

Agent already liking change of scenery

Senior mentors sought

By CRAIG MURPHY
Of the Keizertimes

Temperatures have been warmer than normal this summer in Oregon.

Neal Buenz doesn't mind. After all, Buenz originally hails from Iowa and was most recently in Minnesota before moving to Keizer in May to take over the American Family Insurance agency at 103 McNary Estates Drive from the retiring Marlene Parsons.

When you're from the Midwest, hot temperatures are really 10 to 15 degrees warmer than the reading due to humidity. And that's to say nothing of the wind chill in the winter.

"It was tough to be in winter for nine months," Buenz joked. "That's a big part of coming here. Back there, when it's nice out it is really hot."

Buenz and his wife had been eyeing an eventual move west for some time.

"We had been wanting to get to the West Coast for three years," he said. "Originally we were looking at San Diego or something else in California, but the pricing is absurd down



Neal Buenz (right) has taken over the American Family Insurance agency formerly owned by Marlene Parsons, assisted by Nicki Gates (left).

KEIZERTIMES/
Craig Murphy

there. Plus I'm a huge basketball fan and the Blazers have a huge following. The district manager out here said we have a town looking for an agent."

Buenz flew out here and interviewed for the agent position. A couple of weeks later he was offered the job. In May, he drove a Penske truck with his belongings west for a five-day

trek. "I was chosen to succeed Marlene, who retired after she got married," Buenz said. "I joined an agent-in-training program in Minnesota in July 2013. I interviewed here in March, had one shot and got it. It worked out really well. It was between here and Phoenix. I researched this town and the

agency, weather, people, and this fits better. I'm 32; the average age here is 36. It's a good demographic for me to grow with."

While in Minnesota, Buenz was a car finance person for Ford when a friend in the industry suggested he look into insurance. After working for a State Farm agent for nine months, he found American

Family had an office a block from where he lived, much easier than the 45-minute commute he had at the time.

"The agent and I hit it off really well," Buenz said of his first American Family experience. "I worked with that agent for two years. Things worked out."

The same was true for the current role.

"I talked with Marlene quite a bit," Buenz said. "She stayed a month longer than she had planned to integrate me with the agency and the community. We got acclimated really fast. Marlene stayed through June and I took over July 1."

Things got off to a good start, as Buenz and assistant Nicki Gates – who formerly worked as the assistant to Parsons – were named agents of the month in July.

"In Minneapolis, it's so big that you don't see the same people," Buenz said. "Here you see the same people over and over in the grocery store. Everyone is so laid back and nice here. Everyone is so cool and calm. I can't see myself moving now."

Peer mentors to assist seniors become more self-reliant and independent are being sought by Northwest Senior and Disability Services.

Volunteer mentors should be adults 45 years and older who have patience, nonjudgmental attitude and empathy to coach older adults and people living with disabilities experiencing depression, loneliness, anxiety and grief. The volunteers work with caregivers and people facing end-of-life challenges. The typical mentor volunteers about 10 to 12 hours each month.

Training is provided. For more information or to apply contact Tara Manitsas at 503-304-3414.

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