

Hentze family takes farm another step

By ALIYA HALL
For the Capital Press

JUNCTION CITY, Ore. — Hentze Family Farm has been in the Junction City area for 116 years and four generations. Brother and sister Gordon Hentze and Karen McEldowney-Hay grew up on the farm and now work together to manage it.

Neither of them anticipated keeping the farm going, and their parents initially discouraged them from taking it over because it is a smaller farm and harder to make a living from it.

"I lived here all my life,"

Hentze said. "Mom and Dad didn't push us to participate in a way that was saying, 'This is what you're going to be doing.' I never believed I'd end up on the farm, but here I am almost 64. I had to get into a mindset of it's a lot of work. I put a lot of work into this farm; everybody in the family has."

McEldowney-Hay said she believed her father was surprised that Hentze wanted to come back to the farm. She added that "until you actually do it, you don't know how much work it is."

As one of the four siblings, McEldowney-Hay lived in



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Brother and sister Gordon Hentze and Karen McEldowney-Hay grew up on the Hentze Family Farm and now work together to manage it. They sell fruits, berries, vegetables and nuts and host a variety of gatherings on the 116-year-old farm.

nearby Springfield working as a dental hygienist — she has worked in the same office for 48 years. In 2008, she came

back to the farm to help her ailing parents and realized how much her brother was taking on.

"I watched Gordon work like a fool," she said. "He has a full-time job and is working on the farm. I thought, 'This isn't fair. He needs help.' I can't claim to be much of a farmer, but I try to be helpful."

One landmark is the barn, which was already on the property when their great grandparents moved onto the farm in 1902. It went through a 25-year phase as a dairy barn, and for the last 35 years it's been the produce barn. A section has been renovated into a small work area for snipping beans, pitting cherries and cracking walnuts.

The farm sells berries and

other fruits, vegetables and nuts throughout the year, and Hentze's wife sells chicken eggs in Eugene, Ore. Hentze and McEldowney-Hay have also resurrected a tradition from their grandparents: hosting gatherings.

McEldowney-Hay and her husband added a cookhouse to make events easier. They will have live music, and in the fall an Oktoberfest festival and pumpkin patch rides.

"It's our passion now," Hentze said. "We all have worked off the farm to make ends meet, but we put just as much in the farm as our actual jobs."

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