

Volunteers help Expo become a reality each year

By **GEOFF PARKS**
For the Capital Press

If the exhibitors, sponsors and staff of the Willamette Valley Ag Expo are the lifeblood of the annual event, then the volunteers are most certainly its heart.

WVAE producer Scott Ingalls says a core group of volunteers and a reliable stable of newer participants make the transition from planning to implementation of the big event a smooth one each year.

“Our building supers and fork operators have all been working on this event for years, some from the very start,” Ingalls said. “They all know the expectations and needs of the vendors from first-hand experience. All of them have full-time jobs, from which they take time off to come work on this event.”

“And our vendors like seeing the same faces when

they come to set up and know things will go well because of it,” he said.

Randy Smith of RGS Auto & Marine in Albany has for all 14 years of the Expo been one of the scores of volunteers that help make the show happen each year. Smith, 59, is a superintendent at the Expo Hall for the three days, but takes an active hand in “setting everything up, moving everything in and out” and being in charge of the security of the building.

“The Ag Expo is a great thing,” Smith said. “Most of the work is done with lift trucks because of all the heavy equipment. The Expo Hall is basically an empty building when we start and every booth gets carpeted and taped down to the floor, then the pipes and drapes get put up and everything gets moved in.”

“Afterwards, it’s all moved back out and cleaned up.”

Lonny Wunder, 58, of Albany, who works full-time as

the manager of the Benton County Fair, is one of those lift-truck operators. He is also a certified lift-truck instructor, and is in his fifth year of volunteering for the Expo.

He puts in more than 30 hours over the Expo’s three days, “doing anything they tell me to do” with the forklift. That includes hauling materials in and out of the buildings and placing them correctly and securely.

“I’m not the boss at what I do; I just do what they want,” Wunder said. “I like doing this.”

He added that he began building farm equipment when he was 18 and said he “just loves the passion that ag folks have for the industry.”

Both he and Smith are eager and ready for the phone call each year asking them to come out and put in three days of hard work at the Expo.

“Every year, they call me up and say, ‘Are you coming back, please?’” Smith said.



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Randy Smith of RGS Auto & Marine in Albany, Ore., has volunteered for 14 years and is one of the scores of volunteers who help make the Willamette Valley Ag Expo a success.



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