

Pink-tinted campus depicts ORCA support

JUSTIN MUCH
STAYTON MAIL

The color pink permeated the campus of Santiam Canyon Elementary School Friday as Oregon Connections Academy hosted visiting students and parents from all around the state.

Sunny skies highlighted the pink t-shirt-clad teachers, who wore their bright garments with double signif-

icance; one as a show of support for the school's National Honor Society students who have chosen to raise money in support of the Susan G. Komen for the Cure cause.

"It's touching to see them involved with this," said ORCA Outreach Coordinator Laura Dillon as she looked over the pink-tinged open-house bustle.

Laura, an 11-year ORCA educator, is currently undergoing her own battle with breast cancer, and the show of support on campus was standing with her.

"Many of these students and teachers, like many families, have gone through this before with loved ones," she said.

On Friday they were going through a getting-acquainted opportunity, meeting teachers and other students from all around the state. Laura noted that many of the teachers hail from the Portland metro area, but the school boasts educators from many farther-flung locals: Klamath Falls, Coos Bay, Brookings, La Grande, Baker City, to name a few.

The student body, which begins this year populated at around 3,700, hails from most Oregon counties, and many made the trek to Mill City for the event.

"I've had people coming in from Eastern Oregon," said third-grade teacher Brenda Ballinger of Silverton. "I talked to a family who came up from Ashland. They kind of make a day of it."

Brenda said her drive over Cascade Highway and on up the canyon required about a half hour, and it was a beautiful drive.

The Bashor family, also hailing from Silverton, is familiar with that route. Tom Bashor, a retired Safeway meat cutter, drove to the open house with his son, Thomas, an ORCA ninth grader, and Elise, who is in the second grade.

Tom and his wife, Sheri, have adopted and adapted a hearty brood and seen it through a variety of k-12 experiences; their oldest is age 41, while Elise, who turns 8 in October, is the youngest.

"We've done the complete (gamut) of schools: public schools, private schools, charter schools," Tom said. "Some kids do well in public schools, and other kids don't."

"They (ORCA educators) really work more with the kids, and they work with you," he added.

"It's helped me a lot," Thomas added his two cents on the ORCA experience. "I didn't really like going to public schools."

Meanwhile, a couple booths down the driveway junior Garrett Kincaid of Lyons was busy trying to get kids interested in student government. Garrett served as a sophomore senator last year, and he was supported at the "Student Government" booth by fellow senators, junior Rosa Oliver and her younger brother Joshua of Keizer, and freshman Mikayla Wood of Scio.

"We're trying to pump up people; get their interest going in student government," Garrett said.

The open house mingling marked one celebratory occasion for the ORCA contingent Friday; another was receiving their final, permanent occupancy permit at their office, located on Santiam Highway.

The rustic building was formerly Noah's Ark Veterinary Clinic. When Santiam Canyon School District become the school's sponsoring district a couple of years ago, ORCA moved from Scio to Mill City, set up in the building and began construction on a second phase, adding a conference room and an additional open space area.

"We usually have an administrator here on most days," said ORCA Executive Director Allison Galvin of West Salem. "We have our office staff and office manager here."

Galvin said the aim was to keep the building's rustic character while adapting it to ORCA needs, and then adding to that.

"When Santiam Canyon became our host district, we had to find space, and I think this ended up being the best option; it was the right fit at the right time," she said.

Much the same way ORCA becomes the right fit for certain students, like Thomas Bashor. The student body trend of recent years has seen others fit into the online system as the school year progresses.

"We've started the year at around 3,700 students," Galvin said. "We gain students as the year goes on. Last year I think we ended with 4,100."

"As the school year goes on, many students find they are ready for a different academic option."

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The City is recruiting volunteers to serve on a newly appointed Advisory Committee

The City of Silverton is seeking individuals interested in serving on the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), a newly appointed Advisory Committee of the City Council. The TAC is a seven member Committee comprised of one Council member, one representative of the Public Works Department, and five citizens.

As an Advisory Committee, the TAC will meet on an as needed basis to review and make recommendations to the Council on issues regarding transportation related issues, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure systems and other similar matters. Interested individuals will be appointed by the City Council for three-year terms, (Initial citizen members will be appointed to one, two and three year terms).

Applicants must reside within the City of Silverton and its Urban Growth Boundary. For more information about the Transportation Advisory Committee please visit the Boards and Committees page on the City website at www.silverton.or.us/committees.

Applications must be submitted online no later than Monday, September 25, 2017. Applicants are encouraged to apply now to ensure being considered. Applications are available at the following link: www.silverton.or.us/tacapp.

Interviews will be conducted by the Mayor and individuals will be appointed in October by the City Council.

If you have any questions you may contact the City Clerk, Lisa Figueroa at 503-874-2216 or via e-mail at lfigueroa@silverton.or.us.

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Why are field burns allowed during wildfire season?

LAUREN E HERNANDEZ

STATESMAN JOURNAL

While the nation's top priority fire blazes in the Columbia River Gorge, open field burning rolls on as usual in the Willamette Valley.

Seventy-degree temperatures and low wind conditions allowed roughly 2,235 acres to burn on a number of grass and seed farms this week, said John Byers, program manager for the smoke management program at the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

"Our intention is that we allow growers the ability to burn and we do the best we can to prevent smoke impacts on the general public," Byers said.

Open field burning, which is limited to 15,000 acres annually, is only allowed in the Silverton Hills. The burns are primarily located in Marion County and the northern section of Linn County.

Byers said he understands the community's concerns for air quality as Oregon's wildfires rage, but added the department works closely with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality to monitor meteorological conditions.

How does ODA determine when farms can field burn?

The Department of Agriculture evaluates meteorological forecasts, air quality, and smoke levels to determine conditions conducive to allow evacuation of smoke, or dissipation of smoke into the atmosphere, without spreading to critical non-burn areas, like schools.

"There are many aspects that are evaluated prior to permitting field burning," Byers said. "Wind speed and direction, mixing heights, pressure gradients, and the relationship of these factors in conjunction with a particular field location."

In addition, the Oregon State Fire Marshal prohibits burning if the temperature rises above 95 degrees, if conditions drop to 30 percent humidity or below, or if there are 15 mph or greater surface winds.

When any pair of those conditions is reached, Byers said, open field burning is prohibited.

Byers said smoke management officials waited for smoke from wildfires to be pushed out by northwest winds before permitting field burns on Sept. 12.

Smoke background, or the density of smoke in the air, is explained by several pollutants, primarily fine particulate matter, which can be inhaled into the lungs. Fine particulate matter can be harmful to sensitive groups such as children, seniors and those who have asthma and respiratory conditions.

Officials measure suspended particulate matter in the air with the help of nephelometers, which are scattered throughout the region.

"When the density clears, or it's not as dense, then we'll start burning," Byers said.

The smoke background started clearing around 11:30 a.m. Sept. 12, and smoke management officials granted the first burn permit of the day to a Silverton Hills farm around 1:30 p.m.

Tom Roick, the air quality monitoring manager for the Department of Environmental Quality, said open field burning affects the air quality just as wildfires do.

"The field burns are designed in a way so that it would have minimal adverse impact," Roick said.

Air quality in cities that primarily burn fields recorded good to moderate air conditions, according to the Department of Environmental Quality's Air Quality Index, or AQI. The DEQ monitors the amount of particulate matter in the atmosphere in different regions throughout the state.

Silverton recorded an air quality rating of 21 on Tuesday, which falls within the Good range of air pollutant concentration.

In Lyons, air quality deteriorated into moderate conditions, with more air pollutants in the air. The air quality rating teetered just below unhealthy levels for sensitive groups at 88.

Roick said air quality in those regions could be a result of a number of conditions including localized weather conditions, wind direction, wind speed, topography of the region and time of day.

Byers said field burning typically only takes place in July, August, and September. By end of September, rainfall spikes and field burning is no longer possible.

A permit is required to burn grass seed and cereal grain growers in the north Willamette Valley.

Historically, field burning was practiced to rid of leftover straw on grass and seed fields, which subsequently improved yields and maintained grass and seed



The Department of Agriculture permits field burns under certain circumstances. COURTESY OF JOHN MERRELL

purity, according to the Department of Agriculture. In the 1980s, roughly 250,000 acres were burned on an annual basis.

Now, Byers said, between 12,000 acres and 12,500 acres are burned annually -- roughly 3,000 acres less than the permitted.

Byers said the decision to only allow field burning of perennial crops was purposeful. Perennial crops, as opposed to annual crops, are located on steep slopes. Burning the crops prevents erosion of the earth. Secondly, he said, straw from perennial crops has no value.

"If you were burning annual crops, that straw has great value," Byers said.

The Department of Agriculture also operated a few test fires just south of Stayton and south of Silverton on Wednesday afternoon. The purpose of test fires is to determine whether farms can do additional field burning in the region. Less than 200 acres burned in roughly four test fire burn sites in the valley.

Seed farmers depend on field burning for healthy crops

Roger Beyer, the executive director of the Oregon Seed Council, an organization that advocates for the state's seed producers, companies, and distributors, said the summer's wildfires have delayed open field burning operations.

"There have been multiple days this summer where the wind direction was good for burning, but there was too much smoke in the atmosphere from the wildfires," Beyer said. "We are very aware of the air quality concerns in the valley."

Despite the spike in particulate matter during open field burns, Beyer said burning operations are essential for stable crops.

Beyer said the council was initially opposed 2009 legislation that reduced to maximum acreage that could be burned from 65,000 to 15,000 because field burning is one of the most successful tools farmers use to break down grass straw and return nutrients to the soil.

Without burning, Beyer said, farmers may allow the straw to break down naturally, but straw that lingers for an extended period of time makes perfect habitat for slugs, mice and insects.

Beyer said seed farmers outside of the Silverton Hills area have observed an increase of worms and mollusks that eat grass, larvae that grow beneath the soil, and weeds that sprout and contaminate crops. He points to reduced field burning as the culprit behind these pests.

"Without burning, that creates a habitat for these species," Beyer said. "Burning can control those problems, but there are other ways to control."

Alternatives to field burning include crop rotation, chemical applications to the soil and straw removal, according to the Department of Environmental Quality.

Insecticide and herbicide can be used to kill pests, but Beyer said farmers should not rely on just a couple tools to break down the grass. Nutrients are sucked from the soil when chemicals are used to treat crops, which then requires farmers to rely on more tillage of the soil.

"Farmers have to use a combination of these tools that work best with the least impact on the environment," Beyer said. "Anytime a tool is taken away, you rely on other tools, and then they become less effective over time."

People impacted by smoke generated from open field burning may call the ODA Smoke Management Program complaint line at 503-986-4709.