

NEXT GENERATION | SCHOOL NEWS

Ruch School mural finalized

BY JENNIFER PAYNE



Local artist Gregg Payne has created a 110-foot mural at Ruch Outdoor Community School. Photo: Gregg Payne.

Ruch Outdoor Community School (ROCS) has a new look. Four front classrooms now feature stylized graphics of native animals, birds, and wildflowers of the Applegate Valley. Local artist Gregg Payne and school principal, Julie Barry, have transformed the front walkway into a 110-foot river scene.

Gregg's mural tells a story of the Applegate River Watershed. It begins in the high country where the Applegate River's headwaters are located, and it

ends where the Applegate River meets the Rogue River. Geese, beaver, frogs, butterflies, woodpeckers, milkweed, large pines, and the school mascot, a leaping cougar, are painted along the front wall of the school.

Gregg designed the mural not only to beautify the school, but also to make an outdoor education backdrop for teachers and outdoor education partners to use when teaching students about their watershed (the area of land that drains to

the local river). Already, Ms. Major's fourth graders have been inspired to create their own nature art as a way to thank Gregg for his work. This was the best thank-you the artist could receive! He was so impressed by the students' talent, effort, and awareness.

Julie is a great supporter of the arts. Her campus feels like a walk through an outdoor art gallery with different artists' styles on display, but all with the common theme of nature and the outdoors. Julie

feels that giving artists the space to be creative benefits students and faculty as it creates an inspiring learning environment. ROCS students feel valued, and educators can utilize the aesthetics in their teaching.

Julie says, "I am always conscious of offering our students, staff, and community a beautiful, inspiring place to learn, work, and gather. These elements are evident in the landscape, the outdoor classrooms, and most recently in our amazing mural that engages our students and supports the outdoor education and environmental stewardship that is our mission at Ruch Outdoor Community School. We all love Gregg's vision and his participation to bring the wonder and appreciation of visual arts to the campus of ROCS."

Gregg says of Julie, "Julie had the original idea to portray the Applegate River along the front walkway, and we shared the enthusiasm for celebrating the valley's natural beauty. She was a joy to work with. She was very open to allowing me creative freedom and artistic license. I came to know her as a genuine champion for her students and the community."

More critters and plants will appear over time, as Gregg loves to surprise ROCS students and staff with new characters in the Applegate River story mural. Last year was very challenging for all students and



Fourth graders have been inspired to create their own nature art, including this work by Sarah Dehaas. Photo: Gregg Payne.

educators. Gregg's idea to beautify the face of the school has helped to lift spirits and kindle hope for the future. We all look forward to the day when kids are swarming through the school and playground again.

Gregg is a public artist and graphic designer who lives in Ruch. He has designed logos for local nonprofits, the Applegate Partnership, the Beaver Coalition, and the Applegate Valley logo for A Greater Applegate. He designed the Applegate River Watershed map and many of the new signs for Cantrall Buckley Park. Gregg also creates large, interactive sound art for public spaces. He was part of the design team for the Tower of Voices, Flight 93 project, and he is currently working on two large musical pieces for the City of Tucson in Arizona.

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AmeriCorps member helps out at Ruch School

BY HANNAH BORGERSON

Hello everyone. My name is Hannah Borgerson, and I am serving as the AmeriCorps Rural Schools Coordinator for Ruch Outdoor Community School (ROCS). I am a southern Oregon local—born and raised in Ashland! I am currently teaching outdoor education and environmental science classes at Ruch and hope to continue this work as the year progresses.



Hannah Borgerson.
Photo: Brandee Tolner.

I developed my love for nature while frolicking among the nearby woods and parks of southern Oregon. For college, I moved north to attend the University of Puget Sound in Washington, where I studied Sociology and Education Studies. While there, my love for the outdoors grew. By my second year in college, I was a leader of my university's outdoor club and eventually helped coordinate the outdoor portion of my school's orientation program. After college, I moved all around the US, working at various summer camps and outdoor education sites until I made my way back home to southern Oregon last spring.

I believe that the more time students spend outside, interacting with and learning about their local environment, the happier and healthier people they become. ROCS has placed a strong emphasis on outdoor learning for their students, and the results are powerful. Even during this year, when schools closed down and most students Zoomed classes at home, Ruch has been able to keep its passion for being an outdoor-focused school alive. Students who were on campus for limited in-person instruction this fall and winter engaged with outdoor education classes in the school's garden and took classes on

biodiversity, habitat health, and water quality.

As one of the main instructors for these outdoor education courses, I could see how much the kids thrived while learning outdoors. I think many of us are feeling the effects of "Zoom fatigue" and long for connection with others and the natural world. Ruch has been dedicated to offering kids

outdoor learning since the start of the school year and more of such outdoor learning will continue on into the spring.

Ruch is constructing an onsite educational tree nursery this month which each student will be responsible to help manage. The tree nursery and the school garden will teach students about root growth, native plants, restoration, and plant propagation. Another exciting outdoor education event to look forward to is the Earth Day festival that I will be coordinating this April.

As I continue my service at Ruch, I hope to get as many students as possible outside learning. There is nothing more magical for me than seeing a student's eyes light up with the discovery of a new insect that burrows beneath the leaves in the school's yard, or the smiles when students get to run around collecting pinecones for a class activity. These are the things students have missed the most while learning virtually, and I am honored to be the one to take the brilliant young learners back outside as we begin to open schools safely. We are ready to re-emphasize the *Outdoor* in Ruch Outdoor Community School.

Hannah Borgerson
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HVHS keeps a close eye on COVID-19 numbers

BY LISA BALDWIN

A year into the pandemic, a return to full-time, in-person learning continues to be an unachievable goal as community spread of coronavirus waxes and wanes, surges and subsides. But February's numbers did make a return to a hybrid model at Hidden Valley High School (HVHS) possible, something that was due to start on February 22.

Students were divided into two cohorts based on their home address. Those with odd numbered addresses are in the A group and attend classes on campus on Mondays and Wednesdays; students with even-numbered addresses are in the B group and attend on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

During these on-campus days, from 8:40 am to 12:30 pm, students have in-person instruction in four classes. An A/B schedule facilitates the social distancing required by state guidelines by reducing the number of students on campus by half (300 at a time rather than 600) and reducing class sizes.

Parents with questions should contact office manager Susie Biller by email at susie.biller@threerivers.k12.or.us. Meanwhile, there is quite a bit going on at Hidden Valley. The student leadership classes are back at work, planning activities for the spring with guidance from Ms. Townes and Ms. Wright.

Mr. Pendleton and Mr. Haley are keeping the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) chapter engaged using a virtual model. The agricultural program teacher, Ms. Shodin, is working with community members on a fencing project so animals can be safely pastured.

Over several days in February, five HVHS students qualified to represent their school in the 38th annual Academic Masters competition at the countywide finals on March 10, hosted this year by Grants Pass High School. The Mustangs team members—senior Kaiah Fisher

in math; junior Alyssa Kelly in science; junior Leah Beachy in social studies; sophomore Jianna Bents in music; and freshman Michael deSouza in English—will compete against their counterparts from North Valley, Illinois Valley, and Grants Pass high schools. In each academic area, first place is awarded \$1,500; second place, \$1,200; third place, \$1,000; and fourth place, \$800.

February 3 was National Letter of Intent Signing Day for high school athletes. At Hidden Valley, six student athletes signed scholarship agreements with universities.

Track-and-field athlete Kaiah Fisher—nationally ranked (fifth in discus, seventh in shot put) and recruited by 30 Division 1 schools—signed with Stanford University. Sam Vidlak committed to playing football for Oregon State University (OSU), and is the only HVHS football player to be named Player of the Year in Oregon and the first Josephine County student to be awarded a PAC-12 conference quarterback scholarship since the 1960s. Jeremiah Noga, who holds school records for receiving yards and touchdowns in a season, also will play football for OSU. Gabriel Burchfield signed on as a two-sport athlete (football and track and field) for Western Oregon University (WOU). Lawrence Matusik and Matthew Iwamizu will also play football at WOU.

Principal Crowson expressed pride in all the students and staff, and gratitude for the Hidden Valley community for their support and persistence. "We had daily conversations about how much we missed the kids," he said. "Without them, HVHS is just a building."

Principal Crowson emphasized that they all want the students back on campus full-time and to get back to normal as soon as possible.

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