

STOCKINGS

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returning a favor someone did for her about five years ago in La Grande. Williams, then a single mom of a six-month-old daughter, was going through a tough stretch when two people she did not know knocked on her door. The individuals provided her with Christmas tree decorations and gift cards, making it possible for Williams and her daughter to celebrate the holidays.

"I said I will always give back after that," Williams said, and she is determined to keep returning the favor she received five years ago, to others she does not know.

Williams' mother-in-law, Stephanie Williams of La Grande, is impressed with Jen's commitment to reaching out to the less fortunate.

"She always finds people during the holiday season who do not have something and helps them," she said of her daughter-in-law.

The 160 stockings Jen Williams made have a total of 12 different designs, including tractors, the Christmas season, Barbie dolls and

Elsa, the fictional character from Walt Disney's "Frozen." The stockings have fleece interiors rather than the more fragile polyester that is sometimes placed inside stockings.

"I want to make sure they hold up," Williams said.

The stockings are filled with toys such as Barbie dolls, Matchbox cars and Play-Doh. Williams said the Paradise project was made possible by the valuable assistance she received from her daughter, Kaelyn, husband, Jeremy, and Shirley Simmons, her husband's grandmother.

Stephanie Williams donated a substantial sum after learning that several business who had indicated they would assist Jen Williams had to decline because of unforeseen issues.

"I felt bad for her," she said. "Jen had made all these stockings but she could not fill them."

One national firm could not make a donation because Jen Williams' charitable organization was not registered as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Anyone who makes a donation to

a 501(c)(3) nonprofit qualifies for a federal income tax deduction.

Williams said she is now working on attaining 501(c)(3) status for her nonprofit.

The stockings she made were sewn and filled over the course of several weeks, but the success of the project can be traced back two years to when Simmons offered her a used Brother sewing machine.

"She just asked me one day if I wanted it," Williams recalled.

She accepted the offer, and two days later she was operating it at full speed. For the Paradise project, Williams said, once she gets going she can make between 30 and 50 stockings a day. The key to such efficiency is having all the needed materials accessible.

"You have to be organized," Williams said. "As long as everything is cut and prepared, I can slap them together quickly."

Making the stockings for the Paradise children is far from the first charitable project Williams has applied her sewing skills to. A year ago she and her daughter

made Christmas stockings filled with gifts for children in La Grande. They also made Christmas baskets for their families.

When Williams is not helping to brighten the lives of those facing challenging situations, she is using her sewing skills to help her family. She sews clothing for her family, makes curtains for her home and more.

"I love to sew. It is relaxing," she said. "I love being creative by doing things like mixing patterns. I have fun with it."

Williams and her daughter are already making plans for helping others in the Christmas season of 2019. Williams said they will be making 500 stockings for men and women in the U.S. Armed Forces who are deployed overseas.

The stockings will be filled with socks, candy and toiletries.

"We want to provide them with things they miss from home," she said.

Stephanie Williams said many people do not know how generous Jen Williams is because she is not one to boast.

ARREST

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Newman said Baker City Police were assisted by officers with the Baker County Sheriff's Office

and the Bureau of Land Management. Baker City Officer Lance Woodward initiated the arrest after spotting Lopez in the area around the library.

Lopez was arrested with-

out incident after officers found her hiding from them in a library restroom.

Newman said the arrest clears multiple Baker City cases and involved joint

investigations with the Baker County Sheriff's Office, La Grande Police Department and Union County Sheriff's Office.

More charges are expected, Newman said.

ARES

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like local first responders do regularly — but this all-volunteer organization is the last hope.

"If we're using (ARES), things have gone very bad (for Union County)," Brock said.

Jason Fouts is the emergency coordinator for the local ARES volunteers. He said the group recently joined with Wallowa County's emergency radio system, so they can communicate with their members regularly.

He said the members of the group have varying backgrounds, but they all have an interest in amateur radio systems and are willing to devote time and training to learn how to use the equipment necessary to be an ARES member.

The ARES system in Oregon was expanded after a 2007 flood in Vernonia, 34 miles northwest of Portland. During the flood, major emergency systems were knocked out and ham radio operators stepped up to help.

"Severe winter storms wreaked havoc on Oregon's North Coast and flooded the City of Vernonia, knocking out 911 services, internet and phone service for an extended period of time," according to an article on the American Radio Relay League website. "The Oregon Office of Emergency Management said during the storms, the radio operators were 'tireless in their efforts to keep the systems connected.' When even state police had difficulty reaching some of their own troopers, ham radio worked, setting up networks so emergency officials could communicate and relaying lists of supplies needed in stricken areas."

Because of the help provided by the amateur radio operators, the governor of Oregon allocated funds to install radio systems in any county that was interested in setting up an emergency system.

"Using (the radio) equipment and other amateur

equipment already in place at the (emergency operation center), ARES teams will have to quickly create a communications network, in some instances without depending on other infrastructure such as telephones or internet," said ARRL Oregon Section Public Information Coordinator Steve Sanders in the article. "Many will not use commercial electric power. Despite these limitations, the ARES teams should not only be able to quickly pass local messages, but also communicate with other regions of the country. The ability to pass information in and out of disaster areas is crucial to the effectiveness of emergency responders."

Locally, the ARES equipment is set up in each of the members' homes with their own equipment. There is also a setup in the basement of the Union County Sheriff's Office.

The radios can run on low power, generator-powered

Vernonia's 2007 flood

In December 2007, floodwater rose in Vernonia, inundating many homes in fewer than six hours. The middle school and high school were destroyed, and roads remained hazardous for a week. Hundreds of houses were destroyed or damaged. It wasn't until Oct. 1, 2009, that the last flood victims were moved out of government-provided trailer homes. The cost of reconstructing the town's schools was estimated at \$35 million. Construction on a new building for kindergarten through 12th grade began in a new location above the floodplain, funded largely through donations from businesses and a student-run fundraising campaign.

— Oregon encyclopedia

batteries and solar power. The operators can send faxes, email, speak audibly or utilize Morse code.

"A lot of people think ham radio is antiquated technology, but that's not the case," Brock said.

He said through the Vernonia grant and because of the interest and dedication of Union County's small group of amateur radio operators, the local volun-

teers have become a part of Oregon's inter-communication network.

"The state doesn't just kick grants out," Fouts said. "This is vital communication."

SNAP

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Oregon individuals are eligible for SNAP benefits if they make up to 185 percent of the federal poverty level. In 2018, the federal poverty level for single-person households was \$12,140. The more individuals in a household, the higher the poverty level is. In Oregon, the Portland Metro area has a \$12 minimum wage, and nonurban counties — which are primarily in Eastern Oregon — have a \$10.50 minimum wage. All other counties have a \$10.75 minimum wage.

In Baker, Union and Wallowa counties in 2018, the average monthly SNAP recipients were 3,324, 4,903 and 931, respectively. In Baker County, this was a de-

crease of 4.2 percent. In Union County, there was a decrease of 4.6 percent. In Wallowa County, the decrease was 7.4 percent.

While these decreases are significant, statewide the decrease was substantially higher — 15.1 percent. Myers said the program's participation has been steadily declining since it topped more than 800,000 monthly recipients in 2008 at the beginning of the Great Recession. Yet, that doesn't mean the program is less helpful than it was then.

"It's a really wonderful program that assists an awful lot of people," Myers said. "The shift that we've seen in participation for (SNAP) shows that this program does what it needs to do. It does expand and contract the way it has been set up to do."

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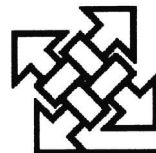
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