

Sports

LOPEZ EXCITED FOR FINAL STATE CROSS COUNTRY MEET

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MT. ANGEL – Alejandra Lopez wore a cow costume at school for Halloween and chaperoned her younger brothers on Treat-or-Treat night.

The Kennedy High School senior will be back in her familiar running gear Nov. 3 for the Class 3A/2A/1A girls state cross country meet at Lane Community College.

Lopez, who has back-to-back fifth-place finishes at the state meet, is among the favorites.

“It kind of adds to my nervousness,” she said. “I want to make it a good race. I’m hoping for a top two (placing).”

That is a realistic goal. No one in 2A or 1A has a time within 20 seconds of Lopez’s best mark this season of 18:47 from the Saxon Invitational at Bush Park.

Stephanie Finley from 3A Oregon Episcopal School, a former cross country state champion, posted a faster time than Lopez at the Saxon Invitational at Bush Park, a race that included Lopez.

Other athletes to watch include Lillian Fenner of Catlin Gabel, who matched Lopez’s PR time at the Saxon Invitational, and Jessica Neal from Central Linn.

A fast pace over the 3.1-mile course favors Lopez.

“She’s probably not going to out-kick any of those other girls (among the top contenders), but she’s really good at going out and setting a tough pace,” Kennedy coach Steve Ritchie said. “It’s just seeing if someone can stay with her.”

Lopez’s soft-spoken demeanor belies the fierce competitor within. She wants to win every time she laces up her running shoes.

Lopez misses training with former teammate Kaylin Cantu, a freshman on the Western Oregon women’s cross country team. Cantu placed third in last year’s state meet.

“I do miss her, but I’m really happy for her,” Lopez said. “She’s leading her team.”

This year Lopez leads the Kennedy girls cross country team and is among the premier small-school runners in the state. She placed second in the 1,500 and 3,000 at the 2A state track and field



John F Kennedy High School track senior Alejandra Lopez has the top time in 2A heading into the state cross country meet. She placed fifth last year. MICHAELA ROMÁN/STATESMAN JOURNAL

meet last spring after finishing fourth in both events the previous year.

Senior teammate Claire Seiler points to Lopez’s work ethic as one of the main reasons for her success.

“She’s always worked hard in the past, and this year she’s added a job and she’s still gotten all of her workouts in,” Seiler said. “I think her determination and her attitude is just gonna help her out a ton.”

Lopez has been extremely busy this fall.

In addition to her cross country commitment, Lopez is an honors student taking advanced placement classes, and works on weekends at a restaurant.

She’s also volunteered for several projects in recent years, including mo-

saic design work at Coolidge McClaine Park in Silverton.

Ritchie calls Lopez “a wonderful kid” with a great sense of humor.

“If you ask her right before the race what is your goal, she’ll probably say something like ‘not to finish last’ or something silly,” Ritchie said. “I think that’s her way of handling pressure.”

Lopez, who has 10 siblings, plans to compete in college. She’s received interest from Southern Oregon University and Western Oregon.

When Lopez has free time, she enjoys watching “Bones,” a crime drama television series that examined FBI case files utilizing forensic anthropology.

“I was thinking about going into a nursing program (in college), but I’m

also interested in forensics so I started looking into being a medical examiner,” Lopez said.

For now, career goals will wait.

There’s the rest of her senior year to enjoy, which figures to include another season on the Kennedy swim team in the winter “because it helps my endurance,” followed by track.

But first there’s a last hurrah in cross country.

“I wanna make this one count, especially because it’s my last one,” Lopez said.

Go to StatesmanJournal.com/Sports for results from the state cross country meet.

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Golden advice from mushroom-finding whiz

Outdoors
Henry Miller
Guest columnist

“It’s better to be lucky than good.”

That line is attributed to Vernon “Lefty” Gomez, a pitcher for the New York Yankees during the 1930s.

I’m with Lefty.

Which reminds me of a story about wild mushrooms for reasons that will become apparent, eventually.

The year after I arrived here, which according to some wags was shortly after the continents of Gondwanaland and Laurasia separated during the Triassic Period, I was putting together a Thursday outdoor recreation calendar of events and saw that a local club had scheduled an outing up the Santiam Canyon to look for morels.

I had read a couple of articles in outdoor magazines about this highly prized mushroom that looks something like a length of sea sponge on a stick, and which tastes a lot better than the description that you just read.

So I called the mushroom hunt foray leader and asked if I could tag along with notebook and camera in tow to capture the excitement, and she agreed.

The meet-up site was a picnic area/campground that had been closed for about a year for a major expansion and renovation.

The leader said that the quarry should be in the ash pits of the long-disused fire rings, morels apparently favoring formerly burned areas.

The half-dozen or so participants fanned out, and pretty soon there were peals of excitement and delight as the fungal targets were located ... one here, another there.

Finding the excitement of the chase somewhat, ahem, stimulating, espe-



Whether hunting birds, game or wild mushrooms, you need to have high visibility in the woods when the fungus are out in the fall or early winter.

PHIL MCCORKLE/SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

cially when augmented with three cups of coffee during the pre-foray preparation, I decided to take a little side trip out of sight of the hunters to do a wee bit of scouting.

If you get my drift.

The outhouse being closed for the park expansion, the most likely looking privacy screen was a head-high berm that had been pushed up with a bulldozer and then set alight sometime the previous fall.

And oh what a relief it was. Pure bliss.

Peeking this way and that to make sure that no one was coming, there in

front of me was a virtual forest of sea sponges on sticks, probably 30 to 40 of them poking out of the mound of dirt, ash and woody debris not more than 4 feet away.

So after sealing the deal and zipping up, I returned to the morel gatherers and told them that they might want to check out the other side of that mound.

With the admonition that they might want to wash their treasures especially well during preparation.

The experience made me feel somewhat like a mushroom whisperer among the local experts, or at least a mushroom whizzer.

And it just goes to show that Lefty Gomez was mostly right when he said, “It’s better to be lucky than good.”

In my case, it was better to be leaky than good.

That lengthy preamble leads up to a more current issue, mushroom-wise.

Item 2, ‘shroom with a view: If you fish or hunt – or hike, mountain bike, backpack or get out of the vehicle to relieve yourself among the trees for that matter – you’re going to be in the woods when wild mushrooms are out.

You can learn about the good (tasty), the bad (poisonous) and the ugly (meh) fungal phenomena of Oregon at the noon to 5 p.m. Nov. 10 third annual Mushroom Show at the Salem Public Library, 585 Liberty St. SE.

And I can say from numerous personal experiences since that shall-we-say “golden” morel foray that a mushroom hunt makes an excellent, and often rewarding, side trip and adds adventure to any outdoor outing.

The event is sponsored by Salem’s Willamette Valley Mushroom Society and will feature displays of locally collected wild mushrooms.

In the interests of full disclosure, I am a new and so-far relatively inactive member of that group.

The show will feature 1 and 3 p.m. presentations about mushroom identification as well as a 2 p.m. talk about poisonous varieties. Those are being held in the Plaza Room.

There also will be seminars about Mushroom Hunting for Beginners at 1 and 3 p.m. in Loucks Auditorium.

Show admission and presentations are free, but metered parking is 75 cents an hour in the adjacent library parking structure.

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