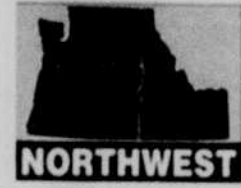


Grange finds it hard to compete in television age



KENNEWICK, Wash. (AP) — The state Grange is fighting to reverse declining membership in an age in which television has replaced the potluck dinner as a favored leisure activity.

As its membership ages, the 128-year-old agricultural organization is struggling to prove it hasn't outlived its usefulness.

"Most of us have one foot in the grave," said Leonard Auby, 91, a member of the Kennewick Valley Grange. "A lot of us had hobby farms and that sort. Now we can barely make it up the steps. And the younger folks just don't seem interested."

The Grange was founded in 1867 by a Minnesota farmer to provide a place where farmers could hold

potluck dinners, meet neighbors, compare farm prices and swap tips.

The organization, which came to Washington in 1889, provided an escape from the isolation of rural America and created an opportunity for poor farm families to forget the daily struggle.

Valeria Pilgreen was 14 when she joined the Columbia Valley Grange in 1929.

"Our fathers were all there to address farming problems and find new ways to grow our crops," said the Pasco woman, who today is 79 and one of the hall's four surviving charter members. "But it was a source of entertainment for me. I just wanted to know who my next dance partner was going to be."

The Grange flourished on Eastern Washington's Columbia Basin after Congress passed the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909, which encouraged farmers to

settle in the arid region.

Twenty-three Grange halls were formed in Benton County between 1910 and 1943. Today, only five remain in Benton County and neighboring Franklin County.

Meanwhile, state Grange membership has declined from a peak of 72,000 in 1979 to less than 63,000 today, state Grange Master Robert Clark said. Fifteen to 20 percent of today's members are farmers, and although some halls report hundreds of members on paper, many rarely take part in Grange activities.

Rural families today often have a hard time making ends meet and often are difficult to recruit, Clark said.

Modern technology and changes in leisure time activities also have played a role in the Grange's declining membership, said Anne Ross, one of eight remaining members of the Locust Grove Grange Hall in Benton County's Horse Heaven Hills.

High traffic fines may curb reckless driving rates

PORTLAND (AP) — The state's higher traffic fines may be a deterrent to speeding, reckless driving and tailgating — violations that could cause accidents, according to Oregon State Police.

While many traffic fines increased by 100 percent or more last year, the number of citations and warnings issued by state troopers declined.

"The bail schedule may have had an effect," said Lt. Bill Johnson, a state police patrol division administrator in Salem.

Tickets issued for violations such as speeding, reckless driving and tailgating fell to about 100,000 in 1994 from 121,000 in 1993, Johnson said.

Warnings also declined to 63,000 in 1994 from 64,000 in 1993, so it doesn't appear that troopers are issuing warnings instead of tickets.

And it's not because there are fewer troopers patrolling. While there are fewer officers on patrol, the actual number of patrol hours spent on the road increased by 1,000 in 1994, to 205,000 hours, Johnson said.

The higher fines prompted the formation of Citizens Against Highway Robbery, which launched an initiative petition drive last year to fight the higher fees. The group is aiming its measure for the 1996 election.

But even Eugene attorney Drake Koe-

ford, who began the effort, suspects the threat of expensive traffic tickets may cause fewer violations.

"I think people maybe are more paranoid," Koefoed said. "I know I certainly watch for cops more now than I used to."

Lawmakers approved the higher fines in 1993, but some wish they hadn't. Rep. John Schoon, R-Rickreall, for example, has introduced a bill to reduce them to pre-1993 levels or, in one case, to pre-1993 levels plus 20 percent.

"The people who have complained to me are not people who have gotten tickets," Schoon said. "They're the parents of kids who have gotten tickets and people who are worried about poor people trying

to pay them." Schoon said he does not believe that higher fines lead to fewer violations. He said troopers realize the fines, such as \$519 for driving a car lacking a front license plate, are unfair and often cost more than people can afford.

"I think it means the state police have a heart and common sense," he said. The increased cost of tickets has been a major concern for state police, confirmed Lt. Bernie Giusto, agency spokesman.

"Is the purpose of traffic tickets to be punitive or to be instructive?" Giusto asked. "Our agency thinks it's to be instructive. That's why we reserve the right to warn somebody."

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