

OPINION

The opinions expressed in the letters below are “your voice,” and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the *Columbia Gorge News*, its staff, publisher or advertisers.

YOUR VOICE

Stable workforce

A stable workforce is crucial to the livelihoods of the pear, cherry, and apple growers in the Columbia River Gorge. Last week, thanks to the support of Congressman Cliff Bentz, the U.S. House passed H.R. 1603, the Farm Workforce Modernization Act. While not perfect, improvements made by this legislation will help ensure growers can access the workforce they need to continue growing and harvesting their pears, cherries, and apples now and into the future.

On behalf of the tree fruit growers in the Gorge, we thank Congressman Bentz for his support of family farmers by voting for this important bipartisan legislation. We look forward to working with him and our senators to further improve upon the bill, so that it can be passed into law.

Mark Powers
President, Northwest Horticultural Council

Sensible loss

Take Pounds Off Sensible (TOPS) support for weight loss: Has the COVID-19 pandemic become a weight problem that you are ready to do something about, like get rid of it?

Find support and accountability for your desired changes at a TOPS meeting. Meetings are held in The Dalles, Hood River, White Salmon, and online. Morning or evening times depending on which chapter meeting you attend. All TOPS chapters are low cost and offer support and information. My chapter meets at Zion church at 10th and Union streets in The Dalles on Thursday's at 9 a.m. with a weight in at 8:30 a.m. First meeting is free.

Visit a chapter this week and find out how TOPS can help you achieve your weight goals.

Karen Sype
Cascade Locks

Living in fear

My biggest problem with public mass shootings, besides the death and destruction, is what it has done to my psyche. Often when I am in a public space now, or a business, I look for my exits and find myself sizing up potential threats around me. Maybe this is just my issue but I think not.

No matter where you live and what you believe in we get supported in untold ways by the society



Train cars roll behind the sculpture of a cougar at Cascade Locks Marina park. Titled “Silent Descent,” the sculpture is by artist Heather Söderberg-Greene of Söderberg Gallery and Studio in Cascade Locks. **Mark B. Gibson photo**

around us. Grocery store clerks for example. Or teachers and if you work in an office.

If we can't support our society through laws that promote safety for everyone, then what truly does that say about us and our collective ability to look at complex issues and move forward with solutions?

Watch the news these days and you see that each time a mass shooting happens, it's shoved under the rug by making them isolated incidents. Mass shootings sure have the appearance of a problem with multiple symptoms screaming out to be addressed.

I agree mental health is one area to focus our attention. But we aren't the only country with mental health issues. Our big difference in the US is the high gun ownership and ease

of purchase in basically every state.

When you think about how much we all depend on a safe, well functioning society, I would think everyone would want to take the necessary science-based steps to implement as much safety and security as soon as possible.

Frankly, any argument to the contrary is just kicking this hard conversation further down the road of our nation's history.

Avery Hoyt
White Salmon

Thank you

We want to add our thanks to others for *Columbia Gorge News* continuing to keep local reporting alive in the Gorge. Given the double challenge of declining support for local papers and COVID-19, you

all are doing an incredible job.

Supporting all the communities in these trying times is a heroic effort.

Plus, we now get to be better informed of multiple communities in both Oregon and Washington. That helps make us all better connected and to understand what we all share and where we have unique concerns.

Thank you so much for your commitment to local reporting.

Les and Sheryl Penney
Dallesport

Improvements to Obamacare

There has been a lot of information in the news about the relief checks that many people will receive under the American Rescue

Plan (ARP) recently signed into law by President Biden. However, there has not been a great deal of information in the news about how the ARP will increase and expand eligibility for Affordable Care Act (ACA) premium subsidies for people enrolled in marketplace health plans.

Starting April 1, 2021, people with healthcare plans purchased through the exchange will be eligible for increased subsidies. There will no longer be an income cliff, and people with income more than 400 percent of the federal poverty level will be eligible to receive subsidies.

However, there is a catch. To qualify for a subsidy, you must have

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How to help homeless cats in the Gorge

■ **By Tracie Hornung**

Once again, “kitten season” is upon us. With few resources for cats in the Columbia River Gorge, kittens without homes are frequently born. And this year there will no doubt be more than in the past because the year-long pandemic has forced cat-rescue organizations to curtail their efforts. But breeding, of course, continues.

Cats can reproduce as young as four months old, are capable of breeding two or three times a year, and average four kittens per litter. Therefore, a single pair of cats can create a population of more than 2,000 in just four years, according to North Shore Animal League America.

According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), approximately 860,000 cats in U.S. animal shelters are euthanized each year.

Although a commonly held belief is that “cats can take care of themselves,” people involved with cat rescue will tell you otherwise. Sure, cats are intelligent and resourceful creatures, but they cannot always survive busy roads, disease, or lack of food. Thus, cats relegated to living permanently outdoors often have short and/or miserable lives.

How can you help? The two most useful actions you can take are to get a pet or homeless cat spayed or neutered, and to socialize kittens. Kittens that are not socialized by about 10 weeks old frequently become wild and unadoptable.

In general, homeless cats come in three varieties: Friendly, meaning as kittens they became familiar with and learned to trust humans; semi-friendly but skittish, meaning they probably have been living alone outside for so long they have become afraid to trust humans; and wild, or feral.

If you encounter cats fitting the skittish or feral description they will have to be trapped before they can be fixed. Most rescue organizations follow the Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) protocol endorsed by the Humane Society, the ASPCA, and many other reputable animal protection organizations.

Trap-Neuter-Return is the method of humanely trapping free-roaming cats, spaying or neutering them, and returning them to their colony to live out their lives. TNR also involves a colony caretaker who provides food and basic shelter, and monitors the cats' health.

TNR stabilizes the population of a feral colony and, over time, shrinks it. Several colonies in the Gorge have been significantly reduced or eliminated thanks to TNR. And with the population of cats reduced, fewer birds are killed, and nuisance behaviors such as spraying, howling and fighting are largely eliminated. Most importantly, the breeding cycle is broken because no more kittens are born.

Often people who find feral cats on their property think the best solution is to move them elsewhere, such as a barn home. Although it



Photo courtesy of Tracie Hornung

may seem reasonable, it is often not a solution for the cats. Those that are moved from what they consider their home territory must generally be confined in a safe area out of the elements, and fed in their new home for about four weeks. Anything less, and the cats will often run away — probably in search of their previous territory. It's understandable that people who attempt to keep the cats temporarily confined begin to feel sorry for them, but it is in the cats' best interest not to let them out until they are grounded in their new environs.

If you've found homeless, stray

or feral cats or kittens (not pets), you can fill out Columbia Gorge Cat Rescue's online appointment form at www.gorgecat.org. CGCR provides donation-based spay and neuter surgeries at its clinic in Lyle. Also, the Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon (feralcats.com) operates a donation-based spay/neuter clinic in Portland. These groups offer humane cat traps for a refundable deposit and will instruct you in how to use them. Do not trap a cat until you have confirmed an appointment.

If you have a pet cat or kitten that hasn't been spayed or neutered,

do so as soon as possible. Kittens can often be fixed safely at about two months old; your veterinarian can advise you. An option for low-income pet-cat owners is Cat Adoption Team (catadoptionteam.org) in Sherwood. Also, the Feral Cat Coalition may resume its low-cost spay/neuter program for pets this year. And some vets in the Gorge accept coupons sponsored by the Oregon Spay/Neuter Fund for discounted surgeries.

If you'd like to adopt a cat, doing so in the Gorge can be perplexing. You can start by visiting petfinder.com and typing in the zip code of the area you wish to search within. You may find that the cats listed are being fostered in Portland or elsewhere. Resources for finding an adoptable cat here in the Gorge include the Home At Last animal shelter in The Dalles, and the monthly Adopt-a-Pet page in the *Columbia Gorge News*. A number of pet shelters exist in the Portland area, including The Pixie Project (pixieproject.org), Oregon Humane Society (oregonhumane.org) and Cat Adoption Team.

Please support these hardworking groups who are trying to create better outcomes for both cats and people. We need to work together to solve the problem of cat overpopulation in the Gorge.

Tracie Hornung has been involved in animal welfare efforts in the Pacific Northwest for 20 years.

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