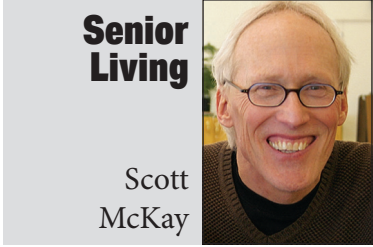


Beware COVID-19 vaccination scams



IT SEEMS AS IF ONCE OR twice a year I feel I need to write about the latest scams, from Medicare scams to sweepstakes and lottery scams. So, just as sugar ants return in the spring (well at least in my kitchen!), vaccine scams are beginning to circulate. So here are just a few reminders.

There is no cost for the COVID-19 vaccine. Medicare covers it.

You can't pay to put your name on a list to get the vaccine.

You can't pay to get early access to a vaccine.

If someone calls, texts, or emails you promising access to the vaccine for a fee, as with all scams, don't share your personal or financial information. Medicare will never contact you for your Medicare number or other personal information unless you've given them permission in advance; will never call to sell you anything or enroll you over the phone unless

you called first and will never visit you at your home. And remember, guard your Medicare card as if it was a credit card.

If the scammers get your Medicare number or personal information, they can commit Medicare fraud, which results in higher healthcare costs and taxes for everyone. If you encounter anything suspicious, call the Medicare Fraud line at 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).

Volunteers in Action is pursuing a pilot program in partnership with Senior Planet to offer technology classes locally to help older adults access technology to enhance their lives. Because of COVID-19, the classes will start out with on-line-only classes converted from the Senior Planet in-person curriculum and will move to in-person classes when it's safe to do so. The technology classes are available to residents of Hood River, Klickitat and Wasco counties and will be held twice a week from Feb. 22 through March 26. Days of the week and times have not yet been determined.

First they need to find and train the volunteer Technology Trainers. If you feel you have a proficiency in common software applications

and devices, the ability to effectively communicate the relevancy of technology to seniors' lives, and reliable internet connectivity, this may be an exciting volunteer opportunity for you. But don't dillydally. (Do people still say dillydally or am I showing my age once again?) The Train the Trainer classes are from Jan. 19 through Feb. 18, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

If you are interested in being a trainer or want to learn how to access technology in a supportive environment, call Britta Willson, program coordinator, Volunteers in Action, Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital, at 541-387-6404

Now a little humor. "Strange new trend at the office: People are putting names on food in the company fridge. Today I had a tuna sandwich named 'Linda.'"

The saying children used to convince someone they were telling the absolute truth was "Cross my heart and hope to die. Stick a needle in my eye." I received correct answers from Jeanne Pesicka, Barbara Cadwell, Lana Tepfer, Jess Birge, Clare Zumalt, Keith and Marlene Clymer, Joan Chantler,

Margo Dameier, Susan Ronning and Shirley Colf, this week's winner of a quilt raffle ticket. And last week I missed Margo Dameier.

The Miss America Pageant has changed dramatically over the years, but we can all remember watching it during the early 1960s when it was the highest-rated television program. For this week's "Remember When" question, who was the host for the Miss America telecast from 1955 through 1979, when each pageant ended with him singing "There She Is, Miss America" as the winner was crowned? Email your answer to www.mcseniorcenter@gmail.com, leave a message at 541-296-4788 or send it with a recording of the television show Stop the Music that aired in the 1950s.

Well, it has been another week looking up my sleeve for the unexpected. Until we meet again, remember the adage that's fitting for these times, "Better be safe than sorry."

"You are only young once, but you can stay immature indefinitely."

— Ogden Nash

Meals

Nutritious Home delivered meals and pick-ups for anyone over 60:

The Sherman County Senior and Community Center — Call 541-565-3191 by 10:30 a.m. and leave a message with the number of meals needed and the names of each person.

The Dalles Meals-on-Wheels — Call 541-298-8333 to sign up for home delivered meals. Call before 10:30 a.m., to pick up a meal at noon at the Mid-Columbia Senior Center.

Hood River Valley Adult Center — To sign up for Meals-on-Wheels call 541-386-2060 and ask for Eric. You can also pick up a drive-thru meal from 11:30 a.m. until 12:45 p.m.

Skamania County Senior Services — Call 509-427-3990.

Klickitat County Senior Services — For home-delivered meals call the Goldendale office (509-773-3757) or the White Salmon office (509-493-3068).

Pioneer Potlatch meal sites in Wasco and Sherman Counties — Call 541-298-4354.

Comunidades hires staff to 'amplify voices'

By Trisha Walker
Columbia Gorge News

Comunidades — an advocacy group focusing on environmental and social justice — has hired its first employee.

Lisa Muñoz, who earned a bachelor's in biochemistry and molecular biology from Lewis and Clark College, began her position as Comunidades program director Dec. 7.

The goal of Comunidades is to amplify voices in BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) communities on matters of environmental and social justice, said Ubaldo Hernández, senior organizer for Columbia Riverkeeper, who started Comunidades about a year and a half ago as an extension of his work to engage the Latino community in advocating for the river.

"Our community is the one getting affected (by

environmental issues)," he said. "... You can't talk about environmental justice without talking about social justice."

What sets Comunidades apart from other organizations is that it is led by Latinos. The group has 17 members.

"Most of the organizations around environmental issues in the area are led by Anglos," Hernández said.

Comunidades recently received a grant from Seattle-based Group Health Foundation — \$75,000 a year for three years; Columbia Riverkeeper sponsored the group and helped with the application process.

"It's a significant amount of money to a Latino-led group," Hernández said. The foundation provides startup grants for community groups, and because of it, they were able to hire its first employee — Muñoz.

Muñoz echoed that environmental issues are also social justice issues for BIPOC communities.

"The BIPOC perspective is vital for change because we highlight the multifaceted nature of environmental injustice," she said. "Environmental issues are personal. For example, pesticides do not just contaminate our water ways, they also damage the health of agricultural workers."

Muñoz met Hernández at a Sense of Place lecture as a



Lisa Muñoz



Ubaldo Hernández

panelist; he invited her to join the group because of her background in science.

"I helped create the mission and vision statements, and write grant proposals," she said. "Each of these experiences helped me create stronger community ties and participate in community engagement. I think forming strong connections with people in our community is vital for creating systems that work for the people."

During the pandemic, the group has had to pivot to meet the needs of the community, Muñoz said.

"I think everyone in the Gorge has been impacted by the lack of resources and support available," she said. "In order to help, Comunidades distributed 800 reusable masks to farm and packing house workers. We are currently distributing KN95 masks in Hood River County and Skamania County. Additionally in Skamania County, Comunidades has been assisting undocumented workers to apply for financial relief during the pandemic. Undocumented

families do not have access to unemployment benefits, but are a vital part of our neighborhoods. The financial support comes from the Latino Community Resource Group. So far, we've been able to help about 25 families apply for assistance."

At the beginning of 2020, the group assisted community members in White Salmon who had been evicted from a mobile home park. "Approximately 20 families were left with the cost of removing their mobile homes, and without affordable housing options in White Salmon," she said. "Comunidades coordinated weekly meetings with the mobile home residents ... provid(ing) public testimony training, and once the residents felt comfortable, they testified at city council meetings. Thanks to these efforts, White Salmon City Council created codes to preserve affordable housing options and forced property owners to pay relocation costs of residents that they evict."

One project launched during the pandemic is Voces Unidas del Noroeste, a seven-part training series on how to conduct interviews and share regional news revolving around environmental and social justice issues in Oregon and Washington.

"Our goal is to encourage community-based journalism and empower Latino community members to

become a part of the local news source," she said.

"... As a scientist, I believe in the power of information and providing resources to educate our community," Muñoz said. "However, even if a problem is well known, community members also need to feel comfortable engaging in change. Predominantly white spaces, like government buildings, can be highly intimidating to Latino community members who have faced the threat of deportation and verbal abuse from government leaders.

"Our goal with Comunidades is to create a space where Latino members feel comfortable learning about the issues affecting them and how to tackle those problems," she said. "We want Latino community members to learn how to give city council testimony, contact elected officials through letter writing, and create and sign petitions for environmental and social justice issues. Learning to advocate for yourself is such a valuable tool in engaging leaders and becoming a leader yourself. My hope is that we demystify the path toward leadership positions and reduce barriers for Latinos to self-advocate."

Muñoz has devoted much of her time to science, conducting structural research on spider venom peptides in college. She came to realize

that "whatever significant contribution I made to science wouldn't be equally accessible to everyone," she said. "You see this a lot in pharmaceutical development — it's amazing when a drug is available to treat a disease, but then it costs too much for low-income communities to access. I think that's what led me to start thinking about systematic change."

Her position with Comunidades is a culmination of personal and professional experiences.

"My parents immigrated from Mexico, and worked as agricultural workers," she said; she grew up in Odell and graduated from Hood River Valley High School.

"My upbringing cultivated a deep love of nature and my motivation for its health and protection," she said.

"I also grew up seeing the discrimination my Latino community faced on a daily basis," she said. When her father died, she began working in orchards to help support her family. "Working in multiple orchards at a young age exposed me to the poor treatment and compensation of immigrant and agricultural workers. I was lucky enough to work and live on an orchard where my parents felt valued ... I think my experience as an agricultural worker is the reason I am passionate about social justice."



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