

Unique arrangement helps transition

By **CRAIG REED**
For the Capital Press

WINSTON, Ore. — In recent years, John James had said several times he was ready to turn his fruit orchard over to somebody younger.

Lorienia Hunt and Erin Saylor, who had picked fruit in the James Orchard since they were kids, thought James was joking when he brought the subject up. But last summer during the peak of the harvest, James made it clear he wasn't joking. He and his wife, Kathy, wanted some help.

"We always thought he was kidding," Saylor said. "But then he just outright asked if I would do it."

Hunt got the same question.

The two friends hardly hesitated before partnering up with the Jameses. The two women and their families helped James



Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

Erin Saylor, left, Lorienia Hunt, John James and Deborah and Theran Hunt are the main partners that are now working at, managing and marketing the James Orchard near Winston, Ore. Long-time orchardist James said he is pleased to have found a couple of families who are willing to share the workload needed to keep the 16-acre orchard in production and successful.

during the final six weeks of the 2015 summer fruit season, helping to pick and sell the orchard's peaches, cherries, nectarines, pears and apples at farmers' markets. This year the Hunts and Saylor are in a 50-50 partner-

James Orchard

Where: Winston, Ore.

Partners: John and Kathy James, Lorienia and Travis Hunt family, Erin and Jason Saylor family

Acreage: 16

Fruit: Cherries, peaches, nectarines, pears and apples

ship with James on the 16-acre orchard of about 1,500 trees for the entire year. James is doing all the tractor work, fertilizing, spraying, irrigating and will cover the expense of electricity, water, fertilizer, farmers' market fees and fruit boxes.

The Saylor and Hunts will do the pruning, harvesting and selling at a stand at the orchard and stands at the Coos Bay and Grants Pass farmers' markets. Hunt's son Theran and his wife, Deborah, have done much of the orchard work, such as pruning, through the winter.

"John wants his orchard to stay in business," Saylor said. "He really trusts us. He knows our hearts are into it. He's trying to make it work for us."

"I'm so excited," Lorienia Hunt said. "I'm so glad God gave us this opportunity. It's literally a dream come true for me."

"Erin and I are two peas in a pod," she added. "We are true farm girls."

Saylor, 35, and Hunt, 43, have known each other for

years and both love the farming lifestyle. They each milk cows at their home places, they grow big gardens and they have their own small orchards. They already have farmers' market experience, selling surplus fruits and vegetables and homemade items at booths.

But working with a 1,500-tree orchard is their biggest farm project to date.

James, who is almost 66, has been growing fruit since 1972. He cut back on his orchard about 10 years ago, taking out some trees to ease his workload. He turned the cleared area into a venue for special events such as weddings and reunions.

"Rather than selling the orchard, I took some trees out," James said.

James said the women initially wanted to rent the orchard, but James told them they needed to learn the business first. So he partnered with them with the understanding if all goes well, the Hunts and Saylor will take over 100 percent in a year or two.

On the Cover

Harvest time is seen in this photo courtesy of Gebbers Farms.

"These girls are hard-working," James said. "They wanted to rent the place, but I told them they needed to learn the business first and then they could. I know it is going to work."

To add to the orchard's diversity and to add to the inventory available at the markets, the new partners plan to plant strawberries and the vegetables needed to make salsa such as tomatoes, onions and peppers. Lorienia Hunt has made and sold salsa at past markets.

"We'll incorporate some of our own items with the fruit at the stands," Saylor said.

"It's overwhelming, but exciting at the same time," she added. "We're all on the same page. We wouldn't do this with anybody else."

In addition to the stand at the orchard, the partners will sell at the farmers' markets in Coos Bay, Ore., on Wednesdays and in Grants Pass, Ore., on Saturdays.

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