

Community... A Continued Series Celebrating the Circle of Life with Salmon Festival

By Jill Hult

Fall, where leaves are brilliant in color and rivers change to swift cold, people and animals begin to prepare for shelter from the impending winter's cold. For Salmon this is a time to return home and begin the precious task of spawning. We are fortunate here to be able to see this miraculous journey up close and personal. And in the spirit of life's cycle we choose appropriately to celebrate. It is all thanks to a small group of people that bring us together to do so. Salmon, pumpkins, scarecrows, food, art, and of course the fishing pond – what could be a better way to welcome fall? Okay, maybe a clear, crisp day instead of rain to celebrate the day, but whether the weather cooperates with our wishes or not, life carries on and we partake.

In this year long series of community events that focused on our community assets, volunteerism, and our ability to attract visitors, the Salmon Festival is my final focus. I would like to briefly recap that this series covered: The Vernonia Friendship Jamboree and Logging Show, The Spirit of Christmas & the Christmas Community Bazaar, The Fourth of July Great American Bash, Vernonia Community-Wide Sale, and St. Mary's Quilt Fair. All of these events are organized by volunteers and have a lot to offer to us and our visitors. I encourage you to support them in whatever way you can from year to year. Community is the reason they exist.

Currently, Mayor, Josette Mitchell and her husband Casey head up the Salmon Festival along with the help of Gadget Abney, Tobie Finzel, Joann Glass,



Scott and Kate Laird, Bob Argue, Hands On Art members, and others. Josette mentioned that throughout the festival's history it has had many organizers and festival crew; Randy Parrow, Shirlee Daughtry, Kate Conley, Donna Webb, Maggie Peyton, and others to name a few. This year marks the 12th year of the event though it has been known as the Salmon Festival for 11 years.

In an interview, I asked Josette about organizing the event. She said, "Organizing the supplies happens in late October after festival is over and lists are made of what needs to be purchased for the next year. Most of the participants who donate time or materials are long term supporters, so in late August/September we start checking in with contacts. Vendor materials go out with the Jamboree packets in March." The cost to operate the Salmon

Festival is between 1600-1800 dollars.

They pay for use of the Scout Cabin, electricity, trout for the trout pond, scarecrow supplies, pumpkins and pumpkin supplies, fishing supplies, insurance, garbage duty, and hay bales if they get wet. I asked how they fund such costs. Josette said they have sponsors as well as vendor fees, and ticket sales from activities that fund the festival.

The day's staple activities include a



kid's trout fishing pond, scarecrow building, pumpkin carving, vendors, food, and an auction, and of course Salmon watching! Josette would like to have the budget to do live music at the festival again as it is always a big draw.

I also inquired how many volunteers they currently use. Josette answered that they have around 10-15 volunteers and that they pay High School kids to do garbage duty. She added that there are always people doing multiple jobs so it would be nice if there were more people to spread the duties among. I asked how others can get

involved. Josette said, "We are hoping to start meetings in January, it is hard as people's time is valuable." Also the Salmon Festival has a Facebook Event Page you can check out.

I asked Josette what has been the biggest challenge the event faces. She said, "Unpredictable weather and attendance. If the weather is bad the number of people drops off, making for less sales, unhappy vendors/artisans and lack of ticket sales which we rely on for next year's seed money."

We all know it is impossible to order up a sunny day on the first Saturday of October but certainly we can bundle up and carve a pumpkin or buy a gift from a vendor. As Josette so amply said; "The Salmon come back, so should you!" This year's Salmon Festival will be held on Saturday, October 5, 2013 at Hawkins Park, Vernonia, OR from 10:00 AM – 6:00 PM.

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