

## SHELTER

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emphasizing Olson's "kindness and her generosity to care about people she didn't even know."

Now, Maggie, her daughter and Olson are planning to move to the East Coast together. Maggie needs a liver transplant and needs to live closer to a hospital with a donor program. For Olson, the move means a fresh start after a divorce — and a chance to expand her efforts.

Since starting Shotzy Sanctuary in 2019, Olson has helped provide a safe haven for five women, four of whom brought their horses with them — Maggie included. She's hopeful that in less than 10 years, horsewomen in every state will be able to find a safe haven in a Shotzy Sanctuary.

"My motto is, if I can, I will," Olson said. "If I can't, I'm still gonna try."

### Assessing need

According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, more than one in three women and one in four men in the United States have experienced some form of intimate partner violence, including rape, physical violence and/or stalking. Nearly half of all women and men in the U.S. have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

"Whether people realize it or not, every single person knows a woman who has been battered and/or verbally abused or emotionally abused," Olson said.

The Urban Resource Institute and the National Domestic Violence Hotline released a survey in May 2021 that assessed the impact pets can have on a survivor's ability to leave a dangerous situation. Over 97% of respondents reported that being able to keep their pets is an important factor in seeking shelter. Half said they would not consider shelter options for themselves without their pets.

Shelter From the Storm, a La Grande-based organization that offers services for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking, accepts mostly dogs in their safe house — and considers other small animals on a case-by-case basis. According to the shelter's advocacy support coordinator, Candi Nielsen, Shelter From the Storm is one of the only pet-friendly organizations in Eastern Oregon.

"A lot of people feel like their animals are also part



Shannon Golden/The Observer

**Marjie Olson, right, poses with Maggie and her daughter in front of one of several horse corrals on Olson's property near Elgin on Monday, Aug. 15, 2022. With the help of Olson's nonprofit, Shotzy Sanctuary, Maggie and her daughter were able to leave a domestic violence situation and take their animals with them.**

of their family," she said. "It would probably make me think twice about actually leaving, and that's scary."

From the emotional support that animals provide survivors to the fear that their abusive partner may harm or kill the pet, there are many reasons those experiencing abuse want to stay close to their pets. But as of 2021, only about 250 shelters in the U.S. — out of approximately 2,000 shelters and programs — are pet friendly. Many others have arrangements for pets through animal shelters or veterinary offices.

Olson decided to address the gap she saw in the support being offered to victims of domestic violence. She hadn't found a shelter anywhere else in the country that offered services for women, their children, their horses and their other animals.

"A horse is a big investment and to leave it behind would just be devastating, financially as well as emotionally," Nielsen said.

### A vision for Shotzy Sanctuary

Olson herself is a survivor of domestic violence. She said that people who know her to be a self-sufficient, outgoing and motivated person are surprised to learn about the abuse she endured during her 20s.

"When you have that attitude and you do go off and do well for yourself, you never expect that woman to be the one that gets abused," she said.

Olson noted that she was blessed to have been raised in a loving family that instilled in her a passion for animals and people from an early age — a passion that helped her get through. She endured what she did in part because she had horses and dogs that she didn't want to leave behind.

Many people see their animals as their children and protect them as any parent would. Escaping domestic violence can present an

impossible choice — seek safety or stay, to protect the animals who have helped you through it all.

"That animal is who you cry to," Olson said. "They're also the one that gives you the strength to say, 'I can do this.'"

While cleaning stalls on her property, Olson had the idea for the first-ever safe haven where horsewomen could seek refuge from domestic violence with their children — that would also offer shelter for their animals. She also wanted to provide support for victims who did have a safe place to go but didn't have the means to transport their animals.

By the fall of 2019, Olson had registered Shotzy Sanctuary as a nonprofit organization, with the long-term goal of expanding safe havens for horsewomen across the country.

"We can start helping hundreds of women to keep their animals, whether it's a giraffe or a horse or a donkey," she said of her hopes for the organization.

### Decades of devotion

Olson has spent most of her life working with horses. For more than 40 years, she has owned and operated Light Rein Farm and Farrier, through which she has rescued and rehabilitated horses, provided corrective horseshoeing services and offered training and lessons for students.

Her work has followed her wherever she goes, from Michigan to North Carolina and beyond. Olson lived in Belize for about six years, rescuing horses and training students for National Barrel Horse Association events. She currently lives in Union County and provides shelter and farrier services to horse owners in Union County.

Throughout her 17 years in Michigan, Olson trained three dozen students, about 20 of whom stayed with her from kindergarten until their early 20s.

"They're all married with babies and master's degrees

and doctorates and all that," she said.

Olson has rescued approximately 15 horses since she arrived in Eastern Oregon seven years ago. She often takes in horses that need extra support and care that their previous owners cannot provide them — and finds them a new home or cares for them herself. And although she no longer trains, she has no plans of stopping her farrier services.

### Creating a safe haven

Remembering the sanctuary's namesake still brings a smile to Olson's face. More than 30 years ago, she saw an ad for a caramel-colored pony that was "kind of plain, nothing fancy." The first time she met Shotzy, he was emaciated and living without water or shelter in the middle of a Michigan winter.

"I'm amazed he was alive," she said.

Olson purchased him for \$250, and within a few months of rehabilitation, he became her top lesson pony. When Olson moved to Belize, a now longtime friend — and one of the sanctuary's board members — bought Shotzy for her daughter.

"That same day that I decided I wanted to do this, I had to call it that, I had to," Olson said of the organization's name.

All seven of the Shotzy Sanctuary board members are horsewomen from around Union County and beyond — Olson said she'd like to keep it that way.

Co-owner of Deer Creek Stables Lora Bannan is one of the newest board members. She became friends with Olson after Olson began shoeing her horses more than six years ago.

"A good farrier is hard to find," Bannan said. "After we found her we latched onto her pretty tight."

Bannan has supported Shotzy Sanctuary ever since, and runs yearly fundraisers for the nonprofit. Now, she and her husband, Brent, are expanding their boarding and training facility — adding new pens and shelters — so they can take over the Union County Shotzy Sanctuary when Olson leaves.

"I've never been in an abusive relationship, but I know what it's like to have a hard time with something," Bannan said, noting her battle with breast cancer. "We always like to give back when we can, because so many people helped us."

When creating the nonprofit, Olson and her board created a four-tiered system of support for women in need, ranging from a facility that can take in only a wom-

### HOW TO SEEK HELP

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic abuse or intimate partner violence, help is available. For the National Domestic Violence Hotline, call 800-799-7233. For local support, call La Grande's Shelter From the Storm at 541-963-7226. If you need immediate assistance, call the shelter's 24-hour crisis line: 541-963-9261. If you are an animal owner seeking local domestic violence support, contact Shotzy Sanctuary at 704-677-3261 or 509-420-0300.

an's horses and dogs to one that can take in women, their children and their animals, including livestock. Olson's north Elgin location is classified as the latter — a level one facility.

For now, the Bannan and her husband will run their facility as a level four, taking in horses, pets and livestock. They also plan to establish a connection with Shelter From the Storm to provide services for survivors who can't keep their pets with them. And Bannan said they hope to add tiny homes or campers to their property in the next year to offer shelter to people.

### Hurdles along the way

When it comes to funding, Olson admitted that she's put most of her retirement funds into Shotzy Sanctuary and the work she does to shelter and rehabilitate animals. She works full weeks through her Light Rein services to financially support the animals she cares for.

"It's just the right thing," she said.

Much of the financial support Olson has received over the past three years for Shotzy Sanctuary has come from acts of kindness both large and small. Donations have come in many forms, from close friends leaving money or horses to Olson in their wills, and material donations that could be sold for funds.

Olson once received a \$50 bill from a woman in the aisle of a Dollar General who overheard her speaking about the Shotzy Sanctuary on the phone.

The nonprofit has also received a few small grants in the last few years, but due to the pandemic, Olson was unable to do much of the outreach that she had planned. Still, she asserts that she never wants to rely on money from the women she helps.

"All of that expense is ours," Olson said. "We don't expect anyone who needs help to cough up anything."

The work of Shotzy Sanctuary does present

legal challenges. Olson and the board have to verify that none of the animals legally belongs to the partners of the women they are helping. If they did, or if the women couldn't prove ownership, they might not be able to help shelter the animals.

"My biggest fear is to have to say no to someone I can't help," she said. "But I have to draw the line somewhere, I absolutely have to."

### Looking forward

After a former client and close friend of Olson's died in the fall of 2021 — leaving money for the sanctuary in her will — Olson knew it was time to start establishing more sanctuaries.

Olson is expanding Shotzy Sanctuary to facilities across the United States this year. She is moving to the East Coast soon and will open a sanctuary wherever she lands. She has worked with Kick n Ass Mule Ranch in Arizona and Hawk Hill Farm in Michigan to establish two more sanctuaries by the end of this year.

Bannan admitted that she's nervous Olson won't be around for in-person support but knows that she has big goals for the future of the nonprofit.

"This gives those women an option, and Marjie is very dedicated and just on fire with this idea," she said. "I really do see it growing."

Olson said her goal for the next several years is to reach out for financial support from philanthropists and grants in hopes of expanding Shotzy Sanctuary. Ideally, Olson wants to provide \$10,000 for each new facility, so it can bolster its existing resources and build space — like bunkhouses — where women and their children can stay.

As she prepares for the move, Olson must say goodbye to friends and clients around Union County — and some of her horses she will leave behind with the Bannans. Yet, she is eager to get started on her nine-year goal of establishing one sanctuary in every state.

Once settled on the East Coast, Olson has plans to fill one wall in her home with an array of photos from her last 40 years of service — from her former students and women she's helped to the animals she's rehabilitated.

"I love what I do and God has blessed me to be able to keep doing it," Olson said. "As long as he tells me to keep going, I'm going to keep going."

## SCHOOL

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School Principal Brett Baxter is delighted that he does not have to worry about masks at this time.

"That is energizing beyond what I can describe," he said.

Baxter said having to deal with masks and other COVID-19 protocols took a toll on LHS.

"They were taking the

life out of our school," he said. "Now we can maximize what we can do."

Cove School District Superintendent Earl Pettit said that in many ways the state's guidance is allowing school districts to return to where they were before the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020. He said the updated communicable



Pettit



Wells

disease plan his school district submitted to the state earlier this week was basically the same as the one his school district had

before the pandemic began.

Pettit said the plan calls for the school district to take many of the same steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as it does other communicable diseases. For



Dixon

example, if a student is sick, he or she is required to stay home.

Union School District Superintendent Carter Wells

said the state's announcement essentially indicates things have not changed since the end of the 2021-22 school year. He is glad the state is continuing to give school districts freedom with

regard to how they approach COVID-19 protocols. This is putting school districts in a better position to return to a sense of normalcy.

"We are moving in a direction to where we were before COVID-19," Wells said.

North Powder Superintendent Lance Dixon also said he likes the freedom school districts will continue to have to address COVID issues. He said one of the programs his school district will con-

tinue to have will be its test-to-stay program. It allows students to stay in school following a close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 if they test negative.

Dixon is happy he will not have to worry about things like state mandates requiring students to wear masks as the first day of school approaches.

"I'm looking forward to a normal start of the school year," he said.

## FILM

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reimagining of the life of Edgar Allan Poe will be for you," writes Phil de Semlyen, Time Out's global film editor.

Hatton's film opens with Poe and four other cadets on a training exercise in upstate New York when they are drawn by a gruesome discovery — the sight of a young man who has been beaten and tied to an upright board. Poe, played by William Moseley, approaches the dying man and asks what happened. He responds with one barely audible word — "Raven" and then dies.

The utterance sparks a search by Poe and the four cadets that takes them into the forgotten community where they find a township guarding a frightening secret, Hatton said.

A 1986 graduate of Imbler High School and 1991 graduate of Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, Hatton said he believes



Chris Hatton/Contributed Photo

**Chris Hatton, right-front, formerly of Union County, directs a scene in his new movie "Raven's Hollow," which starts streaming in September 2022 on Shudder.**

viewers will be mystified by "Raven's Hollow" until the end.

"I would be surprised if anyone gets ahead of the story," he said.

Hatton, who now lives in Singapore, said he began working on the script of "Raven's Hollow" 15 years ago. In this span he also

directed and wrote scripts for "Battle of the Damned," which stars Dolph Lundgren and was released in 2013, and "Robotropolis," released in 2011. One of Hatton's earliest movies was "Sammyville," whose fictitious story is based in the small community near Elgin, which the movie is

named for.

"Raven's Hollow" was filmed in 2020 Latvia, a country on the Baltic Sea, during a 30-day period in autumn at the height of the pandemic. The cast had to stay in a confined area near the movie set throughout the film's shooting due to the coronavirus. This meant the cast spent a lot of time together.

"It drew us closer together," Hatton said. "It felt like family."

Hatton made "Raven's Hollow" after becoming intrigued with Poe's story and his time at West Point, which Poe attended after serving in the Army. He was at West Point for only seven months before he left following a court martial when he was tried on charges of gross neglect of duty and disobeying orders.

Hatton said what Poe experiences in "Raven's Hollow" is totally fiction and is not meant to suggest what really happened.

Hatton said he sees Poe as a fascinating historical figure. He said Poe, best known for his 1845 poem "The Raven," one of the

most well-known ever written, is a tragic figure.

Poe received little money for his works, including "The Raven," because laws that fully protected artists' financial rights were not fully in place in the United States.

"At one point, he may have been the best known writer in the world but he had holes in his shoes," Hatton said. "He always struggled to pay his bills."

Hatton said his film reflects Poe and his work in many ways, including elements of horror and detective fiction. Poe wrote many works of horror and was among the first to write detective fiction. His 1841 short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is considered to be one of the first pieces of detective fiction.

Hatton said that as a writer himself, he has long been inspired artistically by Eastern Oregon's landscape.

"The vastness and the scale of the beauty," he said. "I love it there."