

Pretty Gifts and Things - A Dream Come True

By Scott Laird



It's not very often that you hear about a friendship like this. Elsie Taylor and Karri Constance have known each other since Elsie was Karri's 4-H mother in Sherwood back in the 60's. They've kept in touch throughout the years and are now working together here in Vernonia. Elsie is the sole proprietor of Pretty Gifts and Things at 711 Bridge Street. Karri is her right hand...well, gal. And at eighty years young, Elsie, who is confined to a wheelchair, does need a bit of a hand.

Lots of people stop to admire the Pretty Gifts and Things display win-

dows that wrap around from Bridge Street onto Adams Avenue. There is a variety of glass objects, a large selection of jewelry and decorative knives and swords. Once inside the store, shoppers will find amazing stained glass, created by local artist Alice Zimmerman, more antique jewelry and lots of other gift items.

The shop is the result of a life long dream for Elsie and a wonderful story of friendship and giving. Elsie grew up in North Powder, Oregon, graduated high school in 1945 and married Lyle Taylor the same year. She and Lyle spent the next

fifty-four years together, moving to Sherwood in 1954, Jewell in 1979, and finally settling in Vernonia on Timber Road in 1985. They did some ranching and as a hobby became amateur rock hounds and began making jewelry together. Elsie also worked at GAF, makers of the old View-Master slides, in the marketing department. She was a 4-H mother with her two sons and continued mentoring other children in her club which is how she met Karri. Elsie and Karri stayed close over the years and both ended up as neighbors in Vernonia. "We would call Karri up when we went out to Eastern Oregon and ask her to look after our dogs or come over and feed the cows," said Elsie.

After Lyle passed away in 1999, Elsie fell ill and was told she could not continue to live alone. In stepped her old friend Karri, who packed up Elsie's things, moved her, and has been her companion ever since.

Elsie, who has worked with jewelry all her life, decided to open her shop with Karri's help last year. Elsie shares the space with glass artist Zimmerman. As Elsie and I sat talking, Karri bustled around the shop straightening things. I joked that it looked like Elsie was the brains and Karri the muscle of the operation. "She's the gofer," chuckled Elsie. The shop features the jewelry that Elsie and Lyle made together from the rocks they collected over the years.

"I always wanted to do this," said Elsie. "I like being my own boss." For Elsie Taylor, with the help of her friend Karri Constance, Pretty Gifts and Things is her chance to realize a life long dream.

"Eyes Wide Open" and the Costs of War: A Conversation with Exhibit Coordinator Jeff Hunter (continued from page 1)

The original Eyes Wide Open was created by the AFSC in Chicago. A modified version was created in Oregon in July 2006. The Oregon exhibit traveled to twelve cities in 2006 and will be on tour during the summer of 2007, visiting 18 cities including this stop in Vernonia. AFSC is a Quaker organization founded in 1917 and includes people of various faiths who are working for social justice, peace, and humanitarian service.

I sat down with volunteer tour coordinator Jeff Hunter and heard the story of Eyes Wide Open. Following are excerpts from that conversation.

"I believe the costs of this war far exceed any value we might receive," Hunter told me at the beginning of our conversation. "I have spoken with many returning veterans from this conflict, and they tell me it is the closest thing to hell they have ever seen. The ones who hurt the worst are the most silent; they are suffering because they did what their government asked them to do."

"Quakers believe that war in general never succeeds with its goals," said Hunter. "We are here today to stand as witness that this war is not right. This war is counter to the interests of the people of Oregon."

It costs over \$300,000 a year to keep an American Soldier in Iraq. We have squandered over 5.9 billion dollars of Oregonian's tax dollars, money that could have been reallocated to other services."

"Not many of our representatives are still supporting this war yet kids are still joining up," explains Hunter. "The ones that are really being taken advantage of are those in the National Guard. That is an eight year commitment. A lot of them sign up to get help from the GI Bill, to get funding for college. Did you know that you can only use those GI Bill funds during the years you're enrolled? And they keep getting redeployed. They may not even get a chance to fully use those funds if they keep getting sent back over there. We haven't even started to look ahead at the costs

to care for the injured that return. We will be caring for them for years to come, some for the rest of their lives."

Hunter says each one of us needs to ask ourselves "Are we responsible for what is happening there? Don't forget, we attacked Iraq, so this is being done in our name. We don't change peoples' minds, they change them when they are ready. We

need to ask ourselves, is occupying a country against its will an American value? How forgiving would we be if this had been done to us? How would we react if we were invaded and told our occupiers had a better idea of how our democracy should work?"

"Quakers believe there is 'that of God in everyone', Americans, Iraqis, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, everyone," Hunter explains. "Through this exhibit we are trying to bring the humanity of the Iraqi people to Oregon. We believe the American people are good, and if they knew the truth about what is being done in their name, they would act in the right way."

For more information about the "Eyes Wide Open" exhibit or the American Friends Service Committee go to www.afsc.org



***Tax Payers in Oregon will pay \$1.1 billion for the cost of the Iraq War in fiscal year 2007. For the same amount of money the following could have been provided:**

- 238,743 people with healthcare
- 19,394 elementary school teachers
- 6,859 affordable housing units
- 197,416 scholarships for university students
- 23,621 public safety officers
- 331,261 children with health care
- 117 new elementary schools
- 18,538 port container inspectors

* According to the National Priorities Project www.nationalprioritiesproject.org

Changes in the Air at Cedar Ridge Retreat Center (continued from page 1)

and outdoor amenities that include walking paths, basketball and volleyball courts, and an outdoor swimming pool. Rock Creek meanders through the site and there are amazing views and sunsets.

Britt and Larry are taking a multi-leveled approach to the intentional and sustainable changes they are making at Cedar Ridge. "We realize that we create far too much waste and are working to be more responsible" said Britt.

"We're moving towards using more plates and flatware instead of paper and plastic, using more items that are compostable, buying local whenever possible, and purchasing food from small local farmers. We even consider the environment when buying toilet paper and laundry soap. We have an opportunity to expose a lot of people to these practices - we recognize that we're all in this together."

"We want to be supportive of the community as well," said Britt. "We try to run the business like a family. We are one of the largest employers in Vernonia, after the school district, and with that come certain responsibilities. Our intention is to provide leadership and training for the young adults who are our employees. We don't just want to provide jobs, we want to teach transferable skills, increase their level of experience and service, and help them take the next step to move forward with their lives. As an employer we want to be more, do more and have a more meaningful impact on our customers, on the community and on our employees."

The types of events and activities that the retreat center is beginning to host also reflect the changes that are happening at Cedar Ridge. Esther Arce, the office manager who lives on site, is involved in the organization and planning for every event that happens at the center. "In addition to basketball camps, outdoor school and corporate picnics, we've begun to host yoga weekends, religious and spiritual retreats, women's weekends, concerts, and other similar events," said Ester during my visit. "We are actively marketing the facility so it gets more use during the winter months. It is a big goal of Larry's and Britt's to offer programs that are health and environmentally conscious, programs that are inclusive and accepting of others. We want to bring people out here who are conscious of their surroundings and their impact on the earth."

"We have no interest in converting anyone or in making a political statement," said Britt in closing. "Our goal is to be a model for sustainability in Columbia County. We want to be a business that others can look to as an example of what can be done to make a difference. We are trying to be more intentional every step of the way."

"We want to create more opportunities for the people of Vernonia to take advantage of these programs," said Larry. "We hope that by making them available, people will come take a look at them."

For Cedar Ridge and Vernonia, it feels like a positive breeze is blowing.