Bettineski keeps Round-Up moving behind the scenes

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

Rodeo fans are just starting to mill around the concourse late Saturday morning, but Jodi Bettineski is already thinking about the Pendleton Round-Up's end.

In the Round-Up offices, Jodi, her husband Chris, and two other volunteers are furiously stuffing duffel bags with the kind of swag that's typical of a Round-Up champion — cologne, belt buckles, hats, boots, a Pendleton Woolen Mills blanket, a bottle of Pendleton Whisky and more.

Simultaneously, Jodi and Chris are making last minute edits to a script announcer Wayne Brooks will read listing the sponsors and presenters when the winners of each rodeo event come to claim their prizes. If the wrong name is read or a name is mispronounced, there could be some upset people on the final day of the Round-Up.

Besides the unobtrusive presence of Brisa, a seeing-eye dog curled up near the corner of General Manager Casey Beard's office, the scene wouldn't look all that much different than any of the other 22 years Jodi volunteered for the Round-Up publicity office.

But a lot has changed for the Bettineski family in the past two years.

A degenerative eye disease forced Jodi to resign from her job as a physical education teacher at Pendleton High School and move her family to Kennewick to be closer to her daughter's gymnastics academy.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Jodi Bettineski and her guide dog Brisa stroll along the walkway of the South Grandstands on Saturday at the Pendleton Round-Up.

She also got Brisa four months ago and spent this week taking the dog to her first rodeo.

Jodi took Brisa to the southern grandstand box seats where she and Chris would be seated, removed one of the folding chairs and put a blanket down in its place.

Jodi sat near the dog during the military flyover and cannon shot at the grand entry to make sure Brisa stayed calm. But otherwise, Brisa slept through most of the rodeo despite the primo seats. Jodi's sight has deteriorated to a point that she's now legally blind. While she can still see through peripherals, much of her straight-ahead vision is gone.

Chris calls Jodi a good "faker," because she looks people in the eye when she talks and moves freely throughout confined spaces without needing assistance.

But when she needed to ask for help from others for previously basic things like operating the credit card machine at the checkout line at the grocery store, she felt dumb.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Jodi Bettineski holds a horse during an awards presentation at Saturday's Pendleton Round-Up.

Getting Brisa helped to ease the transition, giving Jodi more mobility from destination to destination and acting as an implicit signal to others about her condition.

"It gave her a new lease on life," Chris said.

After leaving the Pendleton School District, Jodi trained to become a masseuse and now runs a massage practice out of a chiropractor's office.

Although she misses connecting with kids, Jodi can draw from her degree in athletic training and many of her clients are enthralled with Brisa.

Jodi's job and new home mean she doesn't make it Pendleton as often as she used to, but that hasn't stopped her from returning to the Round-Up.

She and Chris spent most of Saturday's rodeo carefully curating the prize packages and trophies as each competition got under way, making sure each individual prize was placed with the right presenter for the winner's ceremony.

As each winner grinned for the photo op with the Round-Up and Happy Canyon courts, Jodi was usually outside the photographer's shot, sometimes arranging a horse for the next photo.

During one of the few chances Jodi got a chance to cheer, she cheered for a late tie in the calf roping competition to be broken. If there's a tie for the top spot, only one competitor can be given the prizes in person while the other is sent their prizes in the mail.

Jodi started in the media trailer as a 13-year-old, and within a few years, she was writing the scripts for the prize ceremonies.

Over the time she's volunteered with the Round-Up, the position has evolved from typewritten scripts and rodeo results sent through fax to the internet age that allows her to share results through social media.

Jodi used to occupy the media trailer from the Sunday before Round-Up until the tear down day the following Sunday, but her disease means she now readjusts her schedule.

She now does some of her script work from home and arrives to the Round-Up Grounds on Tuesday, sometimes feeling a sense of trepidation.

"I kind of feel like a foreigner ... but when I come back and get immersed, I feel like I'm home again," she said.

Chris said Jodi has been a volunteer at the Round-Up for so long that she's become a fixture.

"It's in her blood," he said.

Jodi doesn't know how much her eyesight will deteriorate in the future, but she anticipates she will always try to help at the Round-Up in some capacity and has a husband to help her do it.

"That's what (Chris) is for," she said.

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Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

IRRIGON

Residents tap into grants to improve their property

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

Driving through Irrigon, visitors might notice recent upgrades to houses and businesses around town. In the last year, several Irrigon residents have been beautifying their properties by using nearly $70,000 in funds from the Columbia River Enterprise Zone program.

The grant incentive program has several elements, including one that allows residents to apply for different types of grants to make improvements to their properties. The Columbia River Enterprise Zone II board decided in 2015 to focus on four key areas to improve Morrow County, including education, housing, safety and enhancement. Since 2016, Irrigon has received funds for enhancement and housing.

The goal of the program is to make the community more livable, said Irrigon City Manager Aaron Palmquist.

"A home or property in disrepair really affects the overall livability of the community," Palmquist said. "This gives people an opportunity."

The program's policy, available on the city of Irrigon website, states that in Feb. 2016, Irrigon received $140,000 from the enterprise zone board for enhancements, and voted to set aside $50,000 specifically for cleaning up and improving properties.

The program in Irrigon is two-pronged: outside property improvements and nuisance abatement. Residents can apply for a $2,000 grant to make an upgrade to their landscape, roof, or something on the facade of their home. Alternatively, they can apply for a grant to rent up to $1,000 of dumpster space to clean up their properties. Palmquist said about three 40 cubic-yard dumpsters cost around $1,000.

Photo contributed by Aaron Palmquist

A home in Irrigon receives some upgrades as a result of an enhancement program available to residents. At this home, owners put in a concrete walkway and steps.

There are rules applicants have to follow to receive the money, Palmquist said. They must present an expense plan to the committee, receipts upon completion, and before and after photos of the area of the home they for which they use the money. If they are contracting out the work, they must match 25 percent of the funds. If they are doing the work themselves, they must match the funds by 10 percent. They are given half the money up front, and reimbursed the rest after the project is completed.

Applicants are encouraged to make long term plans for their property.

"We're trying to stretch people to think about how they'll continue," Palmquist said. "They may not have the resources now, but at least this gets them on the road, thinking about the next step."

And he hopes those who apply will do so with a desire to improve the entire community.

"We want more than just, 'it'll increase my property value,'" he said.

According to the program policy, grant recipients are required to complete their projects within 15 days, but Palmquist said the city can work with people if they have circumstances that get in the way of completing the project on time.

The Enterprise Zone committee also looks at public projects that will enhance the community.

"One year we did hanging baskets and benches," Palmquist said. "This year, the city approved (funds) to put up a reader board. That all is Irrigon enhancement dollars. The council has the final say on how the money will be spent."

Palmquist said since Sept. 2016, 45 applications have been approved. The total amount awarded has been $69,060.91. Of the properties receiving grants, 43 are residential and two are businesses.

Gabriela Villarreal applied for the grant in August, and recently made upgrades to her home.

"We had a bunch of dirt in our driveway," she said. "We have a long driveway with a bunch of goat heads, and we don't have grass, it's hard to grow. So we laid sod and gravel down, and put a fence up around the property. We didn't have steps into the house, so we did a concrete walkway."

Villarreal said she heard about the program from her employer, and that she was eager to take advantage of the program.

"On my street, most of the houses have pretty yards. We needed to do something," she said. "The application was easy to fill out."

One of only two businesses to take advantage of the funds so far, Stokes Landing Bed and Breakfast received a fresh coat of paint in July.

"We learned of the grant and decided that now was a good time, so we painted the place," said owner Phyllis Danielson, who applied for the $2,000 enhancement grant.

Danielson said she learned of the grant through her association with the Irrigon Chamber of Commerce.

"Our neighbors also accessed the grant and replaced their fence, and made the place look better," she said. "And another put in sod."

Danielson said she hopes more people will take advantage, and that the program will improve the community.

"Our community as a whole is on the upswing in terms of the way it looks," she said. "But it's so hard to measure."

Palmquist said people can apply for the grant every five years and there is no income requirement.

"Right now, we're spreading it over five years so everybody gets a fair shot," he said. "It'll take a while to see."

BRIEFLY

Three men arrested after Irrigon burglary

IRRIGON — Three Irrigon men were arrested Monday hours after two were suspected of burglarizing a shop in town.

Jesus Concepcion Llamas, 35, Brandon Linn Wilson, 35, and Larry Dale Bush, 53, were lodged in the Umatilla County Jail.

At 5:43 a.m. on Monday, the Morrow County Sheriff's Office received a call about some suspicious activity on Wyoming Avenue in Irrigon. Deputy Todd Siex arrived on the scene within a few minutes and found the three men. Deputy Colleen Neubert and an officer from the Boardman Police Department assisted Siex.

Llamas was arrested for second-degree burglary, first-degree theft and a Lane County warrant for the same charges.

Wilson was arrested on charges of second-degree burglary, second-degree theft and for providing false information to the police. He also had three warrants from other counties. Two were from Lane County on charges of failure to appear, and one from Douglas County for parole violation on first-degree burglary and first-degree aggravated theft.

Bush was arrested on warrants from Oregon Parole and Probations Board for probation violation for possession of methamphetamine, and a Washington Department of Corrections warrant for escape/community custody.

Inmate dies Sunday at TRCI in Umatilla

UMATILLA — An inmate died Sunday morning at Two Rivers Correctional Institution in Umatilla.

Kenneth Allen had been making complaints to TRCI staff on Sunday, when he became unresponsive. Security and medical staff began making life-saving efforts, and Umatilla emergency medical technicians also arrived to help. Allen was pronounced dead at 11:09 a.m.

Allen entered Oregon Department of Corrections custody on Jan. 14, 2016, on three counts of theft and one count of possession of heroin in Jackson County. He was due to be released Dec. 22, 2017.

It was the fifth death at TRCI in 2016 and the 11th in Oregon Department of Corrections prisons, according to news releases from the agency.

Allen's next of kin have been notified. The Oregon State Police Criminal Investigation Division is following typical protocol and investigating the death, according to a news release from the prison.

SUBMIT COMMUNITY NEWS

Submit information to: community@eastoregonian.com or drop off to the attention of Tammy Malgesini at 333 E. Main St., Hermiston or Renee Struthers at 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. Call 541-564-4539 or 541-966-0818 with questions.

STANFIELD

Deyhdration plant eliminates potholes to reduce spills

East Oregonian

As the Stanfield City Council prepares to vote on a new nuisance ordinance Tuesday, 3D Idapro Solutions has finished the first of three planned improvements to reduce odors at its dehydration plant.

The plant, which turns raw potato waste from nearby food processors into material for dog food, has drawn complaints about a rotten-potato smell hanging over Stanfield all spring and summer.

The company has completed site grading that eliminated potholes and other uneven areas, according to a news release from the company. The improvement will help cut down on spills from the trucks and areas for those spills to collect.

The company is also working to enclose its receiving area by Oct. 15, and plans to have a new odor-reducing scrubber in place by Nov. 30. The plant's old scrubber was destroyed by a fire in February.

Kevin Anderson, 3D Idapro Solutions vice president, said in a statement that efforts the company has taken so far — including halting operations during National Night Out and high school football games — have lessened complaints, and the capital improvements should "significantly" reduce odors.

"This is just the first step, but it's a big one," he said of the grading project. "We want the community to know that we are working as hard as we can to fix the problem."

The Stanfield City Council, which meets at 7 p.m. Tuesday at 150 W. Coe Ave., will discuss amending the city's nuisance ordinance on Tuesday.

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