

Small-business & Ag HAPPENINGS

Nature's Pantry sets winter hours

LA GRANDE — Nature's Pantry, 1907 Fourth St., La Grande, began its winter hours Nov. 8. The store's hours now in effect are 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Friday, and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday.

Potter's House hosts early Christmas party

LA GRANDE — The Potter's House Gallery, 1601 Sixth St., La Grande, is having a two-day early Christmas open house this weekend. From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Nov. 15 and Nov. 16, the public is invited to stop by for homemade goodies and to see the Potter's House holiday decor and gifts.

Market Place hosts Holiday open house and birthday party

LA GRANDE — Lucy's Market Underground Boutiques are having a holiday open house from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Nov. 15 and Nov. 16 at 1101 Washington Ave., La Grande. The Underground features 19 fashion and home decor boutiques. The open house will include refreshments and door prizes and open house specials at Thai Fresh Gardens.

Upstairs on Nov. 16, Le Bebe Cakes Bakery Cafe will be celebrating its third birthday. The first 50 customers on Saturday will get a free birthday confetti cupcake, and the cafe will have an all-day birthday special: buy any two drinks or pastries and get the third free.

Pulp, paper industry safety conference coming to Portland

SALEM — Workers, contractors and employers in Oregon's pulp, paper and forest products industries are invited to attend a Dec. 3-6 conference in Portland that will highlight best safety and health practices in their respective fields. The 29th annual Western Pulp, Paper & Forest Products Safety & Health Conference will offer sessions including an examination of emergency preparedness issues, such as earthquakes and subduction zones, and personal and job site disaster preparedness.

The Occupational Safety and Health Division is one of several partners presenting the four-day conference at the Red Lion Hotel on the River in Portland. Todd Conklin, a human- and organization-performance consultant, will deliver the keynote presentation Dec. 3. Conklin will discuss how rapidly changing technology has created new dimensions in how people react to their surroundings. Additionally, the conference will feature exhibits, company safety meetings, roundtable discussions and more than 35 workshops.

The registration fee is \$300 to attend the full conference or \$100 per day. To register, go to <https://safetyseries.cvent.com/wp-pfp19>. If you have questions or need help registering, call the Oregon OSHA Conference Section at 503-947-7411.

Farmers encouraged to 'Keep the Stubble' during No-Till November — put away the plow to minimize disturbance and maximize healthy soil

PORTLAND — This month the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is encouraging farmers to "keep the stubble" on their harvested crop fields and improve soil health during No-Till November. First launched in 2017 by NRCS Iowa, the No-Till November campaign is mirrored after the national cancer awareness No Shave November movement that encourages people not to shave during the entire month. The NRCS campaign encourages farmers to leave their tillage equipment in their machine sheds this fall and keep the crop stubble on their fields. In the past two years, the campaign has reached more than 1 million people. Improving soil health increases soil biological activity, which provides erosion control, nutrient benefits, and can simulate tillage.

"No-till farming is a cornerstone soil health conservation practice, which also promotes water quality while saving farmers time and money," said Cory Owens, state soil scientist for NRCS Oregon. "One of the first soil health principles is 'do not disturb.' This campaign is a fun way to remind farmers about the important relationship between tillage and soil health."

For more information about soil health in Oregon, including success stories from Oregon farmers who are keeping the stubble, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/or/soils/health.

ARTISTRY IN LEATHER



Kathy Hunter/For EO Media Group

Pulling strings and working leather is hard on hands. Wilson has had his right hand surgically renovated. Here he is working on a saddle for a rancher in Wyoming. "A girl there had one, he rode it, and he liked it," Wilson said. Many of his saddles are sold by word of mouth.

By Kathy Hunter
For EO Media Group

In Joseph, Ray Wilson works steadily, building beautiful tooled saddles. His craft recalls an era when pride of workmanship could be seen in serviceable items, and when no two were alike. Wilson has produced more than 300 saddles in his lifetime, and his saddles can be found in any states where roping and cutting are prevalent. Most of them are sold by word of mouth and from his website. When trainer Barry Cox took one to a clinic he gave in Alaska, he came back with 12 new orders.

"I started later in life," Wilson said of his total of 300. "Some have made 1,000."

The first half of Wilson's life was spent in a tent in Snake River country, with a family that managed sheep camps. In an area along the Snake so remote it can only be traveled on horseback, they raised wool for the Pendleton Woolen Mill. Wilson grew up delivering goods to camps with pack trains, boating the Snake River, attending school in Grangeville, Idaho, and killing rattlesnakes and cougars.

"In the early history (of the canyon), predators killed everything. You had to declare war on predators before you could run any stock," Wilson recalled.

Bears would chase sheep until they piled up on logs, and eagles preyed on lambs. In a blood frenzy, cougars ran through a flock "batting them left and right and leaving a trail of dead sheep. They hardly ever ate one of them."

The only effective way to hunt cougars in that country was to tree them with dogs. The first cougar Wilson shot weighed more than 120 pounds. Over the years he killed 25, usually 1- to 2-year-olds weighing 70-80 pounds. As was usual, Wilson would skin the cougar and bring out the hide to sell.

In his younger years, Wilson collected rattlesnake tails, a whole drawer full. No one in his family was ever bitten, he said,

but snakes were a special hazard when moving a pack string on the steep side hills in the canyon. A spooked animal might go off the trail and be lost, pack and all. But generally, "I clobbered them with rocks," he said. "They can't strike very far."

If a dog was bitten it would swell, but "it wouldn't kill them. We had a pool of water outside the house where there was a faucet from a spring. The dog would lie in that water and mud to heal."

The Snake River life ended in 1973, when Wilson was 30. After a bitter fight, the Forest Service acquired the Wilson land for a National Recreation Area. A price for the Wilsons' 4,400 acres was agreed on, and "it cost 1/3 of what we got, for the lawyer."

After that, Wilson lived in Halfway awhile, then in Baker, and eventually he wound up in Joseph with a saddle shop. The first saddle he made, in 1996, was crafted out of a book and his curiosity. He rode in it for a year and then sold it to earn enough money to make another. People asked for more, and in Joseph he averaged 20 saddles a year. Recently, that first saddle he made came back for a minor repair. It was still being ridden.

When crafted to fit both horse and rider, a saddle requires much planning before execution. Measurements of width and height are important, and he must know all about the horse: "what kind — narrow withers or round back — and what they had trouble with in the past." It will matter whether the horse is to be ridden in the hills or in an arena. "If a horse is working, his back is shaped different." He can be one shape in the spring and after being ridden awhile his back will change, and a horse's back will also change as he ages, Wilson said.

The seat size of the saddle depends on the rider's thigh measurement, "not their rear end," he said. The saddles are crafted on a traditional wooden tree covered with rawhide. The starting cost for a new saddle



Kathy Hunter/For EO Media Group

Every year Ray Wilson creates chaps to auction off at the Chief Joseph Rodeo Days to benefit cancer research.



Kathy Hunter/For EO Media Group

Wilson's Saddlery, in Joseph, also crafts album covers, breast collars, chaps, cowboy cuffs, headstalls, bridles, and gun and knife scabbards (shown here). All are evidence of Wilson's patience and artistry, and each is one of a kind.

is \$2,800, with a price increase for tooling and the addition of silver decoration. Wilson likes to keep a few saddles on hand for customers. He also sells used saddles for friends because "riders get old."

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