

Keizertimes

SECTION A

DECEMBER 30, 2016

\$1.00

Winco (sort of) comes to Keizer



KEIZERTIMES/File

When 2016 began, Keizer had been reduced to one grocery store.

The sale of the Albertsons to Haggen in 2015 rapidly devolved into store closures throughout the Washington-based chain and lawsuits flew in both directions. It left Keizer with only Safeway within the city limits.

In January, Rep. Bill Post convened a town hall to discuss a way forward and it drew

a large crowd including Amy Lietz, who complained about the price of cereal and other items without more options.

"I don't want to pay \$4.69 for Cocoa Puffs when I can pay \$1.98 for them at Winco," she said.

In March, a representative of the Northwest Grocers Association suggested that Keizer had made its own bed by choosing to shop elsewhere when the city had as many as three gro-

cery stores along River Road.

Thousands of local residents took to Facebook to voice their support for bringing a Winco to Keizer. In October, the employee-owned company announced plans for a smaller-scale store, Waremart by Winco, in the old Albertsons location. The news was viewed by more than 67,000 people on the Keizertimes Facebook page (30,000 more than the actual population of the city).

Waremart by Winco is expected to open in the first half of 2017.

2016 YEAR IN REVIEW

Keizer mural finished

After more than a year of preparation including choosing designs, holding workshops and nearly three months of actual painting, Keizer had a new mural dedicated to the city.

The mural, which includes images of the Keizer Iris Festival Parade, is located on the north side of Town & Country Lanes. It was a joint project of the Keizer Art Association and the city's Public Arts Commission.

The finished 1,400 square foot project includes 27 identifiable likenesses and the handprints of nearly 200 local kids.

The next major public art project in Keizer is tentatively expected to be a trio of story poles carved into the trunks of trees in front of the Keizer Civic Center.



Keizer mural project coordinator Jill Hagen at the public dedication in September.

KEIZERTIMES/File

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Salem mayor-elect shares vision for Salem-Keizer

KEIZERTIMES/Eric A. Howald

Chuck Bennett, Salem's mayor-elect spoke at the recent Rotary Club of Keizer luncheon.

By ERIC A. HOWALD

Of the Keizertimes

Salem's mayor-elect, Chuck Bennett, stopped by the weekly Rotary Club of Keizer luncheon Thursday, Dec. 22, to talk about the ways Salem and Keizer can work together.

Topics ranged from the future of the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) to transit and homelessness.

Bennett reserved his harshest critique for the Salem-Keizer Transit District.

"I'm convinced that we need to sit down and figure out where we want to go from this slow, unrealistic service with buses traveling around town mostly empty on odd routes that don't seem to be serving our residents well," Bennett said.

Recent attempts to add funding to the district through

ballot measures have largely gone down in flames, and Bennett said it is indicative of a lack of conviction to have a transit district in the Salem-Keizer area at all.

In January, Bennett is hoping the Salem City Council acts on approving ride-sharing services, like Uber and Lyft, within Salem and Keizer to follow suit shortly thereafter.

"Right now, the average wait for a taxi is 45 minutes. (Ride sharing) will be one more transportation option for the area," Bennett said.

He also touched on recent talks about a possible third bridge over the Willamette River.

"Right now, we've progressed farther than we have in 40 years of talks. Salem,

"Right now the average wait for a taxi is 45 minutes."

— Chuck Bennett Salem mayor-elect

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Parks survey hitting mailboxes

By ERIC A. HOWALD

Of the Keizertimes

About half of Keizer residents are going to be receiving a thicker utility bill this week. It's because a survey about Keizer parks is being included with the regular mailing.

The remaining utility customers will receive the survey with their January bill. Keizer residents can also fill out the survey online at keizer.org where additional informational videos and materials will also be made available.

The questionnaire requests residents' feedback regarding Keizer's parks and asks if they would support a fee attached to their regular utility bills to create a dedicated parks fund, options range from no fee to \$8 per month.

While the inquiry is being billed as a "survey," members of the Keizer Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, who have spent the better part of nine months planning its launch, are hoping respondents treat it more like homework.

"As we began to talk about this, we realized there was a lot we didn't know. For people to understand what the survey is about, we had to give them some information about the context of funding available through the city," said Donna Bradley, a parks board member. "We want the responses to be educated, not just emotional," added Matt Lawyer, another member of the parks board.

To that end, here are some of the basics regarding park funding at the city level:

- Parks receive about 2.5 percent of the city's general fund. That's the minimum and funding over and above that level is rare. The general fund also pays for police services

which make up the bulk of its expenditure.

- The city has about \$800,000 in system development charges (SDCs), paid by developers when new residential facilities and homes are built, waiting to be used on parks improvements. However, it would need to come up with an additional \$6.1 million from other sources to spend all of it down. A dedicated parks fund would be one way to unlock SDC money.

- Parks also benefit from rental fees paid for the orchard and residence at Keizer Rapids Park and for a cell tower at Bair Park. It

amounts to about \$50,000 per annum, but only \$10,000 per year is earmarked for improvements.

In the meantime, expenses are overrunning the city's ability to maintain the parks. Last month, when a slide and bridge on a play structure in Wallace House Park were vandalized, it left Robert Johnson, Keizer's parks and facilities supervisor scrambling to come up with \$3,500 to fix them. Sections of the play structure were blocked off while Johnson figured out how to cover the unexpected expense. (See Case Study No. 1)

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Case Study No. 1 A barricaded play structure

In November, a play structure at Keizer's Wallace House Park was barricaded after vandals struck.

The connection point of a slide to larger structure was damaged and a slat on a bridge was broken. The estimate to fix the problems came in at \$3,500.

"It looks piddly on paper — \$3,500 shouldn't keep the problem from being fixed, but it is a huge hit to us. We have to ask ourselves if we can afford it," said Robert Johnson, Keizer's parks and facilities supervisor.

Part of the repairs were covered under warranty, while others had to come out of the parks budget, which is typically stretched thin no matter the time of year. Labor alone cost \$1,900 because a licensed installer had to be contracted

so the warranty wouldn't be voided.

There is no excess within the parks budget. The general fund, which the city uses to pay for police and parks among other expenses, does but fixing a play structure using those reserves falls far down on the list of priorities.

If Johnson cuts back on hours for seasonal hires, it will mean he and Don Shelton, the city's only other full-time parks employee, will have to scramble to make up the difference when park usage kicks into full gear next spring.

Another option is holding off on equipment purchases. Johnson was hoping to get a new mower, blower and trimmer in June 2017 with any funds he managed to save during the rest of the year.

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