

VIETNAM

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Seth Hassinger noted his party only once came across a site where there had been a recent motorcycle accident. One reason for the lack of accidents in the midst of seemingly chaotic traffic may be that motorcyclists strive to create space for other riders.

Phil Hassinger noted that the “motorcyclists (were) focused on accommodating others in the traffic flow,” despite often carrying large loads. “We sometimes saw five people on one motorcycle.”

Cellphones, like they are in the United States, are part of daily life in Vietnam.

“They are everywhere. They are cheap and everyone has one,” Phil Hassinger said.

Unlike in Northeast Oregon, there are no dead spots in cell-phone coverage in Vietnam. Jed Hassinger said that there is coverage even in deep canyons. Throughout rural Vietnam, one is likely to see farmers at work. The Hassingers, who are farmers themselves, and Schmitt were struck by how efficient the Vietnamese are with regard to growing crops.

“All available land is used for agriculture,” Schmitt said, recalling plots are mostly hand-cultivated and built into terraces. “Even in portions of the north where rocky ground is the norm, small patches of soil are planted and tended. We even witnessed small terraces on very steep hillsides.”

Jed Hassinger noted well over

90 percent of Vietnamese people work in agriculture. This was like it was in the United States at least two centuries ago.

Visiting Vietnam was “like turning back the clock,” he said.

The Union County party visited Vietnam during Tet, the week-long celebration of the Vietnamese Lunar New Year. The Tet Festival usually falls in late January or early February.

“It is a bigger holiday than you can imagine,” Phil Hassinger said.

Families prepare large quantities of food for Tet and guests are urged to share it with them throughout the week. The Hassingers and Schmitt were invited into many households during the celebration.

“It was overwhelming. Everyone wanted you to come in and have a meal,” Phil Hassinger said.

Seth Hassinger was struck by how welcoming Vietnamese families were, even those who had limited resources.

“They may not be well off, but they won’t spare anything when they invite you in,” he said.

When eating at a Tet festival meal, Phil Hassinger said, the travelers learned to never eat everything on their plate unless they wanted to be served heaping helpings of seconds.

“It is important to know the protocol. If you clean up your plate, they want to provide you more. If you do not eat the last bite, they are not as obsessed with giving you more,” he explained.

To many Americans, “Tet” is a term likely associated with what

is known as the Tet Offensive. This was a military action that began in late January of 1968 when the North Vietnamese intensified attacks on the South Vietnamese.

Today, there is little evidence of the devastating war between what were then North Vietnam and South Vietnam. Schmitt said today’s reunified Vietnam appears to have no pockets of resentment toward the United States and its backing of South Vietnam during the war.

“I never felt any sense of animosity,” he said. “It is all in the past.”

Vietnam has made a lot of progress in the decades since the war, according to Phil Hassinger, who has made numerous visits to the country since 2002, often with his wife Trudy, who did not go on this year’s trip. His most recent trip was the second he made to Vietnam with son Jed and the first with son Seth and Schmitt.

Phil Hassinger said Vietnam’s economy began to see improvements after 1987 when its government began letting farmers own their land, grow what they wanted and sell some of their produce. At the same time, the Vietnamese government began allowing foreign investment, which Hassinger said also boosted the economy.

Schmitt said he was impressed with strides Vietnam is making.

“Vietnam is becoming more affluent. There is a rising upper class, similar to what has occurred in China. We saw several new dams (for hydroelectric projects) being constructed, and numerous buildings



Courtesy photo

Phil Hassinger, second from right, and his sons Seth, left, and Jed, take a break during their motorcycle tour of Vietnam.

were going up in Hanoi,” he said.

On the down side, the environment is suffering in the wake of the progress.

“Air quality is poor, especially in the city. Many people wear masks, especially when on their bikes. Air quality problems extend well away from Hanoi,” Schmitt said.

Pollution may be increasing but a big plus for tourists remains the favorable exchange rate for the U.S. dollar. Phil Hassinger said this means accom-

modations and food are very affordable for Americans. For example, the cost of a good hotel room with a meal included is between \$30 and \$40 a night.

Regardless of the exchange rate, Hassinger said he plans to continue making trips to Vietnam for years to come.

“It is such a gorgeous place, with 2,000 miles of undeveloped coastline,” he said, “but the real reason I want to go back is the people and their amazing hospitality.” ■

DIET DOC

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her success is partly due to the personal touch that is possible with owning a business in a small town.

“We have a face-to-face based business, and I think our clients like having that individual touch,” Garcia said. “The community within The Diet Doc is very tight knit, and our clients have each other’s support.”

At The Diet Doc, clients get a personalized nutrition and fitness plan based on their goals and preferences. Some of Garcia’s clients walk in the door wanting

to lose that last pesky 10 pounds, and others are looking to shed a large amount of weight. Garcia said the most weight loss she’s seen with a client has been 140 pounds in a year, and the client didn’t even start exercising until she’d lost 120 pounds. The key is the personalized diets created by Garcia and Angie Brown, who joined The Diet Doc in 2016.

Clients can also attend a yearly retreat at Wallowa Lake to focus on wellness workshops like how to handle stress eating and how to cook and prepare healthy food. This year’s three-day retreat will take

place in September, and Garcia hopes to feature rail riding as the special activity for the weekend.

Along with the workshops and general relationship building, Garcia noticed something small, yet notable, that clients find valuable about the long weekend.

“One of the simplest, unexpected things of the retreat was that people get to see what everyone else is eating and get ideas for themselves,” she said.

Garcia’s own fitness journey began about nine years ago when she realized how unhealthy she was and decided to lose weight.

“I liked to cook, and I felt like when I was dieting, I wouldn’t be able to cook as much, but it was really about portions,” she said. “I think people need more help with portions and what to eat than anything because if you think about it, nobody ever sat you down and taught you how to feed yourself.”

After she lost 60 pounds, Garcia got her personal training license, but she soon realized people don’t need as much help with exercise as they do with planning meals.

Then she found The Diet Doc from a podcast interview with Dr. Kori Propst, The Diet Doc’s vice president and

wellness director.

“When I heard the interview, I knew I was either going to be her client, her best friend or work with her somehow,” Garcia said, laughing. “Now I’m all three.”

Garcia’s love of podcasts and desire to get the word out about good nutrition led her to start her own with Brown called Life Fitness Podcast two weeks ago. Their weekly episodes, published on Fridays, are free and available to the public on Apple Music and Soundcloud.

“I’m always looking for a way to give more to my clients,” Garcia said. “And for people who don’t know

us, (the podcast) can help them feel comfortable enough to reach out to us.”

Garcia’s overall piece of advice for people who want to lose weight but don’t know how to get started is to take baby steps and come up with a plan that will work in the long run.

“The first thing is knowing you don’t have to do it on your own, and you can do one thing at a time. It doesn’t have to be a huge overhaul that’s not sustainable,” she said. “Try to think of eating healthy and exercising as something you just do all the time, like brushing your teeth.” ■

MOCK TRIAL

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winner goes to nationals.

The regional competition was held March 2 at the Union County Courthouse. The state competition will be at Portland’s Mark O. Hatfield Federal Courthouse.

Smith said McDaniel has taught them to always be prepared for at least one person to drop off the team, because it often happens. However, he said, this year’s team remained intact. He said the team seemed a bit rocky for a bit but the last two to three weeks they really sharpened up and got into a rhythm.

McDaniel said they had 13 returners on the team of 16. They knew what the competition entailed.

“It’s not hard work — it’s just a lot of work,” Smith said, noting McDaniel told him that.

Smith likes the competition of mock trial. He said he “possibly” could go into law, but it’s the camaraderie of the team that made him come back year after year.

Now, McDaniel, Smith

and the rest of the team have to figure out how to pay for the trip to Portland.

“We’ve never had a budget for this,” McDaniel said of the team.

Though going to state has always been a possibility, this is the first time the LHS team won the regional competition under McDaniel, who has been coaching the team for five years. The team doesn’t have funding through the school to pay for the trip, and they’re hoping the community would be willing to help.

McDaniel said there are no plans for fundraising events, because the team wants to dedicate their time to practicing for state. There’s not a lot of time after school to hold a fundraiser in the next two weeks and practicing for the competition is essential.

The trip will have an estimated cost of \$2,500 to pay for rooms, meals and transportation for the students, advisers and chaperones, McDaniel said.

She said this is a worthwhile competition that teaches students professionalism, confidence and how

to think on their feet.

“They judge the students on how well they work as a team,” she said. “(The judges) want to make sure the team helps each other.”

She said she participated in mock trial when she was in high school and still has friendships she generated by being on the team. The mock trial team brings together students from different backgrounds and allows them to work together.

“We have a diverse group of students,” McDaniel said. “The success of the team depends on every participant.”

She said what the competition teaches the students are things she uses in court now as the district attorney.

Smith agreed, adding the event teaches them to be professionals — it’s a fundamental part of the competition.

“We’re very excited,” McDaniel said. “We’ve been working for this for five years.” ■

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