

Outdoor Rec / Local

Locked & Loaded gears up for 2015 off-roading



THE OUTDOOR COLUMN
By Todd Arriola

Well, it looks like Locked and Loaded (L&L), in its sixth year as a local 4x4 off-road group, is all geared up and ready for some new adventures.

Christina Witham, secretary for L&L, and co-owner of Oregon Sign Company in Baker City with husband Russ, said the group currently has 19 vehicles, mostly Jeeps, including the Witham's own 1967 Jeepster Commando (manufactured by Kaiser) and 50 members, covering the spectrum of ages from one newborn baby on up.

One of the first questions you may ask is, "What does the name mean?" Witham said that "locked" refers to the lockers on the vehicles, a special differential setup, allowing them to go places a standard vehicle couldn't go. And "loaded" is a reference to the vehicles being loaded with family, pets and gear.

She said, "Our love for the outdoors and our 4x4s

brought us together, but the need to keep our roads open and accessible for everyone is our passion. We run responsibly on the trails with our families and friends, as well as 4x4 clubs from other areas, including Idaho, which

boosts local tourism, as well as other local businesses that are integral in keeping us running. Our members are local business owners, city, state and county workers, ranchers, teachers and many other professionals, so we know how important off-road recreation is to our economy and our community."

It isn't just about running trails, and having fun with this group. They've also played a vital role in helping to maintain roads, trails and other areas, participating in events like the "National Go Topless Day" last May, celebrated by cleaning up forest roads in the Elk Creek and Washington Gulch areas, for the third year in a row.

"Topless" refers to the removal of the Jeep tops, and celebrating the spring season. This year, the group's cleanup day is scheduled for May 16, but the exact spot is yet to be

determined, Witham said.

In late February of this year, the group Forest Access For All (FAFA) was contacted about individuals with a vehicle stuck in the mountains, and in turn, FAFA contacted L&L, the group shortly thereafter springing into action, according to FAFA. All returned home safely, including Jim Marks and Jimmy Sullivan of L&L, and FAFA publicly thanked the two individuals and the group on their website, adding, "This is a perfect example of how people that are completely separated from each other in their personal lives made a difference."

Said Witham, "We enjoy traveling long distances as a group to bring about awareness to off-road travel, and to learn about customs, laws, history and commerce in those areas. We have explored as far as the Magruder Trail and Lolo Motorway in Montana, which is rich in history. The Naches Ranger District in the Okanogan-Wenatchee Forest is by far the best-managed, off-road-friendly, fun and challenging forest we have ever been on. From Idaho's Rogue River to the old mining towns of Florence and Yellow Pine, there is so much to see and do."

She talked about locations closer to home, facing mismanagement and threats of closure, emphasizing the continuing need to fight to keep them



Submitted Photo.

The Locked and Loaded group is ready to begin rolling the third Saturday of every month on a variety of favorite trails.

open and accessible for future generations. "The places I have mentioned in Montana, Idaho and Washington are all managed and open for tourism, recreation, agriculture and mining, and the communities that surround them are stronger because of it," she said.

She cited Bennett Peak as an example, among the many areas threatened by the Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision and the Walla Walla Whitman National Forest Travel Management Plan, and said, "The reason we will fight to keep this peak accessible is the history, including mining, hunting, high mountain hiking and snowmobiling. The economic factors associated with those activities, as well as the overall

enjoyment of traveling into such a beautiful place, is reason enough."

Witham said L&L has monthly runs on the third Saturday, and for March, the group's destination, Washington Gulch to Denny Creek Run, included routes from Pocatons Road to Washington Gulch, to Elk Creek, Old Auburn Lane, Union Creek Road, Highway 7, Skyline Road, Denny Creek, and back to Baker City. These were some of the items that were recommended for the run: common sense, GPS, paper map of the area and 4-wheel-drive for the few areas that may be soft. The items the group recommends always having in their vehicles: flares, first aid kit, matches, flashlight, extra fuel, fire extinguish-

er, tools, spare tire, winch, paper map, GPS, cellular phone, CB, extra clothing, blankets, food and water.

"We look forward to bringing the readers of *The Baker County Press* some off-road destinations and requirements, so that you all may venture into your public lands safely and discover the wonders that await each and every one of you," Witham said.

We'll highlight some of those destinations in future columns here.

You can check out the group's Facebook page for more information about Locked and Loaded, including details about upcoming events and membership.

Good luck with your adventures!

Fire prevention

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"The benefit to the department is significant. First, it gives us the opportunity to interact with people in the community and share with them not only what we do from a fire prevention standpoint but what other services we provide.

"Inevitably those conversations occur and they get to know our personnel.

"Second, we have the opportunity to observe what potential hazards are in any given structure. The majority of the inspections that we are doing are considered business or mercantile inspections so they are kind of a low level inspection for the most part they are not what we would consider a technical inspection.

"When we get to the larger operations, sizeable occupancies or care

facilities we will actually get the State Deputy Fire Marshall involved in those. Last the benefit to us is to observe any significant construction features in these buildings that would pose a hazard to us in the event a fire were to occur," John said.

The information collected could be useful in preventing unnecessary devastation should a fire occur. It is no secret that Baker City has old buildings, some with little to no protection from the adjoining buildings to stop the spread of a fire.

"A fire could be potentially devastating to business owners and the community in general. A large number, somewhere around 80-90%, of small businesses never open their doors again after a fire. That can really impact a small community like ours especially if a fire effects

more than one building or business," said John.

An example is Jesup, Georgia where in August of 2014 fire broke out in a downtown building and quickly spread destroying seven buildings.

According to John, Baker City has nearly 400 commercial buildings city-wide.

Speaking toward the enforcement of the fire inspections, he added, "At this point in time, there is no punitive schedule we are focusing on positive compliance. We will utilize a worksheet and provide a copy of that to businesses. We will give a timeline to correct the problem and provide assistance if we can.

"Many problems can be corrected easily and some may even be things that can be corrected during the inspection."

John continued, "Usually



Gina K. Swartz / The Baker County Press.

New Fire Chief Mark John has hit the ground running, reigniting the City's fire inspection program.

the way the process goes when a violation notice is provided, the violator gets a copy and is required to sign for that copy showing that they have accepted it, it is not an admission of guilt it is just to show they have received that notice and there is a time frame for them to correct the problem.

"We will then go back out and re-inspect. If the violation has not been corrected we give them another opportunity, beyond that if the problem is still outstanding there is an enforcement piece were we can actually require them to do that and we can get the State Fire Marshal involved, code enforce can get involved and then we can take some action. I hope it will never get that far. I think most will be receptive, I'm very much aware that not everyone is going to receive this well."

John also addressed the City Council during a recent goal-setting session—look for full coverage of that in next week's issue—that it is his vision to see one member of his department eventually receive some extra training and become

complaints, because our vehicles will be parked in front of businesses but we have no choice, if we get an ambulance call while conducting inspections we have to access to that vehicle," he said.

Recently, Karine Johnson, Deputy State Fire Marshall who is based out of Ontario, conducted an eight-hour course for the department and John indicated that he took a refresher course she facilitated on fire and life safety with other rural Fire Chiefs.

Johnson will also be involved in bigger inspections and help with compliance.

Baker Schools are inspected yearly and fall under the responsibility of Johnson, however John indicated he and his department would likely become involved.

John also told the Council during a recent goal-setting session—look for full coverage of that in next week's issue—that it is his vision to see one member of his department eventually receive some extra training and become

a certified Fire Marshall. As it stands now, John acts as the City Fire Marshall.

A new certified Fire Marshall would eventually take over inspection duties and keep the program up to date as part of their main duties. Singling out one employee in particular, John gave accolades to Sarah Blair.

He said, "She does a great job and has the most training of our personnel to do inspections. She's our expert."

According to John, only eight inspections completed last year because of time and staff constraints.

The need to accomplish more inspections and keep those inspections current is in John's opinion is great.

"In a community this size we are very lucky to have a department like ours, providing the type of services we are able to," he said.

As John points out, there is always room for improvement. "I don't know exactly how many we will get to but we will put together a plan so that each of the shifts shares the workload," he concluded.

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