

WYDEN: 'Hermiston High is a hotbed of capitalism'

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looking at what type of legislation might help boost graduation rates, research has shown that those rates are tied to attendance, and CTE programs help boost attendance.

When Congress passed the Every Child Achieves Act to replace No Child Left Behind, Wyden included language that will give schools with low graduation rates access to federal grants for programs that help keep at-risk students interested in school.

He told the students the "spark" he could see in them as they talked about their hands-on projects is something he wants to see spread to other schools.

"You guys have a chance to be a real model, and that's why I came here today," he said.

One of the students who shared their project with Wyden was Hannah Reese, who won a gold medal at state for Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA). She received 97 of 100 points for a recreation and tourism project that involved creating a detailed business plan for a restaurant and catering business that she said she plans to open someday. One of her ideas included cupcakes made fresh every day that will appeal to a variety of customers.

"I want to invest in vegan and gluten-free options," she said.

Wyden said he was working on a bill that would help cut red tape for recreation and tourism businesses, such as requiring all of the permit applications to be accessible online.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Sen. Ron Wyden listens to Hermiston senior Hannah Reese, second from left, talk about her project on hospitality and recreation Wednesday at Hermiston High School.

"I'd like you to take a look at it," he told Reese. "I'd really like to have your comments."

Salma Anguiano, a sophomore, shared that she was recently elected president of the Oregon FCCLA chapter and will be working with the national council to draft proposals for education-related education. She said she didn't know what she would be doing if she didn't have programs like FCCLA to keep her busy.

"Not all schools in Oregon have the awesome opportunity to take the classes we do," she said.

After the roundtable with students, they took Wyden on a tour of the Java Dawgs coffee shop run by accounting students, and the Dawg House, a shop selling Bulldogs gear that is also run by business students.

"I've decided Hermiston High is a hotbed of capitalism," Wyden said.

Following the tour at the high school the group headed over to Fieldstone #2, the second student-built home created by the Columbia Basin Student Homebuilding Program. While students from an agricultural class worked to landscape the yard, homebuilding students put the finishing touches on the highly energy-efficient home, which is on the market for \$345,000.

"This is gorgeous," Wyden remarked as he got the grand tour.

The home will be open to the public for tours on Friday, from 1-6 p.m.

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HOUSING: Land needs to be rezoned

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7,800 acres now in organic peas, corn, onions, carrots and other vegetables. General manager Marty Myers has said they hope to expand to over 12,000 organic acres in the next two years.

In order to do that, the farm will need to bring on a larger seasonal workforce. In a previous interview, Myers compared organic farming to going back 20 years in terms of farm practices, to the point of pulling weeds by hand. It takes more labor to grow organic, and those workers will all need somewhere to live.

In its application, PROfuutt Limited Partnership said they initially plan to build one housing complex with 36 units, each with three bedrooms. Ted Sanders, the company's real estate development manager, declined to talk more about the project when contacted Wednesday.

McLane, the county planning director, said the first step is to get the land rezoned. Space Age Industrial, or SAI, is something of a throwback, she said, created by the Oregon Legislature in the 1960s around the time of the Space Race.

The housing site has been zoned SAI since the early 1980s in hopes of luring aerospace industries to Morrow County. Those companies never came, and since then McLane said they've been discussing what to do with the property.

"It kind of has marginal value as industrial land," she said. "It really is a 1960s space race holdover here in Morrow County."

The Planning Department has recommended approving a zoning change to Exclusive Farm Use. McLane said the location is preferable

for farmworker housing, since they'll be closer to the farm itself and avoid straining sewer and water services within Boardman city limits.

Another part of the application would also allow the Port of Morrow to extend a sewer line from nearby property it owns to serve the development. That condition would not take effect until after the housing is approved.

Some neighbors have expressed concern about the proposal. Kelly Doherty, a nearby property owner, said the entire application process has made her leery. If a zone change is approved first, she said there is no assurance the development wouldn't morph into "Boardman West."

"In this case, there's no regulation on how many units they can actually build," Doherty said.

Doherty, who is the wife of newly elected Morrow County Commissioner Jim Doherty, also has concerns about the amount of traffic on Tower Road, though she said the farm has indicated seasonal workers wouldn't arrive in their own vehicles and would be bused into town once a week for groceries.

That raises its own set of issues, she said, with farmworkers essentially being isolated from services in the community.

"I don't understand why we treat our farmworkers the way we do," she said. "It's my estimation that we have ample water, ample sewer and ample building space within the city."

Doherty has testified against the project in public meetings, and said she will consider hiring an attorney to fight the development if it passes through the planning commission.

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WINE: Zinfandel vineyard had been abandoned for about 20 years

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daddy of wine in the Columbia River Gorge, a pioneer on the level of the visionaries who made the Willamette Valley an internationally acclaimed producer of Pinot Noir.

He's planted, planned or consulted on hundreds of acres of vineyards on both sides of the river from Hood River, Ore., east to Maryhill, Wash., a region that includes two American Viticultural Areas and produces robust reds, delicate whites and boasts of "a world of wine in 40 miles."

Other vineyard owners call him mentor, advocate and friend. In 2011, the Oregon Wine Board gave him its Lifetime Achievement Award. He was nominated by his peers.

But right now he's just another dirt farmer dealing with a dang problem. The issue is resolved a few minutes later when Rojas, the vineyard foreman, finds a closed valve on an irrigation well. Water soon flows to the drip lines strung through the legacy vines up on the hill, and Lonnie Wright is smiling again.

Gorge takes off

Columbia River Gorge wine is on a roll. Vineyards, wineries and tasting rooms dot the towns that line the river and now compete with orchard stands and brew pubs for tourists. Increasingly, the region is tapping the big Portland market on the shoulder and reminding wine lovers that Interstate 84 through the Gorge is a much

quicker drive than creeping out Oregon 99W to the Pinot Noir vineyards of Yamhill County. An April "Portland Grand Tasting" held in the city's posh Pearl District was packed with people eager to sample Gorge wines. In the meantime, Wine Press Northwest, an insider trade publication, named Hood River's Mount Hood Winery as its 2016 Oregon Winery of the Year.

The Gorge itself, a National Scenic Area known for its massive basalt formations and dazzling waterfalls, is part of the attraction and is key to the variety of wines grown in the region. The river bisects the spine of the Cascade Mountain Range, which divides Oregon and Washington into western wet and eastern dry sides. Wine enthusiasts like to say the region loses an inch of rain with every mile traveled east.

The west side of the Hood River Valley gets 36 inches of precipitation annually, while only 15 inches falls in The Dalles and only 10 beyond that.

As a result, the region produces at least 40 types of wine from grapes that grow in a wide range of heat and water, from Zinfandel, Merlot and Pinot Noir to Pinot Gris, Riesling and Chardonnay.

For winemakers, the Gorge represents the "blessing and challenge" of a diverse American Viticultural Area, said Mark Chien, program coordinator of the Oregon Wine Research Institute at Oregon State University.

"They are well on their way to making great wine,"

Chien said. "It's sort of like where the Willamette Valley was 25 years ago: You figure out what the heck you've got and what to do about it."

Vineyard revival

That might have been Lonnie Wright's line 34 years ago as he stood on a slope above Mill Creek a few miles southwest of The Dalles. He'd heard — through the grapevine, if you will — that an orchardist planned to revive an 8-acre, century-old Zinfandel vineyard that had been abandoned for about 20 years. Wright showed up unbidden at 7 a.m. and found the orchardist literally reading from a University of California-Davis pruning textbook.

Wright grew up in Indiana, where he earned a scholarship and played guard on Butler University's basketball team and figured he'd most likely teach and coach hoops. But the call of the road eventually led by way of Central America to the Pacific Northwest, where in 1978 he found himself part of a crew planting the first vineyards at Columbia Crest, a winery owned by Chateau Ste. Michelle in Paterson, Wash. He learned he had a knack for the work, soaked up information, became a manager and supervised the first harvest.

The road called again, however, and he went off for the first of two trips to Libya to install irrigation systems — adventures that seem crazy given the current state of affairs in the Middle East. In 1982 he was back in the Gorge, starting a family with his wife, Linda, and the

idea of getting in on the start of reviving the old vineyard appealed to him.

The rest is Gorge lore. The long-neglected vineyard apparently is among the oldest in the Pacific Northwest. Wright learned it was planted by a stonemason, Louis Comini, probably between 1890 and 1900. Comini also made the headstones placed at the local Catholic cemetery, built a couple of stone houses in The Dalles and worked on The Grotto, a Catholic shrine in Portland.

Early photos, one dated 1910, show the Old Zin vines weren't grown on a trellis system but were "head-trained on the ground," essentially grown like low bushes. The method provided protection against freezing but left grapes susceptible to bunch rot.

Wright revitalized the Old Vine Zin and eventually bought the vineyard and adjoining property, which among other iterations had once been a dairy. Today the wine made from the old block is highly praised by connoisseurs and sells for \$35 a bottle at The Pines 1852 tasting room Wright opened in Hood River.

He also started a "Young Zin" block from Old Zin cuttings 25 years ago, and

planted Merlot and Syrah grapes as well. In 1983 he planted a Chardonnay vineyard for a neighbor along Mill Creek, veterinarian and beef cattle rancher Terry McDuffee. From that first job, he emerged as the go-to consultant, cheerleader and vineyard manager among people likewise drawn to the prospects of growing grapes and making wine in the dramatic landscape framed by the Columbia River, Mount Hood and Mount Adams.

Bob Morus, president of Phelps Creek Vineyards in Hood River, tells a familiar story. Arriving in the Gorge in the late 1980s, he learned Wright was the "guru" to ask about starting a vineyard.

Wright "came up to the place and kicked the dirt," and asked Morus what type of grapes he wanted to grow. Morus answered Pinot Noir, then becoming Oregon's signature grape.

"I suppose we can do that," Wright drawled, but he cautioned that he'd not planted Pinot Noir before. Wright and his crew planned and planted the first eight acres. Phelps Creek has expanded over the years and its wines enjoy a sterling reputation with reviewers.

"He got me going and we've remained friends ever

since," Morus said. He jokes that he eventually had to "fire" Wright "because I needed to make my own mistakes."

A break came when King Estates of Eugene, one of the state's largest and most prominent wineries, came looking for grapes. Wright was friends with the late Brad Biehl, King Estates' viticulturist, and introduced him to Morus and others who became King's suppliers.

"The combination of Brad and Lonnie really bootstrapped grape growing in the Gorge," Morus said. The company liked what it found and paid promptly, critical to the beginning Gorge vineyards.

"All those formative years sucked us into growing more grapes," Morus said with a laugh. "It really helped us get established."

Morus said Wright also pressed for recognition of the Gorge within Oregon's wine industry.

"He's such a strong advocate for grapes in the Gorge," he said. "It was really a struggle to get the Oregon Wine Board to recognize people were growing grapes somewhere other than in the Willamette Valley."

"When they write the history of the Gorge, they'll need to talk about Lonnie."

The Basics & Effective Communication Strategies

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