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Report from the WOEC Annual Meeting

Board of Directors and management team address co-op operations, finances, and wildfire mitigation

By Scott Laird

The West Oregon Electric Cooperative held their Annual Meeting on Saturday, August 20 at the Vernonia Schools Commons.

The meeting started with the introduction of the seven Board of Directors, who were all present.

The Board approved the minutes from the 2021 Annual Meeting and voted to officially approve all new members who joined the co-op during the previous year.

Chuck Fadeley, who was participating in his last meeting after serving the co-op as legal counsel for the past 36 years, introduced his replacement, Raymond Kindley. "Ray, for the last 20 years, has been exclusively representing co-ops," Fadeley told the members. "He's a real believer in the mission. He can talk power supply or he can talk elk hunting. He's a really good guy and I think you're going to like him."

Fadeley introduced the nominated candidates for Directors position elections – Paul Seamons the current Director for Position 2 who was running unopposed, and current Board President Erika Paleck and Ray Tabor for Position 5. As is traditionally done at the meetings each of the nominees was given an opportunity to address the meeting. Both Seamons and Paleck declined, and Tabor was not in attendance. It was later announced that Paul Seamons and Erika Paleck were elected.

Fadeley, who also serves as a judge in Justice Court, shared his final humorous list of excuses he has heard from the bench from people who have appeared before him.

New WOEC General Manager Billi Kohler tells members her background is in customer relations and that she is "confident in the future of our co-op."

Ted Case, Executive Director of the Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association (ORECA) was introduced as the meeting's special guest. Case, who recently became a member of WOEC when he purchased a cabin at Fishhawk Lake, told the membership ORECA is comprised of 18 electric cooperatives and collectively serves about 500,000 Oregonians in regions that cover about two-thirds of the state. "It's a few people, but a lot of land, which, of course is how electric co-ops came to be, because no one wanted to serve those territories," he told the members. Case said he represents co-ops in the southern coast region, the Columbia River Gorge, and in the high desert. "I think the most challenging area in the whole state is up here in West Oregon's service territory," he said. "Lots of trees, lots of wind. So, I just really commend the staff and this really dedicated Board for all they do to try and provide affordable and reliable power. It's not easy and they do a great job."

Case went on to discuss a current political issue that is important to all ORECA members – the potential removal of dams along the Snake River. Case told the membership WOEC's power supply is 100 percent emission free because of their reliance on hydro power. He said studies have shown that removing the dams could increase electricity costs by 50 percent, decrease reliability and increase the likelihood of blackouts, and increase carbon emissions. He encouraged WOEC members to reach out to their political representatives and express concern about removal of the Snake River dams.

Board President Erika Paleck asked members in attendance to fill out a

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More Than Just a Life Saved

First Responders at the Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD were thrilled to meet Tyson Yeck and his family, after their EMS training helped save his life

By Scott Laird

Not every emergency medical call that trained Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel respond to ends with a happy outcome. That's just the nature of the work, where the paramedics, EMTs, and other volunteers are arriving on what is often the worst day of someone's life.

Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD Chief Paramedic Larry Boxman and volunteer EMR Max LeeKwai greet Tyson Yeck during a visit to the Mist-Birkenfeld station on September 24. LeeKwai's training and quick response, along with Boxman's paramedic skills helped save Yeck's life when he suffered a Sudden Cardiac Arrest on August 28 at Fishhawk Lake. (Photo by Gayle Rich-Boxman)

But a recent call in the Mist-Birkenfeld Rural Fire Protection District (RFPD) had the happiest of endings for one man and his family. Exactly four weeks later, the Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD first responders had the pleasure of celebrating their life saving efforts with Tyson Yeck and his young family.

"Unfortunately we often do see the worst out of life," said Larry Boxman, the Chief Paramedic at Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD. "But then we have days like today, and that's what makes it all worthwhile."

The weekend of August 27-28, 2022 was a busy one for the volunteers and staff at the Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD. The fire and ambulance crews were wrapping up their shifts at their aid station at Exchange 24 for the Hood to Coast run, the weekend long relay race which travels from Mt. Hood through the rural Mist-Birkenfeld District along Highway 202, on its way to Seaside, Oregon. Just a handful of stragglers were still coming by, remembers Mist-Birk RFPD Chief Joe Kaczenski. "We had a lot of people on duty because of Hood to Coast. And then we got a call for a Sudden Cardiac Arrest at Fishhawk Lake and we jumped in our rigs right away."

According to Chief Kaczenski, this cardiac arrest call was unique for a number of reasons. The call involved one of the Mist-Birkenfeld District's own volunteers, the patient was only in his 40s, and the District's EMS personnel were able to save the life of their patient.

When most of us think about Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and the Paramedics, EMTs and volunteers who staff the ambulances, we often think about the fast moving vehicles speeding by, with lights and sirens. You might think it's an action packed and exciting vocation, filled with dangerous and heroic life saving moments.

But the reality is, in a rural setting like the Birkenfeld area, EMS life is often pretty quiet. Calls requiring an EMS intervention can be few and far between for the Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD.

But when a medical emergency does happen, it is almost always serious, just based on the remote area and the long transport distance to a hospital emergency room. This was one of those serious calls.

Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) is the abrupt loss of heart function – the heart stops beating and pumping blood – that results in immediate loss of consciousness and unresponsiveness. It is different than a heart attack, which involves a blockage of blood flow to the heart and includes symptoms that may start immediately and persist for days or even weeks.

When the call came in August 28, Chief Kaczenski was the first to arrive on the scene, in just over 10 minutes, but it turns out he wasn't the only Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD staff member there. District volunteer Max LeeKwai was hosting an annual reunion with about 15 of his college buddies from the University of Oregon that weekend, and wasn't participating in the Hood to Coast event. The group had been playing soccer when one of those long-time friends, 43 year old Tyson Yeck, dropped to his knees and then face first to the ground without any warning.

LeeKwai's EMS training kicked right in. "Usually I'm in uniform when I'm going to a call and it's all sorted in my mind what we're going to need to do when we arrive," says. LeeKwai. "It was very shocking. There were no signs leading up to it, it just happened out of nowhere. It just didn't add up."

LeeKwai says he initially thought Yeck was having a seizure. "Once I started my assessment I found out that his pulse was jumping all over the place. And then it was obvious what it was when his pulse just stopped."

LeeKwai quickly had someone call 9-1-1 and sent someone else to get his medical bag that all trained Mist-Birk RFPD first responders carry with them at all times from his car, while initiating CPR. Chief Kaczenski arrived and helped with the CPR. "We continued working on

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