

YouthBuild gives back to Sisters

By Jodi Schneider
Correspondent

The Heart of Oregon Corps YouthBuild is an alternative program in Sisters that works for youth who need a different approach from the traditional classroom setting.

The program provides significant, life-altering opportunities to local young people who need and deserve them. Members in the program divide their time between classroom, field (construction sites), and leadership development. The youth are working toward completing their GED, high school diploma, or college credits while also learning work-readiness skills through construction.

This past Friday and Saturday a group of 15 hard-working youth put their labors to use to make a difference in their community by helping build the stage and fencing for the Sisters Rhythm and Brews Festival at the Village Green and the second venue at Sisters Art Works.

A percentage of the festival's proceeds will be donated to the Heart of Oregon YouthBuild program. Program director Kara

Johnson is enthusiastic about their program being able to benefit from the festival.

"We want to inspire and empower positive change in the lives of young people through jobs, education, and stewardship," said Johnson.

"Not only are we a beneficiary of the proceeds but it also gives us the opportunity to expose our youth to careers in the music industry from electrical, stage building, sound set-up, and festival organization. Our youth are very much into music, so the exposure to careers in the industry is amazing."

Heart of Oregon YouthBuild has built 23 homes in the last nine years. And in Sisters, they have built one home, have one home under construction, and have two planned for 2019 and 2020.

"Our youth are currently building two brand new residential homes, one in Sisters through our partnership with Sisters Habitat for Humanity and one in Madras through Housing Works," Johnson added. "The youth, with the help of our construction staff who are teaching them along the way, build from the ground up."

The young people are also AmeriCorps members, so when they are working on the homes, they are working toward earning their AmeriCorps scholarship for college.

Sisters resident John Griffith, mentoring coordinator for YouthBuild, was on hand with the members at Village Green Park.

Griffith's passion is working with youth and he calls it his second career.

"I recruit, train and coordinate volunteers, tutors and mentors," Griffith told *The Nugget*. "I've been working with kids for 15 years now, and over the last five years I was working at different alternative/boarding schools teaching math, English and counseling, and I'm an engineer by trade."

"We've got 35 youths in the overall program right now. They are trained in construction skills and they get certified at our training center in Redmond. The young people who attend our program are 16 to 24 years old, who typically have had some type of barrier that prevents or has prevented them from excelling or even attending high school. And another unique



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER

Central Oregon YouthBuild helped stage the Sisters Rhythm and Brews Festival, which, in turn, supports the program.

aspect to our program is youth get paid a daily stipend for attending the program."

Allison Griffin, case manager and youth advocate, noted that one youth member from Sisters was really enjoying learning a new set of skills building the fence.

"I think the whole idea of the festival is awesome and I do like building. I've never had any experience with something like this and it's been really fun learning," said 17-year-old Konnor Murphy, who's been in the YouthBuild program for less than a year. "I think about how we are helping people out, and it makes me feel good."

Festival co-organizer Jennifer Rambo was inspired to bring the YouthBuild program into the festival

because, like them, she didn't fit in the standard high school mold as a youth, and graduated Sisters High School through another alternative program.

"In 2015 I was approached by Heart of Oregon YouthBuild to organize a girl's leadership day," Rambo said. And that led to working on five of the houses that they've built in Madras.

"Part of the program is learning life skills and a building trade. It's setting them up with the first steps to get into trade school or college," she added. "There is a need for more awareness in the community that these programs exist, and there is a need for affordable housing in the community. These programs (bridge) that gap."

**ENLIGHTENING
ENGAGING
SPUNKY**

The Nugget
Health & Fitness Issue
8.15.18

The opportunity for a healthy, active lifestyle in an environment that promotes wellness for mind and body is one of the main attractions of living in Sisters. We invite you to explore the Health & Fitness special edition of *The Nugget Newspaper* August 15.

Photo by Jerry Baldock, outlawsphotography.net