

Happy 100th to Thompson Creek Irrigation Association!

BY BARBARA CHASTEEN

A living link to the early history of the Siskiyou and the Applegate River Valley.

The Thompson Creek Irrigation Association (TCIA) was established officially on May 19, 1919, when Secretary Charles Herbert Elmore II signed the first shares. The original membership included 12 local ranchers. Some of their names—Beckner, Bingham, Darneille, Elmore, Hogan, Houston, Johnston, Knutzen, Mee, Miller, Oster, and Teski—still live on in the landscape, maps, and history of the valley.

But TCIA's roots go back 60 years earlier to the first gold miners and ranchers of the Applegate Valley. The system had its beginnings in the 1860s when John O'Brien, an immigrant from Ireland, came to the upper Applegate to farm and mine for gold. To support his gold-mining activities, he had Chinese laborers build a 13-mile diversion ditch from Sturgis Creek and O'Brien Creek into Carberry Creek, which flows into the upper Applegate River. In the late 1800s, O'Brien sold his ditch to a group of ranchers, who redirected the ditch over the low divide from Carberry to augment the flow of water in Thompson Creek (see note below).

One hundred years later the network of irrigation ditches in the ten-mile-long Thompson Creek Valley is still served by Thompson Creek with added water from Miller Lake, Sturgis Creek, and O'Brien Creek. Sturgis Creek flows out of Miller Lake, a natural lake augmented by a dam permitted by the US Forest Service later in TCIA's history. The lake lies on the ridge between Little Craggy Peak and Steve Peak. O'Brien Creek rushes down the mountainside just to the north.

Over the decades, most of the original ranches have been broken into smaller parcels, and today there are about 300 homes in the valley. The community spirit that began in the 1800s has continued through the years as neighbors pitch in to keep the organization running.

Charles Herbert Elmore's descendants, still working the family ranches dating back to 1903, have continued through the years to be a mainstay of TCIA. Family members serve on the board of directors and work behind the scenes communicating with TCIA members, maintaining relationships with government agencies, continuing to protect the dam that slightly elevates Miller Lake for extra storage, and maintaining the historic Sturgis-O'Brien ditch.

Keeping history alive, the association's secretaries from the start have preserved records of meeting minutes, contracts, grant proposals, projects, and correspondence, though a few years are missing due to losses in home fires.

Unlike other irrigation systems in the Rogue River watershed, TCIA is not an irrigation district but an Oregon corporation. Water rights are expressed as shares in the association. Property



Weir located on the O'Brien ditch. The concrete work dates back to the 1930s. Photo: David Dobbs.

owners pay a yearly assessment based on the number of shares, tied to the age and acreage of a particular property's rights. TCIA is responsible only for delivering water to the stream itself. Ditches are maintained by the local landowners who hold water rights to the stream.

TCIA works with the local Oregon Resources Department watermaster and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, helping to protect the anadromous (sea-going) fish that breed in the stream: coho and chinook (Oregon's state fish), salmon, steelhead, and the native cutthroat trout. While it coordinates with the US Forest Service and other state and federal agencies, the Thompson Creek system is maintained by local volunteers.

Today as you rush up and down Thompson Creek's valley on a wide asphalt road, crossing the stream on cement-and-steel bridges and driving past grazing livestock, hay fields, orchards, vineyards, and vegetable and flower gardens, give a thought to the decades when life moved more slowly. Even into the 1950s covered bridges spanned the stream, while ranchers and their horses plowed and hayed the fields, herded livestock, dredged the ditches, and traveled the trails. They depended on each other to get through the years. A lot has changed in the past century and a half, but a tradition remains of people of the valley helping each other for the good of the community.

Check out the next *Applegater* for stories of modern days in the TCIA, including the Beaver-TCIA Partnership, the Bigelow Slide, and other adventures.

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Note: See *They Settled in Applegate Country: Frontier Days Along the Lower Applegate River in Southern Oregon, Olga Weydemeyer Johnson (1978), and Ruch and the Upper Applegate Valley, John and Marguerite Black (1989). These and other local historical resources are available in the Applegate Library.*

OPINION UPDATE

When a problem becomes an opportunity

BY LISA E. BALDWIN

I appreciate readers' positive responses to my opinion piece in the Spring 2019 *Applegater*, about using hemp in bioplastics!

At present, I am reaching out to US Representatives and local people well-positioned to help. I am also thinking of ways to encourage businesses to pursue bioplastic replacements for plastic items like grocery bags, straws, take-out boxes, and other single-use plastics that are ruining the planet.

Contacts in the hemp world are needed, though, especially someone interested in figuring out how to start manufacturing hemp bioplastics locally.

Please let me know if you have contacts in the hemp industry and/or would like to assist in my efforts to involve the Applegate in using hemp for bioplastics.

Thank you.

Lisa E. Baldwin
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••• BIZBITS •••

Cricket Hill Winery opened a tasting room at the historic 1862 McCully House Inn. Duane and Kathy Bowman, Cricket Hill founders who are influenced by the French wines of Bordeaux, have specialized in growing grand cru grapes here in the Applegate since 1991. For those discerning wine enthusiasts with a love of Bordeaux-style wines commingled with a rich local history, this tasting room offers something special. Located at 240 East California Street, Jacksonville. Summer hours are Thursday through Sunday, 12 - 6 pm. 541-899-8264.

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E Street Cyclery is a new bike shop in Grants Pass, owned and operated by master mechanic Mark Acosta. In addition to offering service and repair on all kinds of bicycles, Acosta's shop specializes in recumbent bicycles and is an official dealer of TerraTrikes, with several different models in stock and available for test rides. Open Monday through Thursday, 10 am - 4:30 pm, and by appointment. Stop by the shop at 317 NW E Street, Grants Pass. Call 541-226-9415, message on Facebook, or email Mark at estreetcyclery@gmail.com.

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Idyllwild Studio. New Williams residents Noel and Ann, a couple with more than 30 years of combined experience in web and graphic design and photography, announce their services to their new community. They specialize in serving a niche market of small businesses, especially farmers, healers, and nonprofits, and are invested in our community's growth and success. They offer a free one-hour consultation for all interested clients as a good way to get to know each other better. Learn more at idyllwildstudio.com or drop them a note by email at hello@idyllwildstudio.com.

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Indigo Grill owners Ray and Tara Moeves invite everyone to check out their interesting menu and remodeled space at Indigo Grill. The new restaurant (in the space formerly occupied by the Honeysuckle Café, which moved to Medford) is getting rave reviews for great service, a vibrant atmosphere, and outstanding food. Live music on weekends is another big hit. Open Wednesday and Thursday 10 am - 10 pm, Friday 10 am - midnight, Saturday 8 am - midnight, and Sunday 8 am - 8 pm. Closed Monday and Tuesday. Check out reviews on Facebook. 7360 Highway 238, Ruch. 541-702-2320.

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Kimball's Artisan Wines, a new wine shop and tasting room in Jacksonville, opened April 16. Owners Josh and Kaylyn Kimball of Applegate offer a wide selection of curated wines, mostly from Oregon, California, and France, including some rare varieties. The Kimballs seek to complement the local wineries' tasting rooms, not compete with them. Now open Tuesday through Saturday, 11 am - 6 pm. 120 South 3rd Street, Jacksonville. 541-954-4715.

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Salon 238 owner Sandy Reynolds is excited to welcome Beth Henderson, the new nail technician. Starting June 6, Beth will offer excellent quality gel and acrylic nails and nail art. *New clients receive 10 percent off their first appointment.* Call to schedule yours at 541-899-7660. 7390 Highway 238, Ruch.

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Wilderville Store. Owner Laura Tracy is excited to present another summer concert series for 2019. The bands and performance dates are not yet confirmed, but four concerts are planned: the first in mid-July, two more in August, and one in September. All concerts will be held in the outdoor Slate Creek venue behind the store. A small cover charge of \$4 or \$5 per person supports the local musicians. Food and beverages will be for sale. Laura also plans several movie nights, "Movies Under the Stars," on a big screen outdoors. These events are free. 7845 Old Redwood Highway, Wilderville.

BizBits highlights businesses new to the area, holding special events, or offering new products. If you are a business owner, let us know when you move into the area or to a different location, hold a special event, expand your business, or mark a milestone. Email gater@applegater.org.


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