

Where have the volunteers gone?

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

When the announcement came that Umatilla's Landing Days were being scaled back significantly this year due to lack of volunteers, it signaled a growing problem.

"We usually have between 30 and 40 volunteers and last year we got about 15," Umatilla Chamber of Commerce director Karen Hutchinson Talaski said.

After the committee said they would cancel Umatilla's signature summer event if they didn't get more volunteers for 2016, they didn't get much of a response. As a result, the plan is to forgo hosting vendors and most daytime activities, even though the parade and fireworks show with live music will go on.

Landing Days is not the only event that has been scaled back or canceled altogether in recent years because new volunteers haven't stepped up to replace ones that are burning out. Hutchinson Talaski estimated the ages of the Landing Days Committee to be between 40 and 80 and said they all "wear multiple hats" in the community.

"We aren't spring chickens anymore and this is a lot of work," she said.

She said it's not uncommon in communities to see the same people stepping up to volunteer for everything. The problem is that they often get spread too thin and eventually decide they need to step back from some activities so they can give 100 percent to others. It can be hard finding someone to replace them.

Hermiston went through a similar problem with the Festival of Lights that used to brighten the Umatilla County fairgrounds each December. After the county stopped providing manpower for the event in 2010 a group of volunteers came together to keep the lights on, but ran out of steam in 2013 when they couldn't find enough helpers. After another unsuccessful attempt to find enough volunteers for 2014 they canceled the festival again, and in 2015 the county donated the lights to the city of Hermiston.

Other organizations continue on, but still find themselves short of volunteers. The Hermiston Warming Station sometimes closes its doors even when the temperature is below freezing because there are not enough volunteers to keep it



Hermiston Senior Center volunteers Harry Trump, Rose Hamilton and Harry Stevenson serve spaghetti at the center's meal program.

Staff photo by Jade McDowell

open through the night.

Marci McMurphy, director of CAPECO's Area Agency on Aging department, said CAPECO has a difficult time finding volunteers to pack boxes at the food warehouse, help around the office or offer financial mentoring to clients.

"The generation that's now aging was very much into giving back ... as they're aging now they're becoming the ones who need help," she said.

Young people seem to be experiencing a resurging interest in volunteer work, she said, but their schedules often conflict with when agencies need the most help.

McMurphy said it might help people to know that CAPECO will take volunteers who just want to commit to one hour a month or want to help out with a single project without committing to doing any more once it's over.

"With peoples' busy schedules, the last thing they want to do is be tied down," she said.

At the Hermiston Senior Center, Virginia Beebe said it's not uncommon to have to ask one or two people showing up for a meal

to throw on an apron and help serve everyone else first.

"We're always short on volunteers," she said.

Julie Harris-Rosner said the problem was that the younger seniors tended to be busy helping care for grandchildren or aging parents or continuing to work well past what used to be retirement age.

"Our really, really good volunteers are now in their nineties, and they're dying," she said. "We're left with the eighty-year-olds."

Gary Reiland, 69, was there Thursday to deliver Meals on Wheels, a volunteer position he said he has held for about 30 years. He said he and his wife used to be involved in a long list of organizations but have had to cut back their volunteering to mostly Meals on Wheels and the Red Cross, because their health no longer permitted more.

The good news is some organizations are finding ways to boost participation. A year ago, core members involved with the Hispanic Advisory Committee in Hermiston started pushing hard for people attending the meetings

to step up and volunteer more. Chairman Eddie de la Cruz said the message was heard, and today there are a variety of new faces helping take charge of programs like the one that provides Spanish translators at parent-teacher conferences.

"I kept talking to them and saying it can't be Eddie, Eddie, Eddie all the time," he said. "I can't do it all myself."

When people like Hector Ramirez and Claudia Jimenez stepped up, he said, that helped get the ball rolling. Each new person who came on board brought with them new ideas for recruiting volunteers and a new network of contacts who they could convince to help out.

De la Cruz said he has also talked to people about being responsible volunteers, and encourages them to treat any board or committee they serve on as seriously as they do their job, instead of frequently skipping meetings.

He said it takes work to recruit and train responsible volunteers, but it can pay off like it did for the Hispanic Advisory Committee.

"We have had quite a change," he said.

Help wanted

Here are a few places to start if you're looking to volunteer:

1) City committees. City councils rely on the legwork and recommendations of multiple committees to make decisions, and many of them face a near-constant parade of vacancies. Contact your city hall or check their website to find out about committee vacancies or opportunities to volunteer for activities conducted by those committees.

2) Schools. Local school districts are always looking for volunteers to help out in the classroom, chaperone field trips, read to children or serve on a committee. If you don't have a child or grandchild's classroom to volunteer in, contact a principal or school district office to find out where volunteers are needed most.

3) Nonprofits. It's a rare nonprofit organization that isn't in need of more volunteers. A few that are frequently looking for more help include Meals on Wheels, the Agape House, CAPECO, the Warming Station, Desert Rose Ministries, Domestic Violence Services, Salvation Army, Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts, PAWS, Relay for Life and various local churches.

4) Umatilla-Morrow Head Start. The local Head Start office relies on a network of volunteers to read to children, assist teachers in the classroom, help prepare meals in the kitchen, plant a garden, work as Court Appointed Special Advocates, do maintenance or work in the office. Contact the office to get the proper paperwork and sign up for a background check.

5) Hospitals and nursing homes. Hospitals are often looking for volunteers to help out everywhere from the gift shop to transporting patients who can't make it to the hospital on their own. Nursing homes take volunteers willing to visit residents and do activities with them.

6) Service Clubs. For those looking to take their volunteerism to the next level, Umatilla County offers more than 12 service clubs — many with chapters in several cities — that residents can join.

Symphony performs for elementary students

HERMISTON — About 900 students listened to classical music and had a morning of musical education Thursday in Hermiston.

The Willow Creek Symphony's Young People's Concert attracted local fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders from Hermiston schools as well as those from as far as Pilot Rock, Boardman and Ukiah. The students had the opportunity to walk through the symphony and learn a little about each of the instruments.

An ensemble of Inland Northwest Musicians, the Willow Creek Symphony is a preparatory orchestra made up of around 30 members. The group will next present "Sentimental Journey" at 4 p.m. Sunday at Heppner Elementary School.

Rhythmic Mode sets community performance

PENDLETON — The public is invited to the final performance of Pendleton High School's Rhythmic Mode dance team before heading to the OSAA Dance & Drill Championships.

The event is Monday at 6 p.m. in Warburg Court at the high school, 1800 N.W. Carden Ave. There is no charge.

People are encouraged to come and cheer on the team as they prepare for the state competition, which is March 17-19 at Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Portland. For more information about state dance and drill, visit www.osaa.org/activities/dnc.

MF students to perform spring concerts

MILTON-FREEWATER — Spring concerts are planned by the McLoughlin High School band and choir and the Central Middle School band.

BRIEFLY



Staff photo by Jennifer Colton

The Willow Creek Symphony performs for more than 800 elementary students Thursday at the Hermiston Conference Center.

The public is invited to the free performance Monday at 7 p.m. in the Jack Williams auditorium at Mac-Hi, 120 S. Main St., Milton-Freewater. Those performing include the award-winning jazz ensemble and Crimson and Black Choir and the concert choir.

In addition, the Central Middle School band will present its Spring Concert

Thursday, March 17 at 6:30 p.m., also in the Jack Williams Auditorium.

For more information, contact band director Mike Agidius at mike.agidius@miltfree.k12.or.us.

Briefs are compiled from staff and wire reports, and press releases. Email press_releases@news@eastoregonian.com

HEPPNER

Wee Bit O'Ireland seeks parade participants

East Oregonian

People are invited to be part o' the fun during the Wee Bit O'Ireland Celebration by participating in the St. Paddy's Cruz-In and Great Green Parade in downtown Heppner.

In its 15th year, participants in the car show may enter the Great Green Parade, but it's not required. Parade registration forms will be available at the Cruz-In registration desk.

Registration for the

Cruz-In is \$20. On-site registration begins Saturday, March 19 at 9 a.m., judging is at 10 a.m. and awards are at 3 p.m. In addition, there is a poker walk from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Plaque awards will be given for Leprechaun's Choice, Mustang Award, Judge's Choice, Best of Show, best muscle car, convertible, paint and more. Also, the top hands for the power walk will receive cash prizes.

The parade is Saturday, March 19 at 1 p.m. It starts

on the north end of Heppner near Green Feed & Seed and travels down Main Street. People can register and check in Saturday at 11:30 a.m. on the front porch of Green Feed & Seed, 242 W. Linden Way.

More information and registration forms are available at www.heppnerchamber.com by clicking on A Wee Bit O'Ireland and scrolling to registration forms or stop by the Heppner Chamber of Commerce Monday through Friday at 111 N.W. May St.

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