

RETIRE

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“Margaret has remarkable vision. She was able to see several years ahead with an accurate understanding of what Community Connection needed to be as an agency and the personnel and skill sets that would be necessary to effectively serve,” said Thomas, who now works for the Oregon Department of Transportation.

Communication skills are another part of Davidson’s skill set, Thomas said.

“Margaret is a master communicator. I’ve seen her convey complex topics on everything from economics to policy and engineering specifications on a housing project, and always in a way that’s accessible to a broad audience,” he said.

‘Flagship programs’

Davidson said most



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Margaret Davidson, executive director of Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, poses in her office in La Grande in April 2022. Davidson is set to retire at the end of the month, concluding a 40-year career with the Eastern Oregon nonprofit.

people know Community Connection for its transportation and meal programs because they are visible and serve many. Community Connection’s Northeast Oregon Public Transit program has provided more than 300,000 rides to the public in Union County over the past two decades, and its senior

meals and food bank programs serve hundreds of people daily across the region.

“They are our flagship programs,” Davidson said. She noted, though, that Community Connection provides a variety of services, many that have been added or greatly expanded in the last two decades.

They include a housing rehabilitation program that provides loans for home improvements, a housing resource center that helps first-time home buyers, a rental assistance program and in-home services for veterans.

Recent major expansions made by Community Connection include a new and much larger food distribution center in Island City for the Northeast Oregon Regional Food Bank it operates. The 8,500-square-foot remodeled former Pendleton Grain Growers building is eight times larger than the food bank’s previous storehouse.

The new distribution center is making it possible for Community Connection to store its food longer. The total cost of the new food center project was \$1.064 million, which included the purchase price of the building. The funding has

been provided by grants, by Community Connection and by donations from individuals and businesses.

Calling it a career

Davidson said much of Community Connection’s growth is due to its excellent staff.

“Years ago I recognized that our agency’s staff members are our greatest assets,” Davidson said. “I believe in treating my staff as people first and employees second.”

Her concern for staff members is reflected in the opportunities she provided them for career advancement. Thomas said Davidson developed career ladders for employees, making it possible for people to rise to high positions in the agency while acquiring skills that would serve them well if they moved on from Community Connection.

“I’m not alone in having

MORE INFORMATION

A retirement party for Margaret Davidson will be conducted Friday, April 22, at the Union County Senior Center, 1504 N. Albany St., La Grande. The party, open to the public, will start at 3 p.m.

Margaret to thank for the skills and opportunity that took me on to a happy career in public service after Community Connection of Northeast Oregon,” Thomas said. “The system of continuous improvement she developed and the encouragement she offered to at least three generations of public servants is now paying dividends all over the state, and likely all over the country.”

Davidson said she will miss not seeing employees and those her agency serves on a daily basis.

“Saying goodbye is extremely difficult,” she said.

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Alina, fled Kyiv in late February, relying on help from the Dempseys in their travels through Poland, Italy, Spain and eventually to Mexico. The family was able to link up with Ian Dempsey at the California border in early April after staying at refugee centers in Tijuana. Stasiuk and her daughters, ages 10 and 2, have since taken shelter with the Dempseys in Colorado.

“A big thing was not knowing what the process would be once they got to Tijuana,” Ian Dempsey said. “That was a bit of a challenge, because I did not want to scare them from not making the trip. I really thought it was the best thing to do.”

Reaching out

The Dempseys are exhausting all resources to help other people fleeing Ukraine and those still residing in the country. The couple are working with friends in Ukraine to get donations, such as those collected in La Grande, to those leading humanitarian efforts in the country.

“The folks that we’re connected with in Kyiv are church organizations mostly,” Ian Dempsey said. “We’ve given some money to friends in need, like a friend who has five kids. When they evacuated, they were not able to bring most of their clothes and most of the kids did not even have a pair of shoes when they left.”

One of the church organizations, in West Ukraine, is housing roughly 60 refugees from the eastern side of the country. Another church receiving funds is holding more than 400 refugees and loading vans full of supplies to take into the most dangerous and devastated areas of Ukraine. The Dempseys are also assisting refugees who left everything behind to escape to freedom.

“I think what people like about the way we’re sending money is that it’s really cool to see the pictures of these people that have specifically received money,” Ian Dempsey said. “To be able to see things getting directly into the hands of the Ukrainian people gives a full sense of who it’s going to and who it helps.”

The donations are going toward medical supplies, food, gas for supply distribution, bedding for refugees, financial support for individuals fleeing the country and defensive gear for Ukrainian fighters.

In addition to Anne Morrison, other La Grande residents have ties to Ukraine and are putting together efforts to garner donations to reliable sources. Fuji and Jim Kreider lived in Odesa, Ukraine, for a year in 2003, and have stayed in touch with a close friend, Nataly Kartasheva, who is now living in the Netherlands and helping refugees afford transportation, temporary residence and safe traveling.

Arie Farnam, a La Grande resident who came from the Czech Republic, has been helping in efforts to aid disabled individuals in Ukraine.

Continuing the efforts

Those involved and in close contact with frontline Ukrainians see no immediate end in sight to the dispute with Russia,

Ian Dempsey noted that donations go a long way — the average monthly salary in the country is roughly the equivalent of \$200 in the United States.

The Anne Morrison-Ukraine Fund is accepting donations through PayPal, which can be sent to amorrison@eoni.com. The Kreiders’ trusted friend helping refugees flee Ukraine can be helped via PayPal at pranzhu@gmail.com.

“No one really knows how this will end, or when,” Dempsey said. “I pray that free countries around the world continue to come together to help these people in need.”

BOOK

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grab anything available to record them.

“Sometimes I would even write on napkins,” Hopkins said.

He said that such steps were critical because memories can be fleeting.

“Often I would hear my fellow educators laugh

and share what one of their students might have said, and remark that they would never forget that special moment,” Hopkins said.

But, he noted, “Time takes its toll, so I have attempted to record another collection of these comments in my second book.”

Most of the student comments in Hop-

kins’ new book are ones he heard personally, but there are others that were shared with him, including by his wife, Mary, also a retired educator.

Hopkins gathered the comments in his books during his time serving as principal of Huntington Elementary School and North Powder Elementary School.

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