

## Hood River News

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## A Blossom Welcome

*How do you rebrand a fruit blossom?*

**Y**ou don't really, but the venerable spring festival in Hood River Valley is now known as Blossom Time.

It spans three weekends, beyond the traditional three-day event over a single mid-April weekend. This is part organizational, part scientific: that is, Chamber of Commerce is looking at more and more community activities to promote in April, and Mother Nature seems to have evolved in terms of delivering local flora.

Simply stated, it used to be that you could count on the blossoms making themselves known on or about April 15 or so. People would plan their visits to the splendid orchards of this valley at about that time.

But "blossom creep" started happening a few years ago: in some parts of the valley the flowers would emerge somewhat earlier than the accustomed time, meaning some folks might miss seeing them if all they had was one weekend to plan around.

So the Chamber decided to stretch Blossom Festival, as it was once known, into Blossom Time: a three-week arc in which people can plan, at some point, to see the flowers at or near their peak.

Of course, this year the blossoms appeared in March, for the first time in memory. The full emergence, mid-valley, by April 1 was no joke, but documented as the earliest blossoming since records were kept at OSU Experiment Station starting in 1944.

Blossom Time is about the flowers, to be sure, but it is about the community and the way we revolve around the cycles of nature. The past week has been a tense time for many orchardists as overnight temperatures dipped at or near freezing, in a time when the young blossoms and fruitlets are highly susceptible to damage.

Blossom Time is about community events, and the way our lives do cycle around the agricultural heritage of this magnificent valley.

Whether you are a visitor or a local, now is the time to enjoy a cornucopia starting this weekend, primarily: Hard-Pressed Cider Fest in Odell, Wine Passport Month events, Abstract Fiber Trunk Show near Odell, Second Saturday at WAAAM, and Gorge Artists Open Studios Tour.

One result of all these remarkable events happening in one weekend is that people will need to drive from place to place, so caution on the roads is definitely in order. Take your time, enjoy the scenery (marvelous even in inclement weather) and be on the lookout for farm equipment.

For many, the work doesn't stop for the festivities. The work is year-round meaning that for farm workers in Hood River valley, it is always blossom time.

### WHERE TO WRITE

**President** — Barack Obama, White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington D.C., 20500  
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**U.S. Senators** — Jeff Merkley, SDB-40B, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington D.C., 20510. Phone: 202-224-3753; E-mail: oregon@merkley.senate.gov; Ron Wyden, 717 Hart Office Building, Washington D.C., 20510. Phone: 202-224-5244.  
Web address: www.senate.gov/member/or/wyden/general/

**2nd Congressional District Representative** — Greg Walden, 14 N. Central Ave., Suite 112, Medford, OR 97504. Phone: 541-776-4646;  
E-mail: www.walden.house.gov/contactggreg

**Governor** — Kate Brown, 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310. Phone: 503-378-3111;  
E-mail: www.governor.state.or.us/email.htm

**District 26 State Senator** — Chuck Thomsen, 900 Court St. N.E., S-307, State Capitol, Salem, OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1726; E-mail: sen.chuckthomsen@state.or.us

**District 52 State Representative** — Mark Johnson, 900 Court St. N.E., Bldg. H-385, State Capitol, Salem, OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1452; E-mail: rep.markjohnson@state.or.us

## Our readers write

### 'Net Neutrality'

I had my letter about Greg Walden's stand on net neutrality in draft form ready to type up and submit. After reading Joshua Dawson's letter of April 4, 2015, I must add a second paragraph to my letter: But first my initial thoughts. Greg Walden is again pandering to corporate America rather than acting on behalf of his District 2 constituents, all Oregonians and American citizens.

His latest attack on people, and even small businesses, is his efforts to stop new FCC rules guaranteeing equal access to all internet users, meaning there is not favoritism given to any one user for any reason. The net is to remain neutral. There can be no slowing of delivery or failure to deliver any message or deny access to a site. Before the 2014 elections, Walden was bought by AT&T, Verizon, Comcast and Time Warner Cable with almost \$57,000 in campaign donations. Now, Walden, after all as a surrogate employee of those internet providers, is earning his pay by trying to stop the implementation of the new FCC designation of how these businesses are categorized. Why does Walden consistently put corporate profit before people?

Now some comments on Mr. Dawson's letter. The FCC did not take over the internet, period.

The only attempted power grab was by the four providers above and their ilk and Walden is stand up for them, not freedom. After all, he must earn his pay. Yes, the internet has been around for a good long time but Verizon, Comcast, Time Warner, AT&T nor any other internet provider invented it. They did not patent it. But they have profited by it and handsomely.

**Gary Fields**  
Hood River

### Not 'Smarter'

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium test (SBAC) is too long. It will take a student approximately 10-15 hours, spread over seven days, to complete the test.

An adult would be tired and weary of testing going into the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th day of testing. How will an 8 year old feel and perform? How about an already perpetually tired 17 year old?

Standardized tests have their place. The Common Core Curriculum has its strengths. What I am personally opposed to is the length and validity of this particular test. This test has not been proven to test what your student has been taught or what your student

has learned. From all I have read, this test is still in the research phase and any student that takes it is a research subject. The scores that they will receive will be part of their school record whether or not they are a fair reflection of their actual knowledge. If this doesn't seem fair, then you might consider opting your student out of the test.

I know that parents worry how opting out of SBAC might affect their children, so this is important to understand: private school students are not required to take the Smarter Balanced Assessment and will not have a SBAC score on their record. Schools and universities will find a way to assess them, perhaps by looking at their transcripts — and they can do that for public school students who opt-out, too.

The Hood River School District is required by law to administer the test, but it is your legal right to opt your student out of it. I have already opted my students out of this test. There are several opt-out forms available on the Web. I encourage you to do your own research about this topic and seriously consider what is best for your family and your student's future.

**Peg Bogard**  
Hood River

### Springtime reminder

Spring is in the air and gardeners in Hood River will soon start working in their yards. If that work includes digging, NW Natural reminds you to first call 811 — the Utility Notification Center — to locate underground gas and other utility lines.

This is a free service and it's not only a smart thing to do to help prevent damage, it's the law. Once you call, a technician will visit the property within two business days to locate your gas and utility lines.

If a gas line has been accidentally damaged, remember to: Smell. Go. Let

us know. If you smell rotten eggs or hear a hissing sound, immediately leave the area on foot and then call 911 and NW Natural's 24-hour emergency line at 800-882-3377.

Be safe this spring and be sure to call before you dig.

**Tonya Brumley**  
NW Natural Community  
Affairs Manager  
The Dalles

### Visit 'Clink!'

I had a fun, interesting time recently at the Hood River County History Museum. I attended the program called "Clink!" It included a traveling exhibit describing the wine industry in Oregon.

Fascinating! I had no idea what a rich history it was. There were several local, award-winning wineries sharing their best wines and an excellent presentation on wine growing as a hobby by Helmut Riedl.

The museum is a real credit to our community — beautiful building, informative exhibits, and outstanding volunteers. Hats off to the county and all those who have made this possible!

If you haven't gone recently, the "Clink!" program is an excellent introduction. The last one is April 24, from 5 to 7 p.m. (\$10-15 donation), and it is your last opportunity to see the traveling exhibit.

You can learn more about the museum by googling "hood river museum, about us."

**Lawrence Jones**  
Hood River

### For Wilhelm

Kris Wilhelm is running for school district position 1, Westside Hood River and Cascade Locks. She stands for kids, teachers, parents and makes sound financial decisions not only in her personal life and business but also by investing wisely for her children's

Please see LETTERS, Page A5



### ANOTHER VOICE

## Cost vs. patient safety: When health plans discriminate

By **DAVID RUSSO, D.O., M.P.H.**

**H**aving health coverage, even when you didn't have it before the Affordable Care Act, still may mean you can't get the medicines you may need.

Insurance companies call it "benefit design," but consumer watch-dog and patient safety groups call it "adverse tiering." Those of us on the front lines of patient care know it simply as bad medicine. That is, the choices your prescriber presents you for treatment of your chronic health condition may be less about his or her professional judgment and more about what your insurance plan is willing to pay.

Tiering is how health plans use various incentives to influence how you and your doctor select a medication to treat your condition. It's not surprising that these incentives have been shown to effectively bolster the insurance company's bottom line. What is surprising is that these incentives can affect who even bothers signing up for insurance in the first place. By making it more costly or difficult to prescribe medications for a particular kind of problem or

group of people, health plans can cherry-pick their customers.

Findings published recently in the New England Journal of Medicine by researchers at Harvard's School of Public Health showed that one quarter of health plans surveyed used adverse tiering to limit patient access to certain HIV drugs. Even when lower premiums and Affordable Care Act caps on out-of-pocket expenses were factored in, someone enrolled in an adverse tiering plan would still pay \$3,000 more than someone enrolled in the other plans. But it doesn't just stop there.

Doctors who treat medically complex patients with multiple chronic diseases know that adverse tiering can have life threatening implications. For my specialty of pain management, this means that "tiering" patients into first failing attempts of dangerous drugs, when safer abuse-deterrent formulations may be more appropriate, forces prescribers and patients into bad prescribing practices.

The good news is that new rules now under consideration by Oregon legislators would encourage safer opioid prescribing practice by removing any disincentives to prescribing

abuse-deterrent painkillers. Other protections include requiring insurance carriers to provide coverage for abuse-deterrent opioids as preferred drugs on their formulary, requiring that the cost-sharing for abuse-deterrent opioids not exceed the lowest cost-sharing applied to prescription drugs, and prohibit an increase in patient cost-sharing. Massachusetts passed a similar law last year.

Oregon health providers and leaders, as well as policy makers, must pay attention. When it comes to reducing opioid over-doses and deaths in our state, prescribers need every arrow in their quiver. This means that insurance companies shouldn't be allowed to prioritize cost over patient safety. When a prescriber judges that an abuse-deterrent formulation is a safer and more appropriate option for a patient, that judgment should be honored by payers and at the pharmacy pick-up window. Using tools such as abuse-deterrent formulations, prescription drug monitoring data-bases, enhanced patient surveillance, and evidenced-based prescribing guidelines, together we can stem the tide of deaths and dysfunction caused by prescription pain-killer abuse in our state.

Dr. David Russo is a psychiatrist and pain management specialist with Columbia Pain Management P.C. in Hood River.

*Prescriber judgment should be honored by payers and at the pharmacy pick-up window.*



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Founded in 1905

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