship.

One of Davis Martin's missions is to help prospective mentors recognize that the work is flexible and can work for people with a variety of lifestyles and abilities to commit time. For example, a retiree who likes to travel can partner with another mentor and "share" a child. She and Executive Director Debbie Newport hope that anyone who thinks they might like to mentor a Circle of Friends child inquires about it — there's almost certainly a way to make things work for everyone.

And the rewards are tremendous. Many studies have shown that children who have strong relationships with adult



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

Kelly Davis Martin.

mentors outside the family do better in a range of areas, from academics to their physical health and well-being. In a sense, mentorship relationships adhere to an ages-old human tradition of extended family relationships — where sometimes it's easier for a child to talk about certain things or do certain activities with someone who is not a parent.

And the mentors, too, benefit, in the classic "I get more out of it than the child does" sense.

"The long-term investment is so worth it," Davis Martins says.

For more information visit www.acircleoffriendsoregon.com/mentor or call 541-588-6445.



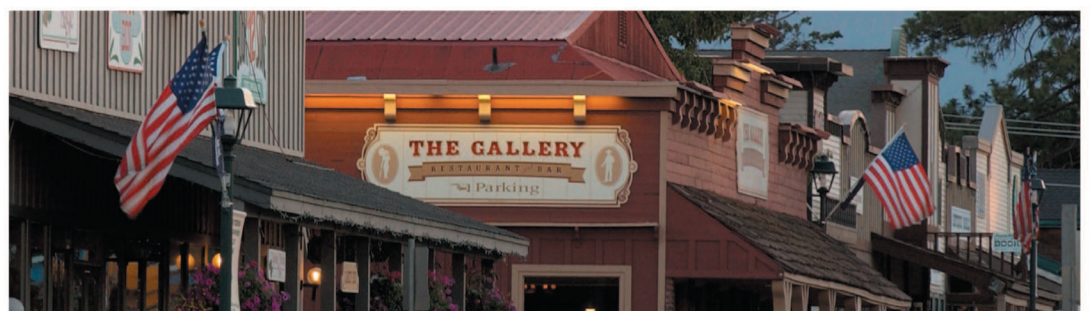
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May S. Fan, MD

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