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OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat; kick in the pants

A tip of the hat, and a pleasant ride off into history for Pendleton's Pioneer Ladies Club.

The venerable social club — which for generations was made up of women with ties to the initial European pioneers of the county — has disbanded after 98 years.

As the women found out, the way people socialize and share stories and feel a sense of community is changing rapidly, with much of it moving online for younger generations. Social clubs have had a hard go of it recently in Pendleton, as we're reminded of the closure of the long-running Elks Lodge as well.

But the Pioneer Ladies Club was one of a kind, and boasted a bevy of accomplishments. Those included writing and collating an important historical book, changing the name of Cabbage Hill to Emigrant Hill, and erecting benches and signs and marking grave sites to commemorate the early white pioneers of the area — many descendants of whom still live in the area.

Yet the scuttling of the club marks the end of an era, offering evidence that the line of that lineage has grown thin. Very few living here today can still connect their forebears to the Oregon Trail.

"There's no more pioneer women left," said member Dorys Grover.

A kick in the pants to the dreadful steelhead returns that are making their way up the Columbia Basin this year.

Most years, as many fish return over Bonneville Dam each day than have returned in all of July 2017. That's bad news for area anglers, but also area ecosystems.

We know most returns are cyclical, and there are good years and bad years. It's not good to get too caught up on one run, which can be susceptible to weather, ocean conditions and the vagaries of life on Earth. But the big picture is distressing for many who are looking at it.

There are no easy fixes anymore, when it comes to rehabilitating anadromous fish runs. The ocean is changing so dramatically, so many intertwined species are stressed and changing their habits and territory quicker than ever before, and habitat is continuing to degrade as more and more people move to Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.

There is a precipice out there — we're not sure where — where the decline in fish will be dramatic and disastrous.

If salmon and steelhead runs are going to continue in the Columbia Basin, it will become exponentially more expensive. Either that, or we will have to change the way we live in a significant way, which humanity has shown no sign of being willing to do.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of publisher Kathryn Brown, managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, and opinion page editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

Glimmer of hope in opioid battle

The Albany Democrat-Herald

New federal statistics released this month show, at long last, a glimmer of hope in the nation's battle against opioid addiction. But this latest news, while welcome, does not change the fact that we still face a long battle with the addiction adversary.

A new analysis by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that the amount of opioid painkillers prescribed in the United States peaked in 2010 and fell by 18 percent from 2010 to 2015.

In about three-quarters of the nation's counties, the amount of opioids prescribed has declined since 2010.

But that still leaves 23 percent of counties where the amount of opioids prescribed increased in that same time period.

Oregon followed the national numbers: The amount of opioid prescriptions dropped in most of the state's counties. But four counties, in rural areas of the state, posted increases in the prescriptions: Malheur, Morrow, Union and Wallowa.

For purposes of comparison, the CDC analysis looked at what it called per capita morphine milligram equivalents. Using that figure allows researchers to make meaningful comparisons that take stronger opioids into account. For example, hydrocodone is rated at a 1-to-1 ratio because it's about as potent as morphine. But stronger opioids such as oxycodone and methadone are rated at a higher ratio.

Not surprisingly, the Oregon counties with the highest amounts of opioid prescriptions tended to be in the state's more rural areas, which highlights one of the toughest issues in battling the addictions: They take a disproportionate toll in areas that often have the fewest resources for treatment. (And it's not a coincidence that many of these counties have economies that still are struggling, even as Oregon enjoys an

robust economic recovery. In fact, across the nation, counties with higher rates of opioid prescribing tend to have a higher percentage of white residents and more people who are uninsured, unemployed or disabled.)

The top Oregon county for prescribing opioids in 2015 was Curry, with 1,800 morphine milligram equivalents (MME) per person. Falling just outside the top five, landing at No. 6, was Lincoln County, with 1,539.5 MME per capita. That has an impact in the

mid-valley, because Lincoln County is one of the three counties served by the InterCommunity Health Network Coordinated Care Organization, which delivers health services to patients served by the Oregon Health Plan. (The national average in 2015 was 640 MME.)

Even though the overall news from the CDC was good, it still comes with some important asterisks: For starters, even though the rate of opioid prescriptions has been declining since 2010, it still remains three times as high as it was in 1999, when the addiction problem was just starting to gain traction.

But even in those areas, the numbers may still have a bit of a silver lining: Since the CDC analysis didn't go beyond 2015, it does not take into account the most recent guidelines from the agency on prescribing the drugs for chronic pain and new limits from states and insurers alike about how many pills doctors can prescribe. In other words, it's likely the decline documented in this analysis will continue in years to come.

Still, we're a long way from declaring victory over opioid addiction. As we noted in a recent editorial, most experts who have been following the horrifying human death toll from opioid overdoses expect that number to keep rising for at least a few more years.

But the CDC's analysis suggests that we're making progress against this drug scourge. Now is not the time to back away from this fight.

The amount of opioid prescriptions increased in four Oregon counties: Malheur, Morrow, Union and Wallowa.



Presidential



Modern Day Presidential



OTHER VIEWS

Television's wonderful women

I worship Charlize Theron, the "Atomic Blonde" trailer is a hoot, and I love the story she keeps sharing with interviewers about training so hard for the fight scenes that she cracked several teeth.

But please stop telling me that "Atomic Blonde," on the heels of "Wonder Woman," amounts to some hinge moment for movies, which are henceforth going to shower us with female action leads. I've heard that joke too many times before.

Let's talk instead about all the wonderful women — brawlers, bawlers, schemers, dreamers — on the small screen, a nickname that we have to retire because television is proving infinitely bigger in spirit and more in tune with the moment than most of the loud schlock shoveled into multiplexes.

And let's trade the usual, sadly necessary outrage about how poorly a given group of Americans is being represented for a hearty cheer about some heartening progress.

The Emmy nominations came out last week, and they affirmed not only that television is indeed enjoying a golden age but also that part of that is its juicy opportunities for female actors. In terms of gender parity, it puts corporate America, the Trump administration and the Senate to shame.

A Times television critic, James Poniewozik, pointed to the "murderers' row" of actresses nominated for best lead performance in a limited series: Jessica Lange and Susan Sarandon in "Feud: Bette and Joan," Reese Witherspoon and Nicole Kidman in "Big Little Lies," Carrie Coon in "Fargo" and Felicity Huffman in "American Crime."

Five of them are over 40. Two (Lange and Sarandon) are over 60, playing roles that speak expressly to sexist double standards and the derision women face if they do something as audacious as age in the limelight.

Yes, there's a negative spin on this: Why have Lange, Sarandon, Witherspoon and Kidman, all winners of the best actress Oscar, fled to television?

Also, the disproportionate crowd of men nominated in the writing and directing categories this year suggests that despite the recent successes of such female writers, directors and show runners as Shonda Rhimes ("Grey's Anatomy," "Scandal"), Lena Dunham ("Girls") and Jill Soloway ("Transparent," "I Love Dick"), women still don't get enough opportunities behind the camera.

But television is hardly a last-resort medium anymore. And what's happening in front of the camera really does warrant celebration.

Often, in the wake of Oscar nominations, there's talk about how tough it was to fill the five slots in the best actress category credibly. Emmy categories accommodate six or seven nominees, and the chatter this year focused on



FRANK BRUNI
Comment

how many deserving women couldn't be squeezed in. No Dunham for "Girls," no Oprah Winfrey for "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks," no Claire Danes for "Homeland" and no crime in any of that, because there was so much else that deserved — and got — recognition.

To compare the nominees for best supporting actor and best supporting actress in a comedy series is to be reminded that women rule the "Saturday Night Live" roost. From that show, only one recurring male performer, Alec Baldwin, got an acting nod, while three female performers — Kate McKinnon, Vanessa Bayer and Leslie Jones — did.

It's not just that actresses are giving television's greatest performances but that many of the top-tier shows — "The Handmaid's Tale," "Better Things" — tackle gender-related issues.

The most recent season of "House of Cards" was in some ways about the tricky algebra of effacement, assertion, subservience and ingenuity behind many women's paths to power. It ended (spoiler alert!)

with two triumphant words from Claire Underwood, played by Robin Wright, that pointedly evoked Hillary Clinton's 2016 campaign: "My turn."

There's a world of fascinating women and fierce actresses on television now. Britain, which long ago conjured the miracle of Helen Mirren in "Prime Suspect," recently tripled down with the messy, mesmerizing sleuths played by Sarah Lancashire in "Happy Valley," Gillian Anderson in "The Fall" and Anna Friel in "Marcella."

And finally, this week, the producers of the BBC series "Doctor Who" announced that the role of the Doctor, which has changed hands repeatedly over decades, would next be played by a woman, actress Jodie Whittaker. That's a first.

But to watch Lancashire in "Happy Valley," Lange in "Feud" or Viola Davis in "How to Get Away With Murder" isn't to applaud social justice. It's to savor phenomenal artistry. Television proves what has been observed about all walks of life: For the best talent, cast the net wide and don't ignore any of the available pools.

Theron long ago worked on a movie with Tom Hanks, who signed her script with words that, she told *Variety*, "I bet he's eating." They were these: "Promise me you'll never do television."

I want her to promise that she'll do lots of television. She'll get meatier parts that way, and might not even need dental work afterward.

Frank Bruni, an Op-Ed columnist for The New York Times since 2011, joined the newspaper in 1995. Over his years, he has worn a wide variety of hats, including chief restaurant critic and Rome bureau chief.

YOUR VIEWS

Veterans Administration medical care saves lives

I am in remission from cancer of the immune system. I am one of the lucky ones who has taken the six chemotherapy treatments and am now cancer free. The U.S. Veteran's Administration takes a lot of flak over problems within this vast bureaucracy. Upon diagnosis of this very aggressive Mantle C Lymphoma, I applied to the VA for help with payment for my cancer care. The Veteran's Choice rep assigned to my case went to bat for me and was successful in getting their high-powered committee to approve payment for all of my cancer care.

Without exaggerating, this saved my life — as each chemo treatment costs about \$30,000. With six treatments, doctor's bills, scan costs and hospital bills, the total is well over \$200,000.

In addition to this, my oncologist, Dr. Quackenbush, with the cancer center at Providence Hospital in Walla Walla, said my type of cancer nearly always comes back. He has recently placed me on what he calls a "maintenance chemo program" for the

next two years. Once again, the VA came to my rescue and approved payment for this extended care. So I think it is only fair to publicly thank the Veterans Administration for saving my life, because there is no way in the world I would have ever been able to pay this bill on my own (even with the help of Medicare).

In 2016 there were 1,685,210 new cases of cancer in the U.S. Of those, 595,690 died. About 40 percent of both men and women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with cancer at some point in their lives. Estimates say about \$895 billion is spent on cancer care and research every year now. There are about 200 different types of cancer that can be found in literally ever part of the body. A person doesn't have to do anything wrong to get it either. My oncologist told me my cancer was probably "just plain bad luck."

I am sure much of the many criticisms of the VA are well deserved, but before you jump on that bandwagon, remember my case. They saved my life — along with a lot of prayer, family support and good doctors.

David Burns
Pendleton

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