

Volunteer gives Ag Expo a 'lift' each year

By GEOFF PARKS
For the Capital Press

Lonny Wunder, 61, a longtime volunteer at the Willamette Valley Ag Expo, is no stranger to hard work. In fact, he admits he's had several "retirements" followed by new starts dating back to age 13.

Event producer Scott Ingalls said the Expo features hundreds of thousands of square feet of exhibitors, equipment, seminars, classes, food and fun. Dozens of volunteers such as Wunder put the show together — and take it apart afterward — performing hundreds of hours of unpaid work each year.

Wunder said his first phase of hard work was the physical labor of youth, loading tomato, asparagus and almond totes and moving irrigation pipe in Northern California. After an accident left him severely injured, he healed and reinvented himself as an electronics installer and repairman, then



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Lonny Wunder has been a volunteer forklift driver at the Willamette Valley Ag Expo since 2009.

as a purchasing agent for a school district. Retiring from the school district and moving to the Albany area, he worked with the Benton County Fair. He then moved to the Linn County Parks Department and in 2009 worked with the Expo's Scott Ingalls, who recognized a good thing when he saw it. He put Wunder — a certified forklift instructor — to work helping to set up the exhibits and displays each year.

"At the Expo, you kind

of have to be able to build a city in a few days, then tear it down and move on," Wunder said. The Expo features over 250,000 square feet of show space, making it the largest ag show in the region, Ingalls said.

"You have to have independent thinkers and be two steps ahead of everybody else and build this thing from the inside out. I'm a forklift driver and a fixer, and I'm into safety, so this is my escape from retirement," Wunder said.

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