

Girl Scout brings cuddly comfort to patients

JUSTIN MUCH
STAYTON MAIL

If you asked Girl Scout Ashlee Ellis, she would tell you there's something important about a snuggly touch of comfort that works wonders in convalescence.

The Whiteaker Middle School eighth-grader recalled trips to the hospital and always receiving a stuffed animal to help with her comfort. She said she always thought "that was just what hospitals do."

She discovered otherwise during a family trip to Yellowstone when a trip to the hospital yielded no such touch; the hospital wasn't budgeted for stuffed animals.

That turned the idea light on in Ashlee's mind, which in turn led to a unique Silver Award project through the scouts, through which she's delivered more than 100 comfort items each to Silverton Hospital, the emergency room at Salem Hospital, the pediatric ward at Salem and on

March 28 to Santiam Hospital in Stayton.

"I'm just very thankful to everyone who donated," she related to the more than two dozen folks in the lobby who turned out to show appreciation. "I was in the hospital a lot, so this makes me very happy."

Ashlee dealt the appreciation around, citing her brother Brady Ellis, a junior at McNary High School who helped through his leadership class and concocted a website. She thanked her mother and father, Melinda and Jason Ellis, and teachers Doreen King, Meredith Sheridan and Lauren Stephenson. She also had a friend and classmate, Michael Austin, along to help with the Santiam delivery.

She's not done. Plans are to bring another 100 items to the hospital in Dallas before the project's finished.

Ashlee said the schools and entire community in Keizer have been receptive and helpful in her quest to gather more than 500 items. Melinda said the

new comfort items her daughter's gathered include stuffed animals, blankets, coloring books, and fuzzy socks, all destined for local hospitals pediatric and emergency rooms.

"She calls her project 'creating comfort.' She wants to give comfort to every child, teen, or adult who enters the hospital," said Melinda, who is also an assistant troop leader. "Ashlee has an amazing heart and has worked on this project for about a year."

Among the dozens who greeted Ashlee and her contingent in Stayton were Santiam Hospital CFO/COO Maggie Hudson and Chief Nursing Officer Sherri Steele. The hospital presented the scout a certificate of its own.

The Silver Award is the highest award a Girl Scout Cadette can earn, and the pursuit of one involves a dedication toward improving one's community.

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Ashlee Ellis, an 8th-grade student, displays a certificate issued to her by Santiam Hospital.

State's most popular campgrounds may see higher fees

ZACH URNESS
STATESMAN JOURNAL

The number of people going camping at Oregon's state parks has never been higher, and that's mostly a reason to celebrate, say parks officials.

But one problem is that people are often picking the same cluster of campgrounds, leading to overcrowding at one park while others sit half-empty.

To help spread visitors out, parks officials have introduced legislation allowing them to raise prices at popular campgrounds to fund lower rates at less-visited spots.

The legislation — House Bill 2318 — is essentially calling for more "flexible fees."

"We have a lot of parks with capacity that few people visit," Oregon Parks and Recreation Department director Lisa Sumption said. "We're just testing this to see if we can encourage people to explore new areas."

Sumption said price increases would only amount to an extra \$1 or \$2 per night at popular parks, and would only apply certain times of year. Any revenue gained would have to be offset on discounts somewhere else.

"We're not looking to make extra money with this," Sumption said.

Currently, state park campgrounds are limited to two pricing tiers — "destination" and "value." Destination campgrounds cost \$22 per night for a tent site, while value campgrounds cost \$17.

"The way it is now, it's a really blunt approach," OPRD spokesman Chris Havel said. "There are specific sites and dates that can support slightly higher rates. There are specific parks that need much steeper discounts to attract that small group of people who can be enticed by a good deal."

Fort Stevens State Park, Oregon's most popular campground, is at full capacity 85 percent of the time, Sumption said. It's booked solid in the summer and

Fast facts

Oregon had 2.7 million camper nights at 57 state parks in 2016, a new record. Of that, 1.4 million camper nights — more than half the visits — came at just 10 state parks.

Most popular state park campgrounds

- Fort Stevens: 256,124 camper nights*
- Nehalem Bay State Park: 170,357
- South Beach State Park: 168,010
- Beverly Beach State Park: 165,296
- Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park: 164,731
- Cape Lookout State Park: 124,041
- Bullards Beach State Park: 104,022
- Valley of the Rogue State Park: 103,022
- Harris Beach State Park: 97,075
- Detroit Lake State Park: 84,721

* One camper for one night is a camper night. A family of four spending two nights = 8 camper nights.

people are often turned away.

Humbog Mountain State Park, also on the Oregon Coast but farther south, is just 20 percent of capacity and almost always has multiple sites available.

"Maybe somebody who's having problems getting a night at Fort Stevens would consider Humbog if they got a night of camping for free," Sumption said.

Both Havel and Sumption emphasized that the legislation was just one tool for a broader issue.

"If it doesn't work at all, we'll try something else," Havel said.

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BRENT DRINKUT/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Camping rates could increase slightly at Oregon's most popular state park campgrounds.

Least-visited campgrounds

- Saddle Mountain State Natural Area: 1,366 camper nights
- Jackson F. Kimball State Recreation Site: 1,551
- Willamette Mission State Park: 1,590
- Red Bridge State Wayside: 1,733
- Bates State Park: 1,860
- North Santiam State Park: 2,277
- Hilgard Junction State Park: 2,617
- Ukiah-Dale Forest Corridor: 3,092
- Catherine Creek State Park: 3,584
- Goose Lake State Recreation Area: 4,633

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