

# HAPPENING PEOPLE



by Paul Neevel

## Joni Wilkinson and Rhonda Riddle

"I had a male friend who was like a Romeo pimp," says Joni Wilkinson, a lifelong Eugenean who has worked in her dad's insurance business since her Sheldon High School years. "He was manipulating me to get to my daughter. When he was pulled over and arrested on the way to my house, I found out he was a sex offender, wanted in three states."

Wilkinson began researching sex offenders who use social media for grooming, trauma bonding and mind control to traffick teens. "I started sharing on social media," she says. "I had survivors from all over the U.S. emailing me."

Five years ago, she started One's Purpose, an organization and website devoted to bringing awareness of human trafficking and providing assistance to survivors. "I contacted schools," she continues. "Churchill High School let me come in and share. My daughter was going to Churchill."

These efforts introduced her to Rhonda Riddle, a Eugene native with personal experience of being trafficked. "I was kidnapped from the downtown bus station when I was 14," Riddle relates, "and taken into sex trafficking until I escaped at age 22. I was trafficked in every state but Alaska and Hawaii. They train girls to make friends with high school students on their lunch break at DQ and McDonald's so that we can introduce them to our pimps."

After her escape, Riddle spent 21 years in near total isolation, afraid to go anywhere alone. She recently found a therapist who specializes in EMDR (rapid eye movement) therapy, a Vietnam vet who has helped her to heal. "And with that, I met Joni," she says. "I was blown away by her dedication. I helped her turn One's Purpose into a nonprofit in May of 2021. Our biggest goal is to raise enough money for a safe house rehabilitation program."

From 6:30 to 8:30 pm Friday, Jan. 28, the Junior League of Eugene, in partnership with One's Purpose, will hold its third annual Abolish Human Trafficking Event at the Valley River Inn. "We have nine survivors speaking at this event," Wilkinson says, "and we'll provide basic training on how to recognize the grooming process." Admission is free, but please register at the Junior League website, JLEugene.org, or watch online through Facebook Live. Find One's Purpose at OnesPurpose.com.

# slant

• **"Collaborating on Permanent Housing Solutions"** is the City Club of Eugene topic for noon Friday, Jan 28. Speakers are Debi Farr, community relations manager for Trillium Health Plan; Jacob Fox, executive director of Homes for Good; Michelle Hanks, CEO of ShelterCare; and Sarai Johnson, housing and shelter strategist for Lane County and Eugene. Listeners who cannot attend can watch a live stream. The in-person meeting at the First United Methodist Church, 1376 Olive Street, requires proof of vaccination, booster and mask wearing. No lunch will be served.

• **Eugene Weekly is a tour of tastes this week** as we explore everything from tacos in the Whit at the revamped Tiny Tavern to renowned mixologist Jeffery Morgenthaler's canned Ninkasi cocktails. FYI, our cover photo is not in fact a bartender Tazing an innocent drink, though it might look that way. Nicole Kauffman is adding citrus vapor to Tavern on Main's Globe Trotter cocktail, featuring pisco, Aperol, orange, lemon, cinnamon and topped by that citrus vapor.

• Why yes, we are doing Wordle in hard mode and ignoring the haters who whine about our joy in posting the little green and yellow image of our daily word game success. **Fun fact: Wordle's inventor went to the University of Oregon.** The British software engineer behind the once-a-day word puzzle, Josh Wardle, graduated from the UO in 2011 with a digital arts MFA.

• Here's a question for our *Weekly* readers. **If our democracy is dying, as we are told repeatedly, why are so many people running for office?** At least eight candidates are lined up to run for Peter DeFazio's congressional seat. Do they think they can save democracy? Do they want to hasten its death? Tell us what you think about elections, democracy and the host of candidates.

• Another key race coming up in the 2022 election is the one for governor. Pro-Choice Oregon PAC has endorsed Democrat and



TINA KOTEK

former House Speaker Tina Kotek. **On the other hand, high-profile candidate Nick Kristof's current claim to fame is that he just got \$15,000 from former Disney CEO Robert Iger.** As the writer-farmer awaits the state Supreme Court's decision on whether he has lived in Oregon long enough to actually qualify for the ballot, you can check out the *Politico* story by Brent Walth — Pulitzer Prize winner and co-director of the University of Oregon's Catalyst Journalism Project. Walth takes a deep dive and a walk through downtown Yamhill to explore Kristof's sometimes Trumpian candidacy.

• **Eugene School District 4J's interim superintendent, Cydney Vandercar, is one of the top two candidates for the superintendent position at Greater Albany Public Schools.** That would be their gain and our loss, although we would not blame her if she wanted out of Eugene's 4J district. A November 2021 study by the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators, the Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon Commission for Women shows a gender gap in Oregon superintendents with 75 percent of them male despite the fact the teacher workforce is overwhelmingly female. GAPS says it will announce who has been selected at its Feb. 3 meeting.

*Hello Friends,*  
Here's to good food,  
good health and  
good friends!

— ♥ —

**Nancy's**  
PROBIOTIC  
FOODS

Springfield Creamery · Independent & Family Owned · Eugene, Oregon

**LANE COUNTY FARMERS MARKET**

**WINTER FARMERS MARKET**  
SATURDAYS Starting February 5th 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.  
on 5th Ave, between High St. and Oak St.

We accept Credit/Debit/EBT \$20 SNAP Match

[LaneCountyFarmersMarket.org](http://LaneCountyFarmersMarket.org)