

KEIZERTIMES PUBLIC SQUARE

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Foster parents need a seat at the table

By JOSIE WALSH

There are 125 non-relative foster homes in Oregon Department of Human Services District 3 which contains Yamhill, Polk and Marion Counties. Not bad, you might think. Until you realize that there are 638 foster children in District 3. That math does not add up. Of course, some of those kids are placed in family or kinship placements. It still leaves a disproportionate number of foster children for the number of foster homes available. Our community is outraged when they hear that foster children are temporarily housed in hotels, sent out of state or to other facilities.

Well, my question is, where are those community members? What are they doing to step in and fill the gap left in the care for these most vulnerable children in our community?

Foster parent recruitment and retention have been a focus for state and private agencies for the last several years. A number of organizations have begun operating in our area with the intention of supporting, encouraging and recruiting foster families. Groups like Every Child Oregon and Salem Angels are stepping up to uplift children and families impacted by foster care. Churches and other groups across the state consistently work to fill gaps in specific and material needs as well as encouraging families to consider becoming foster parents.

Oregon Department of Human Services District 3 has a Resource Family Retention and Recruitment Champion. The vision, as stated on marionfosteradopt.com, is that "Oregon will have an abundance of safe, affirming, well-trained, supported, diverse and thriving quality resource families that reflect the characteristics of children in care and are equipped to meet their unique needs." I believe the state is working in that direction, by focusing on recruitment and retention, providing additional support to resource families and by beginning to give foster families a voice.

But it's not enough. Recruitment is step one. We have to get potential resource/foster families interested and in the door. Next, the focus is on retainment. How do we keep foster families in service? How can they be supported and encouraged so that they can stay the course, and continue to provide the loving, caring and nurturing environments that are so desperately needed by the hundreds of children that are in care?

There is a myriad of barriers, concerns



and problems that are the reasons why a family stops fostering. One glaring concern I see is the fear of retribution by the state or agency should any little thing go wrong in a foster home. What should be a partnership, a team, a united front often feels like it's "us versus them." Foster parents and families are often in a constant state of anxiety and concern that one small misstep; or worse yet, a falsely reported misstep, will mean the end of their fostering journey. Foster parents often know these children better than anyone, they serve not just as parents, but as advocates and cheerleaders. When will foster parents be given a seat at the table? When will their voices, their input, their experience be valued? How can we create an environment where foster families can feel safe, and know that they don't have to fear the very agency they serve?

In July 2019, Oregon legislature made a commitment to support foster and kinship families by making KEEP groups available across the state. KeepFostering.org explains that "KEEP is an evidence-based support and skill enhancement program for foster and kinship parents of children (KEEP Standard) and teens (KEEP SAFE). The program supports foster families by promoting child well-being and preventing placement breakdowns." The KEEP model has been implemented in several states with positive outcomes.

It is imperative that Oregon maintains this commitment, perhaps even expand it in order to continue to fund the KEEP program, and others aimed at increasing the recruitment and retention of foster families in our county as well as across the state.

(Josie Walsh is a Master of Social Work student and lives in Keizer.)

National Night Out is Aug. 3

National Night Out is Tuesday, Aug. 3, an evening when households gather with their neighbors to meet and greet. Keizer residents will join with over 38 million other Americans that night.

The annual event is designed to heighten crime awareness, generate support and participation in local anti-crime effort, strengthen neighborhood spirit and police-community relations and send a message to criminals letting them know neighborhoods are organized and fighting back.

The best way to build safer communities is to know our neighbors. The past 15 months of isolation due to COVID has left many feeling disconnected from their neighbors and their neighborhoods. With relaxed pandemic protocols in Oregon we hope Keizerites in every part of town will either organize or attend a National Night Out party.

Over the years Keizer has seen dozens of block parties on National Night Out—some small, others were big affairs with amenities such as bounce houses for the kids. Regardless of the size of the gatherings, the results were as intended: people reconnecting, new neighbors greeted and



informed about the community.

The Keizer Fire District has been known to make appearances at gatherings and show off their rigs and delight kids with demonstrations of fire hoses. Members of the the city council, including the mayor, make stops at many of the parties, as do members of the Keizer Police Department.

After months we have lived through with COVID, National Night Out is needed more than ever. The city encourages neighborhoods to register their parties—it improves chances of visits from city leaders (this is the perfect time to get some one on one time with the mayor and councilors).

Deadline to register a party for National Night Out with the Keizer Police Department is Wednesday, July 28. Log onto keizer.org/national-night-out-2021, then get out and meet your neighbors, new and old. —LAZ

Korean War should not be forgotten

To the Editor:

Tuesday, 27 July 2021 commemorates the 71st year of the Korean War cease fire (armistice). A war for which no peace documents to terminate the war have been signed. More than 37,000 Americans died in combat during the 37 months (25 June 1950 - 27 July 1953). This equates to the population of the city of Keizer. To those Americans who survived and to those who didn't, this is an important part of history that should not be forgotten. Since World War II, all wars (conflicts) in which the United States has been involved are by executive decision. Only Congress can



declare war and they have not.

Regrettably, there is very little information about the Korean War in the history books used in the schools. There are, however, some well written books available at book stores, both new and used

Saturday 24 July, a ceremony will begin at 10 a.m. at the Korean War Memorial in Wilsonville to remember the Korean War.

Bob Wickman
Keizer

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