



Nick Rosenberger/SpoKESMAN

The Tavita family gathers together at Novelen and Joseph's house on Sept. 17 in Redmond.

Tavitas

Continued from A1

“Dance is a way of expression — of joy, sorrow, pain and love,” Jake said. “Dance is a universal language.”

According to Eric Sande, the director of the Redmond Chamber of Commerce, the Tavitas have been participating in Music on the Green almost since it began. The chamber has made it a tradition to close out the summer concert series with them.

“They’re just great people,” Sande said. “They bring a sense of community, a sense of peace. They’re just an amazing asset to Redmond.”

Sande said the Tavitas are always a highlight of the series. He said the chamber handed out close to a thousand leis to concertgoers during the family’s performance at the 2022 Music on the Green.

GENERATIONAL STORIES

Novelen, who’s parents are Hawaiian and Filipino, and Joseph, who’s parents are Samoan, have always danced. Novelen grew up dancing hula with her family in San Francisco. She said they were a family that performed at all kinds of parties.

Joseph and Novelen met at 13 and 12-year-olds at a dance class, falling in love in between dance sessions. As a couple, the continued dancing and, when they later had kids, passed it down to the next generation.

According to Novelen, she danced when she was pregnant with all of her seven children and danced until she had them, then danced right after. Her daughters did the same with their kids. Novelen and Joseph now have 14 grandchildren.

“We just never stopped dancing,” said the now 60-year-old Novelen. “I love dancing, I don’t want to stop.”

She added that even if she’s in a wheelchair someday, she’ll find a way to dance with her hands.

“You dance with your heart and soul,” Jake said. “You dance with your eyes. You dance with your heart.”

Although their parents made them dance when they were kids, even when they wanted to play video games and hang out with friends instead, the younger Tavitas now appreciate their parent’s dedication. Many said they were thankful for the physical connection to their heritage.

“In our culture, dance is a big part of our lives and it’s a way to keep our culture alive,” Jake said. “We keep the family tradition alive.”

Novelen said she’s happy to know that dancing is passing down to her children and grandchildren.

“It makes us feel good and now I can rest,” she said.

Lynnette, who married into a different culture, said she doesn’t always realize how appreciative she is of her own.

“But it’s still in us and it’s crazy and it makes me cry when I see it through our kids, because it’s still in them,” Lynnette said through tears. “It’s still in them and I think that’s what’s reassuring is being able to know that we can pass some things like that on.”

TEACHING THE COMMUNITY

Even though the Tavitas have busy lives and outside jobs — Keanu works in masonry, Jake is a nursing assistant, Joseph works in construction — they always make time for each other. Every Saturday, the family gathers at Novelen and Joseph’s house by American Legion Park to eat and drink and dance.

The Tavitas, however, are not just entertainers — they’re also teachers who bring students into their family. Jake, Crystal and Lynnette are next in line to teach those in the community who are interested in learning about Polynesian culture.

Over the decades, they’ve taught a couple hundred students.

Much of their dancing, they said, is on the modern side, rather than following the strict rules of traditional Polynesian dance. The Merrie Monarch festival in Hawaii, for instance, is an annual competition that focuses on traditional, old school dances that have more chanting and rules.

While they are still rooted in traditional principles, the family tries to honor their culture in their own way. They use iPods or CDs at their performances and sometimes dance to modern songs in English and artists like Meghan Trainor.

“We’re kind of going forward into the future because you don’t want to be stuck in the past for too long,” Jake said. “You got to adapt every day.”

And, Jake added, they try to represent all cultures and dances across Polynesia — from the slow movements of Hawaiian hula to slap-heavy Samoan style and the shaking hips of Tahitian dance.

They try to honor all the islands, Jake said, and named their group Hokule’a, after the first canoe to sail across the South Pacific and discover the Hawaiian islands. In turn, they’re trying to bring those cultures to Central Oregon. Hokule’a, he said, means star of gladness.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Oregon, the family stopped teaching and performing. They tried practicing at home and over Zoom, but it didn’t have the same feel when they weren’t all together.

Two years later, the family is slowly getting back to where they used to be.

“Being isolated like that from our culture and from our dances ... I was lost. I was like ‘What am I doing?’” Jake said. “I don’t have anything else if I’m not dancing.”

With the success of recent shows and the calming of the pandemic, the family’s passion for dancing has been rekindled, they said.

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Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin

Glen Gray lives in a trailer near Redmond.

Gray

Continued from A1

he said, while the second succumbed to multiple myeloma — a type of cancer that forms in plasma cells.

“It’s been an interesting life since my last wife died,” Gray said. “There was no cure. I stayed with her until she died.”

Gray has had cancer as well and had an operation to remove his kidney. He currently uses a cane to walk and is preparing for another surgery. Gray’s future is almost as complicated as his past. He was homeless when he was younger and hopped trains, making it all the way to Florida then up to Minnesota and back to Oregon.

He spent six months in the Job Corps before going AWOL and wanted to join the Navy like his father, who served as an underwater welder, but struggled to pass the test and went into masonry instead. He eventually began operating front-end loaders until he retired.

Thirty-six years later, Gray said he lives on \$1,300 a month from earnings he made as a front-end load operator and considers himself retired, not homeless.

“I consider myself as an individual,” he said. “People out here are considered homeless. You know, they don’t have a lot of food like I do, a lot of the accommodations that I do.”

A lifelong Central Oregonian, Gray said he just wants to enjoy his retirement but getting an apartment is difficult.

“I tried to get all my means lowered but sometimes it’s a little harder than it should be,” Gray said.

“Apartment (rent is) like sky high so I can’t move into an apartment because it’d eat my whole check up.”

Most landlords won’t consider renting to Gray because of a criminal history that dates back to 1986. Many charges have been dismissed but, according to Deschutes County Circuit Court records, he has been convicted of four felonies and nine class-A misdemeanors.

Although Gray won’t talk about what happened, he said that his relationship with his three daughters and two sons fell apart after his first wife died and he put them up for adoption. While he’s in contact with a couple of them, he’s not legally allowed to talk to the

How to help

For suggestions on how to help the region’s residents experiencing homelessness, contact the Homeless Leadership Coalition by email at info@cohomeless.org.

others. “I’m a bad dad,” Gray said. “(I) placed them in voluntarily. They have better education, they’re in a different home.”

Gray has learned to live with his past and has family and a community among the junipers. After his second wife passed away from cancer, Gray’s sister — Jessica — had already been living in the junipers and asked him to join her. “She kinda twisted my arm,” he said.

He lived in another travel trailer nearby, until people came through and tore it up for copper. He said not many of those who live in the junipers are like that. Instead, a lot of them are there for each other.

“People out here, they’re mellow,” he said, “they’re nice.”

He’s lived in his current spot for the last year in a renovated trailer donated by Central Oregon Veterans Outreach and lives near Jessica and her daughter along with Jessica’s boyfriend, Josh, and their neighbors Christy, Adrian, Shane and Michelle.

Every Friday, COVO drives along the bumpy and dusty road with a shower trailer that Gray is able to use, as well as bringing supplies like water tanks and propane.

He said he and his neighbors clean up the area all the time and that he’s been doing a little rockwork from camp to camp, finishing five different camps.

He built some rock walls to create a viewpoint and a barrier at the top of his hill.

“It’s a life out here,” he said.

Gray said he thought they’d likely be getting kicked out of the area soon but said that he doesn’t have any plans for when that might happen.

For the time being, however, Gray is trying his best to enjoy his retirement and neon-colored Slurpees as he prepares for his next surgery.

Honor flight

Continued from A1

Anderson eventually ended up with 5,000 other troops on an Italian passenger ship requisitioned for wartime. The chow “wasn’t all that great,” he said, but his time in the military was pretty good compared to those who served in Vietnam. When soldiers came back from that conflict, Anderson said they were spat on and disrespected.

The welcome home in Redmond Sept. 24 at the Deschutes County Fair & Expo Center was possibly the most meaningful moment of the Honor Flight trip, he said. Veterans finally received some recognition and appreciation for their service, he said.

Don DeLand, a Vietnam veteran and vice president of Honor Flight of Central Oregon, said the trips are based on three principles: camaraderie, remembrance and healing.

“A lot of the healing went on in Washington, D.C.,” DeLand said. “But this,” he said, noting the crowd, “is the most healing thing we could do.”

Dane Prevatt, the president of Honor Flight of Central Oregon, echoed DeLand’s statements. He said that it was great to see the welcome all the veterans received at the airports both in D.C. and when they got home to Central Oregon.

“They never got this. 60 or 70 years ago they never got a welcome home,” he said. “So to give it to them now ... it’s better late than never, so it’s awesome to be able to provide this.” Prevatt said he loves giving veterans the news that they’ll get to go to Washington. The veterans get really excited

“A lot of the healing went on in Washington, D.C. But this is the most healing thing we could do.”

— Don DeLand, Vietnam veteran and vice president of Honor Flight of Central Oregon

when told they’ll be going on an all-expense paid trip to the nation’s capital.

“They’re all stoked,” he said. “They’re all elated. It’s like they won something.”

Prevatt said one of his favorite memories from Honor Flight was when they took Vietnam veteran Gregory Turnbow to the Vietnam Memorial Wall in 2021 and found the name of his friend who was killed in action. When Prevatt returned in 2022, he ran down to the wall after everyone had gone through and got a graphite rubbing of his friend’s name: Robert Romero.

Prevatt gave the rubbing to Turnbow at the welcome home ceremony and said there was instant emotion.

“It was awesome to be able to bring that to him,” Prevatt said.

Pat Bowe, a Vietnam veteran who served in the 173rd Airborne Brigade and is the commander of the VFW Post 8138 in Sisters, said it’s important to study history and have remembrance events.

“It’s pretty emotional,” he said.

He said there’s so much history in the some 250 years since the United States declared independence, and he hopes that people can appreciate it.

Redmond Mayor George Endicott also participated in this year’s flight. Helped pass

a city proclamation that designated Sept. 24, 2022, as Honor Flight of Central Oregon Welcome Home Day.

“In times of great danger, the men and women of our armed forces have been resolute, putting their lives at risk when we needed them most. And, making those sacrifices, they ask for nothing in return,” said DeLand as he read the proclamation out loud. “The strength of American society lies in community groups dedicated to betterment of those

around them — Honor Flight of Central Oregon embodies that sentiment.”

Along with Arlington National Cemetery, local vets also visited the Smithsonian Museum, Naval Cemetery, Lincoln Memorial and memorials for WWII, Vietnam and Korea. Each of the veterans also received a handmade patriotic quilt from the Central Oregon Quilting Guild when they returned to Redmond.

Donors consisted of a long list of supporters including local philanthropist Dr. John Pavlicek, VFW and the American Legion Honor Guard, Dutch Bros — which donated over \$50,000 to Honor Flight — and Oregon Veterans Motorcycle Association, among others.

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