

I.V. tourism afoot

Advocate aims for more exposure

By SHANE WELSH
Staff Writer

"Tourism is here, and it's growing. It's time we started recognizing it," according to Roger Brandt, an Illinois Valley tourism advocate.

Brandt addressed board members during an Oregon Tourism Commission (OTC) meeting.

Brandt, who has worked for the Josephine County Parks Dept. for more than 17 years, has been looking into existing research to find the most beneficial tourist attractions in Illinois Valley.

He addressed OTC to help members understand the importance of maintaining and advertising natural attractions along Redwood Hwy.; such as Oregon Caves National Monument and T.J. Howell Botanical Drive.

"I, along with a number of other tourism proponents in the valley, have been wanting to help promote our area's tourism economy in order to get the thousands of tourists who already pass through here to put on the brakes and visit some of our local attractions," said Brandt.

"This came about from a statewide goal for a collaborative initiative to promote tourism. The idea is to stop tourists in our area long enough for them to spend about \$20," he said.

According to Brandt, the monetary estimate was derived from a study conducted by OTC. It shows that for every hour a tourist spends in an area, approximately \$5 is spent at an average of approximately \$20 per tourist.

"We want the commission to understand that what we have here is an opportunity for a collaborative market," he said.

Brandt raised concern regarding an environmental impact statement released by the U.S. Forest Service that focused on areas affected by the Biscuit Fire, including the T.J. Howell Botanical Drive.

Cecile Shohet, botanist for the forest service at the I.V. Ranger Station, led a group recently to discuss the effect of off-road and recreational vehicles on the botanical drive and how the area could be preserved as a natural educational resource.

"The people who attended were concerned about the future of the Illinois Valley as a tourist destination. People felt that future economic successes in the Illinois Valley could be derived from tourism, and creating a tourist market, which we don't really have right now," said Shohet.

According to Brandt, "There are more natural resources on this road than most people in Oregon realize. My intention was to call OTC attention to the Illinois Valley," he said. "It seems to be one of the last areas on anybody's mind in the state."

"I wanted to get them (OTC) to embrace this area and understand that Hwy. 199 is one of the most important travel routes for tourism in Oregon."

"I wanted to make them (OTC) aware that there are things (on the botanical drive) right now that if they wanted to, could be preserved for tourism, which could make a meaningful 'story' for a target audience that we

know exists," he said.

Brandt feels efforts to identify valuable attractions in the Illinois Valley would increase tourism and boost Cave Junction economy.

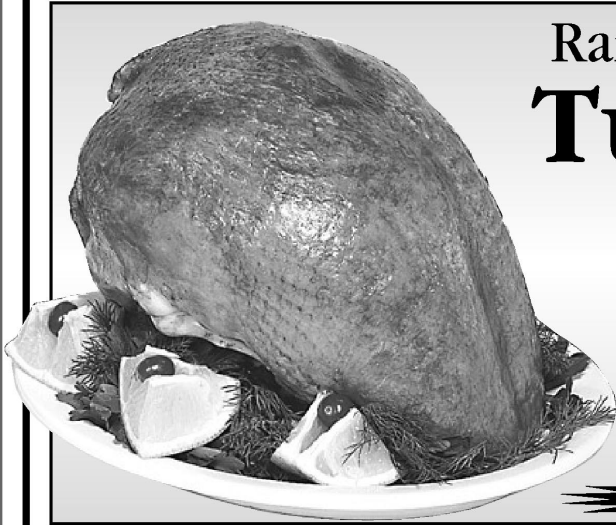
"Every area has a story," explained Brandt, and "stories make money, and the T.J. Howell Botanical Drive has a story that no one else has."



HOT DOG! - Kerby Belt Masonic Lodge members provided and served free hot dogs on Saturday, May 1 to players and others on opening day of Illinois Valley Little League. The Masons have provided the frankfurters for Little League's opening day ceremonies for several years as part of their community service. The wieners were much appreciated, especially by the players. (Related photos on page 24)

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