

VOGELGESANG: Calling Sisters home is about quality of life

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eventually returned to the hometown they loved and Lena was able to spend her junior and senior years once again at Sisters High School. Being back home felt good, however Lena knew that she would again have to leave when it was time for college.

After graduating, Lena headed back to Colorado Springs to pursue her higher education. Small-town life didn't quite prepare Lena for the differences in a bigger world, however she feels it gave her an anchor that would later provide clarity on what is most important. It was here that Lena met Chris Vogelgesang; the man who became her best friend and husband. As the newlyweds planned their future, which included starting a family, Sisters seemed like the best place to settle. Lena would once again be able to return home.

Living in any small town has its challenges, and for a young couple just starting out, limited job opportunities and housing can create difficult roadblocks. Add in high cost of living and it can seem almost impossible. Impossible, unless you are determined, connected and committed to raising a family where quality of life abounds.

Lena and Chris found a way six years ago, and it wasn't long after the decision to move that they learned they were "expecting." That first year was unimaginable. Moving between six different homes and working multiple jobs became the norm. Lena's family and relationships within the community definitely helped, but they had to be willing to move repeatedly and be open to different types of jobs that would sustain them.

After Liam was born, Lena and Chris prayed for stability and a place they could call their long-term home. Prayers were answered when they were offered an opportunity to buy the home they were renting; the sixth residence in that first year would become their own.

The Vogelgesang family has grown to four, and everyone is enjoying a lifestyle that is rare today. Lena's roots and family are here, enabling the boys to share daily life with grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Life still requires strategies and multiple jobs, however Lena feels that "the opportunities definitely outweigh the sacrifices."

As Liam and Noah (Chris and Lena's second son) grow



PHOTO BY CAROL STATTON

Lena (Womack) Vogelgesang (right), her husband Chris, and son Liam are determined to make a go of it in Lena's old hometown.

up, they will experience what Lena did and come to understand their place within a community that cares for and supports them... and they will live a simpler life. Childhood will include unlimited opportunities to connect with nature, breathe fresh air and grow in a healthy way. It will also include a life connected to and caring for those around them, which is a family priority.

Lena is also excited to think of their boys one day going to Sisters High School and benefitting from the exceptional opportunities that exist there. Unlike the overcrowded classrooms with limited options found elsewhere, Lena envisions the

many diverse learning experiences accessible here: flying an airplane, building a ukulele — the offerings are big in this small town.

At this time of year, people who live in a small community are acutely aware of the inevitable rite of passage. It is a time of celebrating, affirming, letting go and experiencing hard goodbyes. However it is also important to remember that some who have left do return home, and some stay right here to build their future. For Lena and her family, calling Sisters "home" allows for a rare quality of life and a future where tradition, possibilities and connectedness are beautifully interwoven.

Oregon wildlife commission adopts wolf plan

SALEM (AP) — Oregon wildlife commissioners have approved the state's long-overdue Wolf Management Plan after years of revisions, contentious meetings, an outside mediator and half the stakeholders abandoning talks.

The 155-page plan to govern how wolves are handled in areas of the state where they don't enjoy federal protection under the Endangered Species Act was approved last month by the commission of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in a 6 to 1 vote, *The Oregonian/OregonLive* reported.

Before several hours of public testimony began, Commissioner Holly Akenson, who noted her past experience studying wolves as a wildlife biologist, acknowledged the tension that surrounded the process, but said the growth in Oregon's wolf population showed the state's previous management was a success.

"We see a lot of concern

on both sides of this plan," she said. "For someone like me, who has looked forward to seeing wolves living free on our landscape, it's time to celebrate."

The state's first wolf plan was issued in 2005 before any wolves had come back to the state after decades of extirpation due to hunting and trapping. The second version of the plan came out in 2010, a year after wolves had been confirmed in Oregon.

The plan finally approved Friday came after hunters and ranchers, and environmentalists and wolf advocates squared off over when wolves can be killed, why and by whom.

Talks grew so rancorous over the years that, in January, the environmental groups pulled out of negotiations, calling the process "biased, superficial and unscientific."

The latest plan revision has some key changes to the plan's most contentious provisions.

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