# WORTMAN

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including police, Grande Ronde Hospital, school districts and fire departments to put on events.

The youth council, composed of teenagers from school districts throughout Union County, works directly with middle and high school students to create messaging that peers will respond to.

Wortman worked closely with programs like "Reward and Remind," where under-age high school students would go into convenience stores and attempt to purchase tobacco. If the clerk did not ask for identification. their store would be sent a letter from the Youth Coalition reminding it that it is illegal to sell tobacco in Oregon to anyone under 18. Stores where identification was requested were sent letters commending them for adhering to the state law.

The program was popular with program students.

"The kids loved it," said Sheryln Roberts, a member of UCSCC's executive committee.

Roberts credits Wortman with doing an excellent job of making the members of the youth council understand that they did not have to be involved in drugs and alcohol to have a good time, a message the students conveyed to peers when they conducted anti-substance abuse projects at Union County schools.

Wortman did an excellent job putting students in leadership positions for Youth Coalition projects, placements that brought out the best in them, Roberts

"This built kids up, boosting their self esteem," she said.

Roberts said it was easy for Wortman to make connections with young people. "Robin enjoyed kids and

made it fun for them," she

Wortman found herself in the role of an educator for not only young people but also parents while serving as the Union County Safe Communities Coalition's coordinator. Roberts noted that when she was hired it was legal in Oregon for parents to provide alcohol to their children in their homes.

To counteract this, Wortman helped the UCSCC conduct information campaigns to inform parents about how alcohol can affect brain development in children and teenagers. Speakers about youth drinking were brought in and information about its detrimental impact was provided throughout the community.

Wortman was able to tackle many responsibilities and projects at once because of her meticulous attention to planning.

"She was so organized. She always had every detail covered no matter what. She had every bullet point written down — even the most minute detail," said Billie-Jo Nickens, a member of the executive committee of the UCSCC.

Wortman was also known for working long hours. She attended all of the events and activities run by the UCSCC, including its 12-hour Drug Free Relay at the La Grande High School track, an event that evolved into an annual run at the Mount Emily Recreation Area.

"She was not an 8 to 5 employee, she attended all of the extra activities," said Tracy Christopher, a member of UCSCC's executive committee.

Wortman would not even let health issues sideline her. Mansveld noted that in 2016, the UCSCC leader broke her ankle shortly before a work-related trip to Washington, D.C.

"She was such a trooper that she managed to

make the trip to D.C. and attended the related meetings in December with a cast and crutches. She was very determined to follow through on any commitment she made," Mansveld said.

Members of Wortman's family were a common sight at the events she helped put on, often assisting her.

"She always included her family in her work," Nickens said. "She was a huge advocate for the family."

Wortman was the guiding light of the Union County Safe Communities Coalition but she never referred to herself at its leader and did not like being referred to as such. This reflected her deep collaborative spirit.

"She excelled at making everyone feel that they were part of a group and a team," Nickens said. "She would never say it was my project. She was community minded that way.'

Not surprisingly, Wortman was not one to seek the spotlight — she felt strongly about others getting credit for their contributions, Nickens said.

Sometimes this meant Wortman's contributions were sometimes overlooked.

"There were many times that she should have been in the limelight, but she stepped back when she really should have gotten the recognition," Nickens

Wortman dodged the spotlight even though she was good at articulating UCSCC's mission.

"She was a great communicator, she drew people into the coalition," Christopher said. "She was definitely amazing and definitely an inspiration."

A celebration of life ceremony for Wortman will be conducted from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturday, Aug. 20, in Wallowa at its senior



Shannon Golden/The Observer

A crowd gathers to watch the Union County Fair parade on Adams Avenue Aug. 5, 2022.

### **FAIR**

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Ken Patterson, the fair's auction chair and barn superintendent, said that during the annual sale, 139 sellers showed their market livestock to prospective buyers. The auction brought in \$82,000 more overall than last year, rounding out at \$378,000.

The fair board included a new event this year called "Over the Hill" an event sponsored by the Eastern Oregon Jackpot where young fair participants could nominate older family and friends to show their animals.

This was also the first year that auction attendees could purchase market animals and donate them to schools in the Grande Ronde Valley — including schools in Cove, Elgin, La Grande, Imbler and Union. According to Patterson, five beef and four pigs were donated. Schools that received donations simply had to cover the cutting and wrapping costs.

"It was super neat to see animals raised by kids go back to students in the area," Patterson said.

#### **Attractions and** entertainment

When it came to finding entertainment for this year's fair, Gover-Shaw said it wasn't as difficult to find entertainers to fill the nightly slots on the fairgrounds' small and large

This year's musical lineup included many local groups and performers from outside the region, including The Wasteland Kings, Countryfied, Ripple Effect, Brewer's Grade and Tiller's Folly — a Canadian group that celebrated its 25th anniversary this year. Gover-Shaw said she heard compliments throughout the week on the strength of this year's performers.

Two years removed from the pandemic, the fair was mostly back to business as usual, with the help of sponsors and continued improvements to the fairgrounds.

Although the fair has had sponsors in the past, this is the first year that it implemented a three-tiered sponsorship system champion, reserve champion and blue ribbon. Upon arriving at the fairgrounds this year, patrons were greeted with signs naming each one, including Barreto, D&B Supply, Granite



Shannon Golden/The Observer

Fair goers gather to watch the "Over the Hill" showmanship award, hosted by the Eastern Oregon Jackpot, on the evening of Aug. 4, 2022.

View Foot and Ankle and Tap That Growlers.

"It's definitely not possible without those sponsors," Gover-Shaw said of the sponsors' in-kind and cash contributions.

Gover-Shaw said that all but two vendor spots in their Mount Fanny Exhibit Hall were filled. For many family businesses that might not have a storefront, the fair offers them a yearly opportunity to sell their wares. She noted that these booths would have been full had a few vendors not come down with COVID-19 before arriving at the fair.

The fair board worked throughout the year to make improvements to the fairgrounds in preparation for the four-day event. In collaboration with La Grande Drywall, ACE and Elgin Electric, the board replaced the kitchen ceiling in the Mount Emily building — and gave the hall a fresh coat of paint.

Behlen Manfucaturing donated around 30 stock tanks to the fair, which the La Grande Lion's Club filled with colorful pansies and petunias donated by the Imbler FFA greenhouse.

#### Carrying on without a carnival

Four carnival businesses across the region went out of business during the pandemic, and the fair has not had a carnival the last two vears. Gover-Shaw noted that for the businesses left, the Union County Fair simply isn't a big enough event.

"If we don't have 25,000 people overall, we're not going to be able to get a carnival to come to our event," she said.

Last year, the fair worked with Bubble Fun to provide inflatable bounce houses, obstacle courses, bungee

jumping and bumper ball. Bubble Fun did not return this year due to operating expenses and distance.

According to Gover-Shaw, the fair board is already working on ways to incorporate more activities for kids during next year's fair, like a climbing wall and a mechanical bull. Still, even without a carnival, the fair increased its attendance in the last two years.

Although the carnival may be a fan favorite among fair attendees, Gover-Shaw noted that the carnival rides and activities have, in the past, actually brought about unwanted behavior at the yearly family-friendly event.

## **Back to work**

For Gover-Shaw and the fair board, they're already back to the grindstone. The team already has a theme picked out for next year's fair — "Boots, Jeans and American Dreams." In the next few weeks it will get to work on the new premium book to make improvements from suggestions they received this year.

Fair Board President Jamie Jo Haddock highlighted in an email the values at the heart of each year's fair.

"Fairs are the celebration of our rural life. They are a time to come together, socialize, and highlight what our community members have been doing the last year,"





Robin Wortman, far right, walks with friends at the old 12-hour Drug Free Relay at La Grande High School's track about six years ago. Wortman, of Wallowa, a former 4-H leader and a former director of the Union County Safe Communities Coalition, died last week of natural causes at the age of 59.

## **EOU**

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products company based in Wilsonville. Insko was appointed Eastern's 12th president in 2015 after more than 20 years as an executive at Boise Cascade.

During its retreat, the

area and regional business leaders, local representatives and regional stakeholders to discuss the university's role in business, industry and education in the area. The board hosted several panels made up of educational and business leaders during the two-day

alumni and community members were able to share

their stories with trustees. "Our partners reiterated what we know to be true here in Eastern Oregon we are in this together," Chaves said. "We need to continue working with each other to increase access to higher education for everyone in the region."











