

Voices In My Head: Meat Loaf On a Stick

By P.J. O'Leary

Several times each day as I walk my mail route, I'll encounter different cats waiting at customer's doors whining for me to let them in the house. One would think that after hundreds of these meetings, the cats would get the idea that I'm not going to open the door for them, but they never give up. "Today, I think, is the day that man will let me in the house," they say. Obviously, I will never let them in the house. I occasionally go so far as to tell them that their families have moved away and they are now orphans, even though it's not true. Is it wrong for me to tell them these things? I suppose so. A better question might be "Why am I talking to cats?" I think the word "loopy" and the accompanying circular motion of the pointer finger around one's ear were invented to more precisely describe people who talk to cats. Talking to dogs is okay. Dogs have a discernable appreciation for oral communication. The words themselves may be "blah, blah, blah," but the tone and cadence of human speech can brighten or ruin a dog's day. When you talk to a cat, his expression never changes. It's really kind of like talking to a slot machine. It might make you feel good, but there's seldom any payoff.

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Wednesday is probably my favorite day on the route. On Wednesdays, Duke Gortler is playing his accordion at the Senior Center when I deliver the mail. Duke just turned 87, and he told me he's been "fooling around" with that instrument since 1952. I love to stand out of sight and listen as he finesses the bellows and tickles the buttons, making wonderful music appear from thin air. If I could provide a "score" for my day, like in the movies, I'd use mostly accordion music. Since I have no accompaniment as I work, I have to just whistle. If I see a stray dog, I'll whistle the theme from "Lassie." When I have to climb lots of stairs, I'll whistle that famous score from "Rocky." When I see industrious children involved in money making schemes, I'll whistle the theme from the "Little Rascals." You get the idea. There's not much that happens during the day that I can't set to music. If only I could get Duke to follow me around all day-- then we'd really have something. It's hard to be cranky when you're listening to accordion music. If we could convince the world leaders at the next G8 Summit to do the Chicken Dance, there's no telling what kind of progress might be made. In fact, it would be great if we could adopt a global anthem. The "Beer Barrel Polka" sounds like a good choice to me.

Beer and music, laughter and fun, rodeos and logging shows-- that's what Columbia County summertime events are made of. Great transition, huh? The Fair is over, Jamboree's ramping up, and we're all reminded of one of our favorite things. Naturally, I refer to food on a stick. Corn Dogs, Teriyaki Chicken, Frozen Bananas, Caramel Apples, Popsicles and Ice Cream Bars all share one thing in common-- the stick. It occurred to me that, as a logging community, we do ourselves a disservice if we do not try to promote other food options which people could consume from a stick. Sticks, after all, come from logs. For instance, I enjoy meat loaf, but preparing it at home can be time-consuming. If I could get it from a vendor on a stick, I'd almost certainly eat it more often. Canny vendors might even take it to the next level by inserting mashed potatoes inside the meatloaf on a stick. Toast on a stick would be a great breakfast option for people on the run. Vegetarians might enjoy a nice deep-fried Tofu cake on a stick. We needn't even limit ourselves to human foods. Imagine Scruffy, his kibble on a stick held adorably between his paws, finishing off his dinner and then chewing on the stick. The possibilities are really endless.

I'm sorry to say that that's about all I have to offer you this month. Perhaps we could get together next month and continue our discussion. Whatever works for you--

County Budget Is Not Business as Usual *(continued from page 1)*

for claimants to establish a specific, but limited, number of home sites. This is applicable only to claimants who filed Measure 37 claims on or before June 28, 2007.

The county processed around 130 claims under Measures 37 and 49, and Dugdale said that a fairly sizeable number of those claims were processed by the state under Measure 49 rules.

"I'd say all but seven Columbia County claims [still] have to be processed," he said. "If those applications get processed in a 2-3 month period [and individuals begin the partitioning process to create new lots], there is the potential for more activity and [creation of] more rural lots."

Dugdale said that increase could potentially result in the re-hiring of at least one part-time position.

The Road Department took a financial hit in addition to a decrease in funds from the Secure Rural Schools Act. These funds are from timber lands set aside for permanent forest production on the principal of sustainability. Last year, the federal government agreed to reinstate funding for four years, on a declining scale.

"There is very little money at this point in time," said County Roadmaster Dave Hill. Funds could be available to supplement the road department's budget, from at least two sources.

The first, according to Hyde, is funding from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act. The Department received \$800,000 and will use that funding to pave four miles of Apiary Road from Highway 47. "We are hoping to construct this project this fall," Hill said. It must go through the approval process as laid out by the federal government, though, so with uncertain weather, Hill said this project may come next spring.

The second source of funding comes from the transportation package recently passed by the state legislature. "It looks like we may be getting a little more money in the next year [to] year-and-a-half," Hill said. "It's going to be a little tight." Although the department's budget is a lean one, Hill said that they are busy.

In addition to the Apiary Road project, the department has committed to paving approximately 3.5 miles of Scappoose-Vernonia Highway, from Highway 47. The funding for this project came from a combination of sources; first, an allocation of federal monies, and \$400,000 from a Senate Bill passed in 2007.

Hill said that three employees recently retired, and that he will look to replace one of those individuals in the fall.

Although every department in the county has been affected by this budgetary crunch, much of the public discussion has focused on funding the Columbia County Sheriff's Department and finding a way to save some of the 14 positions slated for elimination as of August 1. The county has found a way to keep five of the deputies previously notified of impending layoffs.

This will bring the county's enforcement division to eight sworn personnel, including Sheriff Jeff Dickerson and Undersheriff Andy Moyer. An increase in funding from the Oregon Marine Board will allow for 2.4 marine deputies to patrol the Columbia River during the summer months, including a seasonal deputy. Two marine deputies will primarily patrol the water, but could be called on overtime in emergency situations. The seasonal deputy will work from July - September 2009, and May-June 2010.

"We're very pleased by the Board's decision to bring some deputies back," Dickerson said. "This won't bring us up to where we were before the budget cuts," Dickerson said, "but it definitely will give us more options and additional resources to handle our emergency calls."

Five enforcement deputies and four jail technician positions were not restored by this agreement.

Hyde said that the board is in the process of creating a task force to explore options for stable funding of the Columbia County Sheriff's Office. "We are identifying stake-holders and a mission statement," Hyde said.

He does not know how many individuals will be on the task force. "It will be a manageable number, but we have to make sure all of the stake holders are included," he said.

Hyde said that while funding was shifted in the budget, due to project and purchase deferrals at the sheriff's office, use of a portion of the county's contingency funds and shifting of other funds, this was not accomplished as Dickerson had suggested, by cutting approximately one percent from all departmental budgets to use those funds for public safety.

Commissioner Earl Fisher has, for several weeks, stated publicly that the citizens of the county and county officials need to look at how the county delivers services, the particular services the county is responsible for.

Hyde has said that the use of

contingency funds is not something that he is entirely comfortable with. "We're not in danger, at all," Hyde said. "But next year may be even worse than this year and we have to have that contingency."

Finance Director Ruth Baker said that the furlough days and other cost-cutting measures -- including layoffs and the elimination of a cost of living increase for department heads and elected officials-- will save the county approximately \$350,000, and that \$350,000 was used to bolster the Columbia County Sheriff's Office budget.

On the days that the county is scheduled for furlough, there will be limited access for state courts.

For information about operating hours or departmental hours, call (503) 397-7210. Information regarding the Courthouse closures or departmental phone numbers can be found on the County website at www.co.columbia.or.us

On The Shelf:

What's Happening at the Vernonia Library

by Jennifer Maloney

The Vernonia Public Library has had a busy summer this year with the Summer Reading Program in full gear! Jennifer Maloney, Linda Johnston, Kelli Martinez, Orissa Burghard, and a handful of volunteers have had an average of 25 children attending the library on Tuesday mornings to listen to stories, make crafts, and play games based on the weekly theme.

To compliment the weekly theme, we have had Thursday evening event nights which have been wonderful and well attended. First, we had Laura McCormack, professional storyteller, visit our town and tell stories with song, instruments, acting, and a lot of enthusiasm. Children and parents alike enjoyed the animated telling of several stories including well known tales like ABIYOYO, as well as stories that Ms. McCormack has created. Last Thursday was the Tie Dye event. Several youngsters had a great time being creative here at the library making their very own tie dye item. We had shirts, capris, and even socks being rubber-banded and dipped to make one-of-a-kind pieces.

The Summer Reading Program has been a lot of fun this year, and as always, we invite all children to attend these free events!

There will be a party for the children the week of August 3rd. The date and time are TBD.

All participants of the Summer Reading Program are invited to be on the library float in the Jamboree parade on Saturday August 8th.

Upcoming events at the Library
Friends of the Library Book Sale--Friday, August 7, from 4:00-6:00 PM & Saturday, August 8, from 9:00 AM-6:00 PM at the library
Family Movie Night--Thursday, August 20, at 7:00 PM--Troop Beverly Hills
Book Discussion--Monday, August 31

If you have any questions, please call the library at 503-429-1818.

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If you can talk, you can sing."*

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