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Thursday, August 20, 2015

FIREFIGHTERS *continued from page 1*

"Currently there are five fires within the Wallowa Whitman Forest: Windy Ridge, Cornet, Eagle Complex, Sage and Merry Go Round. Windy Ridge and Cornet are rating number two and three nationally," Montoya said.

Greater Bowen Valley Fire Chief, Jim Devlin had strong praise for his fellow rural fire districts as well as the Incident Commanders and their teams. Fairly new to serving as Fire Chief and only being involved with the Greater Bowen Valley Fire Department for a few years he said, "I never dreamed I would be on a fire this big. Everybody came together and brought the resources and expertise they had...we had reviewed scenarios involving Stices Gulch and had always said we'd run the other way if something ever happened there because it's such a death trap. [But when it happened] We didn't turn our back. We worked through the night and saved 95 [percent of the] homes in Stices Gulch," Devlin said.

Devlin also thanked the Incident Commanders and their structural crews. "They have been so courteous, kind and compassionate. They treated the homes like they were their own." He stated that they could not have done this [saved so many structures] without them and their expertise.

Appreciative members of the crowd erupted in strong applause and cheers.

Tori Andrews took a moment to speak on a personal level saying, "We have family members on fires... and the community has been so kind, offering their houses and places to stay... keep up the encouragement."

"One of my deputies said that he had put 1500 miles on his patrol car just since Thursday," said Sheriff Travis Ash when it became his turn to address the crowd. Sheriff's deputies 'flew' down country roads warning residents who were in the dangerous path of the fires.

"We saved lives," said Ash.

He was very complimentary of the community and said that his office had barely received any other calls. He said he felt the community knew of the dire situation and where the focus needed to remain. Ash said he was pleased they were able to lower the evacuation levels in some areas including Auburn Road.

Bill Harvey, County Commission Chairman, praised all of the entities involved. He stated he had ridden out to the fires with several of the people seated on stage, "They were driving into the danger as fast as people were leaving. Be proud of what these people have done and let's thank everyone."

Harvey also praised Gary Timm and Jason Yencopal of Emergency Management saying they had worked extremely long days. Harvey said regarding the homes saved, "I would go so far as to say we saw miracles this week."

Tori Andrews from Public Health Preparedness addressed Air Quality. As of Saturday's meeting, the air was considered "unhealthy for everyone." Of course, that will change as smoke levels increase and decrease.

Andrews took a moment to speak on a personal level saying, "We have family members on fires...and the community has been so kind, offering their houses and places to stay...keep up the encouragement."

At the close of the meeting, members of the public were able to meet with and ask questions of the officials who spoke at the meeting. Information about primary residence and structure losses were shared with property owners privately.

He's Gone to the Dogs



Retherford gently puts one of his pigeons to sleep.



A sampling of Retherford's awards he and his dogs have earned in the last 12 years.



Buck stands still as a statue waiting for a tap from Retherford.

Story / photos by Emily Braswell

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Victor Retherford retired from the 5-J School District in the spring of 1994. He spent about 17 years teaching Government and Economics to the students of Baker High School, and for the past 12 years, has dedicated his time to teaching a slightly more willing species: the Brittany. Retherford has always enjoyed the company of his happy four-legged companions, so the decision to train the Brittany was an easy one.

Once commonly known as a Brittany Spaniel, the Brittany is an intelligent, strong, quick and agile breed of dog which originated in the French Province of Brittany. The breed's standard was first outlined with regard to a dog named Boy in 1907, and it was later introduced to the United States in 1931. The American Kennel Club (AKC) approved the Brittany Spaniel breed in 1934, recognizing them as a remarkable shooting dog and a stunning show dog. In 1984, the AKC shortened the dog's official registration from Spaniel, Brittany to Brittany.

Localized AKC Field Trials took shape beginning in 1924. They were minimal through the Great Depression and war time, but from 1943 and on, the expansion of different Breed Clubs sparked an increase and distribution of field trials, and the first AKC National Championship for any breed was held by the German Shorthaired Pointer Club of America in 1953. Bird dog popularity grew through the early 1950's and the AKC had to develop a Pointing Breed advisory committee to recommend rule and procedure amendments. In 1966, the popular decision to allow horseback riding for field trial participants helped to double the number of yearly trials to 450 and increased participation to over 38,000 entries.

"Even the trial judges ride horses now," Retherford informed, and agreed that it's an option well utilized by the majority of participants in the Northwest, himself included.

In a few short weeks, Retherford will gather up his furry housemates along with his larger pasture friends, and will begin the yearly trial circuit, competing with his dogs as he enters them in the pointing breed field trials throughout Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

"You see there, he won't move a single muscle after he goes into his pointing stance until I tell him to," Retherford explained as he pointed to his 8 1/2 year old Brittany, nicknamed Jake.

Later I would learn that Jake is a Dual Champion, Amateur Field Champion dog; a feat that is not commonly earned. Jake has qualified for the National Trials in Booneville, Ark., three times, and participated in them twice. After his third qualification, Jake injured one of his legs and was therefore unable to attend Nationals.

Retherford feels comfortable still running him at home. "His leg seems fine with regular amounts of exercise. But I won't run in trials anymore."

That's where slightly shorter, but tremendously more energetic, Buck steps in to play. At a year and a half,

Buck has shown tremendous potential for taking home the bigger trophies. Winning both his Puppy Stakes and his Derby Stakes already, he's racked up four points toward the Field Trial Championship.

"I'm by no means an expert here!" Retherford said. "In fact there are two gentleman here in Baker whose talents far outweigh mine." He named Dave Nelson and Mike McGinnis as two trainers from whom he had learned much of what he knows about showing the dogs.

He and his dogs keep a pretty stringent schedule of training, including running exercises and practicing locating and pointing with his own flock of Homing pigeons. He and the dogs performed a short demonstration of what goes on during a pointing breed field trial.

Retherford said, "I'll go out and place a pigeon and the dogs are going to watch me and see where I place it; but first I have to put the pigeon to sleep."

Not exactly sure what he meant by "putting the pigeon to sleep," I held my breath as I watched Retherford fold down the pigeon's head to well under its wing. Holding it on its back, its head still tucked deeply under its wing, this reporter's breathing commenced as he gently rocked the pigeon to sleep in a vertical fashion.

"They only stay asleep for a few minutes," Retherford clarified, as he gently placed the napping bird into a large clump of knee deep alfalfa. In the front cab of his truck, Buck and Jake whined and barked with excitement as their anticipation grew. Finally, the truck door opened and one of their names was called to come out. As soon as their paws were on the dirt they knew they are on the job. Noses wildly wiggling, their entire body's jiggling as each of the three pigeons was tracked down and pointed upon, one by one, in separate sessions.

It was understandable how well the seasoned Jake had his dance perfected as he demonstrated his two points with precision and style, making sure to scarcely even move his eyes until he received the tap from his owner letting him know he could move again. The younger Buck performed well, but justifiably with a little less precision and more slowly.

The pair's final performance offered the chance for both dogs to shine.

Calling Jake out first to locate the third hidden pigeon, Retherford said, "Let's see how well Buck does backing Jake up."

After a few minutes of searching, Jake located the bird and pointed. Buck's higher pitched yowls from within the truck reminded everyone within earshot that he is still just a young pup. The door opened and Buck was called out, but he didn't get too far before he spotted his cohort's serious stance and joined in the effort, pointing toward Jake and the bird from where he stopped.

It's quite clear Retherford's retirement has gone to the dogs. And he enjoys every minute of it.