

Gay men's choir sang through adversity

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

Singing can be an act of courage.

When the Portland Gay Men's Chorus first performed in the early 1980s, many of the men hadn't yet come out to their families. About a third of the singers were listed as either "name withheld" or by an alias in the group's concert programs.

Groups of picketers sometimes stationed themselves outside concert venues, hurling insults at concert patrons. There were bomb threats and police escorts.

The chorus, which performs Saturday, April 11 in Pendleton, is feeling a lot more love from society these days, even in rural parts of Oregon.

Gary Coleman, 64, clearly remembers the early days of the group's 35-year history. Speaking to the *East Oregonian* by phone, Coleman recalled a conversation with two other founding members, Mark Richards and Mark Jones. Richards had been dazzled by a performance by the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, the country's first gay men's choir. At a Portland bar called Wilde Oscar's, he broached the idea of doing something similar in Portland.

"Over a couple pitchers of beer, we discussed what it might be like to start a gay men's chorus in Oregon," Coleman said.

They decided to go ahead and try it, beginning with one initial concert. They put an ad in a local gay newspaper and a dozen singers showed up for the first rehearsal. The concert, held at Metropolitan Community Church, a congregation with many gay and lesbian members, drew enthusiastic applause.



The Portland Gay Men's Chorus poses with then-Secretary of State Barbara Roberts before her swearing in ceremony in 1984.

Coleman, a minister's son, has sung in public since age four, often donning a tie and singing solos in church. He minored in music in college. Singing in an openly gay choir in the '80s, however, felt risky.

"We first had to decide whether we were going to put the word 'gay' in our name," said Coleman, who is an employment specialist at Portland Community College.

Other gay men's choirs, such as those in Seattle and Dallas, had opted not to use the word, but the Portland group decided to be transparent and include it. As a result, some of the singers left.

"They weren't prepared to make that kind of public statement," Coleman said. "Many people were still closeted in those days."

The choir grew from 20 singers to 109 within two years and currently has 150 members, ranging in age from 19 to 70-something. Now 35 years old, the chorus is the

fourth oldest gay-identified chorus in the country, after San Francisco, New York and Los Angeles.

The chorus, hit hard by HIV and AIDS, lost 140 members over the years. Many kept singing as their health declined.

"For a while, we were going to memorial services several times a month," said Coleman, who sings second tenor.

The choir started out performing to mostly gay audiences, but their crowds and venues and even the choir itself became more diverse as time passed. The chorus now includes non-gay men and female singers.

In the early 1990s, the political climate warmed somewhat.

"Politicians and churches stepped up and supported us," Coleman said. "We sang for the inauguration of (then Oregon) Secretary of State Barbara Roberts. We sang in both chambers. Churches invited

us to sing."

These days, the choir finds mostly appreciative audiences, even in rural towns. Coleman quoted a lyric from their commissioned work, "Brighter Day," to be performed during the concert.

"They've grown accustomed to our face," he said.

The choir will also perform "I Am Harvey Milk," a work depicting the life and times of California's first openly gay elected public official.

Singers generally pay their own way to outreach concerts in rural towns and donate concert profits to a local organization. Saturday's proceeds will go to PFLAG Pendleton (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). The concert begins at 7 p.m. at the Vert Auditorium. General admission is \$15. Seniors pay \$10 and students, \$5. No one is refused if unable to pay.

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.

BRIEFLY

Short agenda for city council

HERMISTON — Hermiston's state champion wrestling team will be recognized with an official proclamation by the mayor and city council on Monday night.

The proclamation will kick off a short agenda that includes renewal of the operating contract for the Hermiston Conference Center with the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce through the end of 2016.

According to a memo from assistant city manager Mark Morgan, the city currently pays the chamber about \$64,000 a year to operate the facility and pays another \$26,000 in utilities and operating costs. The center operates at an average net loss of \$49,000 a year.

Considering the city plans to start paying "at least" \$50,000 a year toward operation of another event space — the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center — starting in 2016, Morgan said extending the conference center contract with the Chamber of Commerce through 2016 will "buy the council another year for deliberation about the city's long-term plans for the facility."

The council's other item of new business on the agenda for Monday night is the approval of a contract with Anderson Perry & Associates of La Grande as the city's engineer of record.

The contract, which is the result of a request for proposals put out in January, is expected to save the city money by lowering the cost of travel the city currently pays to Kennedy Jenks out of Portland.

As part of its consent agenda the council will also vote on the approval of three final plat requests for residential developments: 10 lots at the Castle Homes subdivision (zoned multi-family residential) off Highland Avenue, 14 lots at the Desert Sky Estates (zoned single-family residential) off South First Street and 21 lots at the Highland Summit development (zoned duplex residential) off Southeast 13th Street.

District's credit rating strong

HERMISTON — A strong credit rating and a refinance of Hermiston School District's bond debt is expected to save local taxpayers an estimated \$1 million in interest.

Standard & Poor's reaffirmed the district's AA-credit rating, last updated in 2010.

"We are absolutely thrilled with this reaffirmed

rating," deputy superintendent Wade Smith said in a statement. "Many districts and municipalities who have recently gone through this process have seen their credit rating fall as a result of the recession."

In its ratings report, Standard & Poor's noted the strong credit rating was based on Hermiston's financial strengths, which include stable student enrollment with more growth expected, maintenance of reserves above 8 percent of operating expenditures and sound financial policies and practices.

The district plans to refinance approximately \$18 million in outstanding debt.

The Hermiston school board's next meeting is Monday, April 13 at 6:30 p.m. at the school district offices, 502 W. Standard Ave. Building A. The board plans to discuss plans for the Hermiston High School graduation ceremony after the district was presented with a petition asking the board to consider moving the ceremony from the high school gym to Kennison Field to allow more people to attend.

Pendleton chief leads Enterprise PD review

PENDLETON — Pendleton Police chief Stuart Roberts will head up a review of the Enterprise Police Department this month.

Wes Kilgore resigned in March as chief of Enterprise police. He was in charge of the four-officer department since March 2002. The Enterprise City Council approved the review of the department, and the Oregon Association of Police Chiefs referred Roberts, who has experience conducting the reviews.

He will oversee a team of two or more that will evaluate the Enterprise department as a whole and look at its internal functions. The police chiefs association does not charge for the service.

Enterprise Mayor Steve Lear reported the review will commence within the next couple of weeks and conclude by the end of April. The city council's police committee, which consists of the mayor and two council members, will consider the results and make recommendations to the full council on May 11.

Enterprise could opt to drop its police department and possibly contract with the Wallowa County Sheriff's Office for law enforcement services. Those kinds of agreements are common practice for small rural cities.

Study relates more fish to lower survival odds

By GEORGE PLAVERN
East Oregonian

More fish in the Columbia River Basin doesn't necessarily bode well for survival of future generations.

That's according to a recent study by scientists examining the limitations of habitat and resources for endangered salmon and steelhead.

The report, released Feb. 25, draws a correlation between booming fish returns up the Columbia and a decline in smolts after spawning. Simply put, there is not enough food and shelter to support such heavy populations over the long run.

This concept is known as density dependence, and it's nothing new to fisheries managers. Researchers are surprised, however, to see signs of density dependence along the Columbia Basin, where fish runs — though record-breaking in modern years — are far below historical totals.

Evidence now shows the ecosystem is straining to keep up with the recovery of native fish returns. The data is laid out in a 246-page study by the Independent Scientific Advisory Board, serving NOAA Fisheries, Columbia tribes and the Northwest Power and Conservation Council.

Eleven scientists contributed to the research, including Greg Ruggerone, who works with the Seattle-based Natural Resources Consultants. Their findings could guide and influence everything from habitat restoration to releases from local hatcheries.

"Density is a factor that influences a lot in salmon, such as growth and survival," Ruggerone said. "The issue needs to be considered more directly

in different areas of the basin."

By modern trends, salmon and steelhead returns were impressive in 2014. Approximately 2.5 million of the fish made it past Bonneville Dam for the year, including a single-day record of 67,521 fall chinook on Sept. 8. More than 14,500 coho made it all the way past Three Mile Falls Dam on the Umatilla River near Hermiston, compared to just 2,691 the previous year.

To put things in perspective, an analysis of historical data shows anywhere from 5-9 million adult fish returned to the Columbia River prior to the development of hydroelectric dams. For years, scientists thought the abundance of salmon in the basin was too low to bump up against the limits for food and habitat, Ruggerone said.

The advisory board's report now suggests otherwise. Ruggerone points to a number of factors, including dams and barriers that have effectively blocked off nearly one-third of spawning and rearing habitat for fish. Other habi-

tat that is reachable has been damaged over the decades by building and development, he said.

The result is more fish competing for fewer resources. Ruggerone uses the analogy of an overcrowded dinner party: if there's only enough food for 20 people, but 50 people show up, there won't be enough for everyone. Some people will be leaving hungry.

Without enough food and shelter, juvenile fish will either grow more slowly or starve, and leave themselves open themselves to predators. So while salmon runs seem healthy now, they might not be in the years to come.

Ruggerone said their findings point to the need for habitat restoration that focuses on reducing those barriers to survival.

"We need to understand why density dependence occurs in different areas, and at what life stage," he said. "(Agencies) can use density dependence to guide their restoration activities, and evaluate the effectiveness of their

activities."

Densities can also inform hatcheries where to release their juveniles, Ruggerone said, to avoid overwhelming the natural wild runs.

Henry Lorenzen, Oregon's representative on the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, said the report highlights the possibility they could be closer than thought to exceeding the basin's ability to support at-risk populations of salmon and steelhead.

"It means that, going forward, our recovery efforts will have to reflect this new information, and we may need to readjust our fish number goals," Lorenzen said.

More information about the study can be found online at www.nwcouncil.org.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4547.

ANNUAL HERITAGE HOME TOUR
A fun-filled event with refreshments, presentation on the various home styles found in Pendleton, and a tour of two turn-of-the-century mansions.

Saturday, May 2nd
Heritage Station Museum
Two tour sessions offered:
11 AM – 2 PM or
12:15 PM to 3 PM

Tickets: \$20 if bought in advance; \$30 on day of event.

Call Heritage Station Museum at 541-276-0012 for information

HERITAGE STATION
The Umatilla County Historical Society Museum

Welcome

Morrow County Health District is pleased to announce the addition of

Vicki Kent, ARNP

to our Irrigon Medical Clinic.

Vicki joins John Adair, PA-C, at the clinic, where she will focus on the needs of the entire family. Her first day will be April 20, 2015.

She is accepting new patients and is looking forward to serving our community.

To make an appointment, call (541) 922-5880.



MORROW COUNTY HEALTH DISTRICT
Excellence in Healthcare

Serving you at our Irrigon Medical Clinic | 220 N Main St, Irrigon

www.morrowcountyhealthdistrict.org



The family of Frances (Fran) Fitzhugh

would like to extend their appreciation for the kindness shown to our family during Mom's illness and passing. Thank you for all the cards, visits, phone calls, flowers, wonderful food and support. You not only blessed us with your thoughts and prayers but nurtured our souls.

A special thank you to St. Anthony's Hospice, Dr. Earl, Dr. D., PEO sisters, my quilt pals, Pastor Marc Mullins, church family, Catholic Ladies, and Burns Mortuary. Mom was loved by many and will be greatly missed.

Blessings to all

Penny and Ron Gavette, Kelly Hale, Brett and Polly Conner, Erica and Nate Haak, Cameron and Abby Conner