



HISTORICAL CHATEAU - Illinois Valley attractions include the historic, rustic Chateau at Oregon Cave National Monument, some 20 miles east of Downtown Cave Junction. The building, which some call the 'Lodge,' has 26 rooms for lodging guests. The impos-

ing structure also includes a dining room, a coffee shop and a gift shop. The latter contains many works by Illinois Valley artisans. The coffee shop is open during the day, and the dining room is open for dinner. Tours of the Caves are offered daily.

Elderly drivers need to pay attention to limits

By MEDFORD

'MAIL TRIBUNE'

Dark glasses on, radio off, seat belt firmly fastened, John Bergstrom backs slowly out of his east Medford driveway.

Mid-morning traffic is sparse this day as he eases the 1991 Plymouth minivan onto the neighborhood streets, but Bergstrom is cautious just the same.

At 87, he knows he doesn't drive like he used to. Even after 15 years as an AARP driving instructor, Bergstrom says he's alert for signs it's time to hang up the keys.

So when a too-narrow construction zone leads Bergstrom to squeal tires against a curb, he winces. And when he purposely neglects to turn on a blinker during a lane change, he chides his passengers for not noticing.

"I feel good about my driving," says Bergstrom. "But I know the points that I have to watch."

Such self-assessment has become crucial in recent weeks as serious automobile crashes involving older drivers have riveted local and national attention on whether they present heightened danger to them-

selves and others.

In June, a 92-year-old Jacksonville man struck a Medford pedestrian in a shopping center parking lot, critically injuring her. Two weeks later, a 91-year-old veered off Oregon's Highway 99 near King City, killing a young mother and her baby.

Last month, an 86-year-old driver crashed his Buick into an outdoor market in Santa Monica, Calif., killing 10 people. More recently, a 79-year-old man apparently lost control of his automobile at a Florida farmers' market, injuring six people.

The incidents have renewed debate about revoking licenses of drivers after a certain age, and spawned calls for more rigorous screening. At issue is the balance between public safety and personal independence.

"I know myself if I lost my ability to drive tomorrow, it would be difficult," says Dina Rudesheim, 37, an Oregon State Police dispatcher who fields daily complaints about local older drivers.

"But as you age you have to expect some changes and make plans,"

she said. "We're not going to let you plow over people."

Some older drivers and their advocates contend that the attention arising from recent tragedies is misplaced.

"What I see is when something happens, it is magnified because of the horror," says Ed Alcantar, 75, a statewide coordinator for AARP's 55 Alive driving classes.

"I'm very agile mentally and physically and there's a lot of people like me," he says.

But even educated drivers like Bergstrom admit that elderly motorists - and their families -- must be increasingly vigilant.

"This is a problem that seniors have," he says. "We have to decide whether we're a danger to ourselves and others."

That's particularly true in Jackson County, where nearly 18 percent of some 155,000 licensed drivers are older than 65, according to state Driver and Motor Vehicle Services figures.

In Oregon overall, about 14 percent of drivers are older than 65; nationally, the figure is about 10 percent.

Age alone isn't the issue, says Bergstrom, a retired electronics industry executive who drives about 5,000 miles a year. It's ability that counts most, he says, detailing the most common problems for older drivers.

Blind corners and left turns are precarious. Ditto for intersections and merg-

ing traffic.

"Our main problem is a right-of-way problem," he says. "We pull out in front of people."

Speed is another issue, Bergstrom says. If many teen-agers drive too fast, many seniors drive too slow.

"We have to admit we are a hazard because we are slower," Bergstrom says. "We're legal, but we're a hazard."

Even when seniors know better, accidents happen, says Bergstrom. Seven years ago, at age 80, he pulled out in front of a speeding driver at a blind intersection, causing the only accident of his driving career.

No one was seriously hurt, but Bergstrom was embarrassed.

"I said, 'I'm giving up as an instructor,'" he recalls. "But then I realized one of the benefits of being an instructor is telling others and reminding yourself of proper technique."

Classes such as the 55 Alive Driver Safety Program help older drivers assess and improve their ability.

Grace Clark, 86, of Ashland, says last month's session was a valuable refresher. Clark, who's been driving since she was a 13-year-old farm girl, believes she'll know when it's time to turn in her keys.

"I think when I have a hard time seeing the traffic I'll know," she said.

Trivia Time

by WALTER BRANCH

1. Whom did Norman Rockwell say was "no fun to paint" after unveiling a portrait of him in 1972?
2. Who had a pet dog named Windy?
3. What rock and roller was dubbed The Killer?
4. Who was the only dwarf in the Company of the Ring?
5. In what European city was the 1958 World's Fair held?
6. What black singer was the opening act on The Rolling Stones 1972 North American tour?
7. What James Bond novel featured his mar-

riage to Teresa Draco?
8. Who was known as The Master of Suspense?

9. Who was the first U.S. president to visit the troops in Vietnam?
10. What folk group's only No. 1 song was 1961's "Michael"?

Trivia Time Answers

1. Richard Nixon;
 2. Howdy Doody;
 3. Jerry Lee Lewis;
 4. Gimli;
 5. Brussels;
 6. Stevie Wonder;
 7. "On Her Majesty's Secret Service";
 8. Alfred Hitchcock;
 9. Lyndon Johnson;
 10. The Highwaymen's
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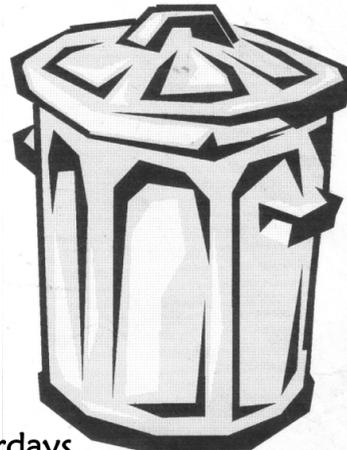
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