

# Of a certain age...

By Sue Stafford  
Columnist

The Three Sisters Historical Society horse-drawn wagon in the rodeo parade last month was full of descendants whose ancestors settled, grew, and sustained early Sisters Country. Those early settlers came from many different geographic locations, all searching for a better life.

Sisters has been home to many people with “can-do” attitudes, and that is a quality still prevalent today. The Smith brothers laid out the original plat for the city in 1901. Schools and a library were built because of the initiative and faith of the citizens in the future. Some things have come and stayed, like the Forest Service, an important component of this town. Other things came and are now gone, like the Sisters Fair and Army maneuvers.

The Sisters Rodeo has been successful for 78 years, all due to the vision and effort of local volunteers who have grown the rodeo into “The Biggest Little Show in the World” known across the country. The crowds that flock to the rodeo benefit the entire town.

Two locals with a love for music began the Sisters Folk Festival, and it has grown into one of the most popular festivals in the country. During the weekend after Labor Day the entire town becomes a stage, with 11 venues throughout the city.

Jean Wells began the Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show 43 years ago when she hung some of her quilts out in front of her shop. Now it is the largest outdoor quilt show in the world, with quilters coming from around the globe to view 1,300 quilts in one day. The event has grown to include Sunday at FivePine, a week of classes, world-famous quilting experts, and specialty exhibits. The population of this small town swells with more than 10,000 visitors in the

streets on Saturday.

Over time, Sisters has experienced the ebb and flow of the economic tides as industries shifted from farming, fur trapping, sheep, and cattle to the timber camps and lumber mills that dotted the countryside. When the ponderosa pine was depleted, Sisters turned to tourism and outdoor recreation to drive the town’s economic engine. Currently, year-round small specialty businesses and light manufacturing are taking hold in addition to tourism.

Adaptability has been a necessary constant for the residents of Sisters over the years. Fires in 1923 and 1924 destroyed major sections of downtown. People regrouped, rebuilt, and came back stronger. Sisters might be considered the little town that wouldn’t die.

The town received help from different corners and many people. Brooks-Scanlon and Shevlin-Hixon brought the timber camps and trains. Lumber mills sprang up and moved with the timber supply, employing many of the local men. Black Butte Ranch was developed as a residential and recreational resort by Brooks-Scanlon at a time when Sisters was struggling. Their desire to have a town where Black Butte Ranch guests and residents could come to shop spurred the revitalization of downtown with the adoption of the Western-themed storefronts.

The importance of education to the community first became evident when the residents demanded the establishment of a public school in town so the students didn’t have to travel to Redmond. That high regard for quality education persists to this day.

In the beginning, there were roadhouses established to serve travelers passing through. Today, we have a selection of motels, B&Bs, vacation rentals, a lodge with cabins and a conference

center, and a new hotel nearing construction. A variety of restaurants can please any palate.

Blacksmith shops made way for garages and auto repair shops. Local saloons turned to near beer during Prohibition (and bootleggers got in on the action). We now have Three Creeks Brewery, Cascade Street Distillery, and a number of bars and lounges.

Early Sisters enjoyed live theater, a local band, a movie theater, and a bandstand on the main street. Today we have Sisters Movie House, numerous art galleries and the Sisters Arts Association, Silent Echo Theater Company, the public library, Three Sisters Historical Society, *The Nugget Newspaper*, and live music almost any night of the week in restaurants, bars, and at The Belfry.

Davidson’s Addition was one of the first platted “subdivisions” in town. Now we have Pine Meadow Village, Coyote Springs, Timber Creek, Village at Cold Springs, and Clear Pine, to name a few more recent developments.

After the town experienced a number of fires, the citizens organized a fire department that today is housed in a modern building with first-class equipment, serving the community in a professional manner, providing not only fire protection and suppression, but also emergency medical response and a number of community services. In the usual Sisters way, they also have a large contingent of volunteer fire people to supplement the professional staff.

The lifeblood of Sisters Country in the early days was water, which made settlement and agriculture possible. Ditches crisscrossed the countryside, carrying water from local creeks to the dry high desert homesteads. Today, the city has a series of wells that supply the residents, along with a

city sewer system installed in 2000 that spurred new development and growth. At every turn, every change, there were undoubtedly those who hated seeing change and worried about losing their quality of life.

We are blessed to be surrounded with the natural beauty of our mountains, lakes, rivers, forests, and wildlife. The establishment of the National Forest system is a big part of why we have that beauty to enjoy. As residents of this paradise, it is our job to protect and sustain our environment.

Part of the pioneer spirit still alive in Sisters is the fact that we take care of our own and welcome strangers. People came here in the late 1800s and early 1900s looking for a better life and realized the importance of helping one another.

People today come for a variety of reasons — the dry climate, sunshine and blue skies, outdoor recreation, small-town atmosphere, the schools, and the arts. The one thing everyone agrees on is the quality of life possible in this small town at the foot of the mountains. We are still wrestling with concerns about growth, economic vitality, affordable housing, and maintaining our quality of life.

Would Sisters be here today if the early settlers hadn’t welcomed visitors and newcomers and learned to adapt to change and

circumstance? Would you and I be here if those who came before built a wall and closed the gate?

Polarization only hurts what we have and stunts the community. Our early Sisters residents were successful because of ingenuity, hard work, and willingness to take risks and try new things. It is now up to us to think outside the box to create our vision going forward, and finding modern-day solutions. Each person’s voice counts — speak up. Most importantly, we need to listen to one another with open hearts and minds.

What a lovely legacy we could leave to future generations if we became known as the little town with the big heart — in the heart of Oregon.

I know I have been guilty of thinking and saying, “I don’t want to see Sisters change.” But change it has over the years, and change it will. It’s all about my attitude toward that change. If we each have pride of place, hopefully newcomers will see that and contribute to what makes Sisters special. Our willingness to share and be welcoming might infect newcomers so they adopt our heart-centered way of doing things. It’s up to each of us to practice civility and kindness in all our interactions.

Instead of dukes up, I will extend my hand in welcome, and hopefully you will join me.



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Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show..... July 14  
Sisters Folk Festival ..... September 7-9  
Sisters Fresh Hop Festival ... September 29  
Sisters Harvest Faire.....October 13 & 14  
Thanksgiving .....November 22  
Christmas Tree Lighting .....November 23  
Sisters Christmas Parade.....November 24

Placement deadline is **Monday before noon** at **541-549-9941** or **nuggetnews.com**

See “ab-strakt-ed” Exhibit at Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show, July 14, 2018 - Sponsored by SBQR



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