

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

So much to do, see in Eastern Oregon

When the sun breaks through the clouds, temperatures begin to rise and Daylight Savings Time gifts us extra hours of evening light, it's only human to get that itch under your feet. It compels you to throw open the doors and windows that have been battened down all winter long, to feel the breeze, to look out to the horizon and head on towards it.

Luckily Eastern Oregon offers plenty of opportunities to scratch that travel itch, be it on foot, on bike or in a vehicle. There are enough adventures to last a lifetime, but in today's paper we included enough to fill 2018. Our Discover Eastern Oregon magazine is inside.

There are lots of goodies in there, fun stories and photography. One of the region's major draws this year will be the 175th anniversary of the Oregon Trail. We list places you can trace the trail through our neighborhood, from Corral Springs outside Echo to Blue Mountain Crossing outside La Grande. Perhaps our area's best kept section of the trail is Flagstaff Hill outside Baker City, where seven miles of distinct ruts are clear and the National Historic Oregon

Trail Interpretive Center is nearby. If you haven't been to the area and interpretive center since your school days, perhaps a 175th anniversary is a good reason to return.

This year will also be special because Cycle Oregon returns to our wide open vistas and rolling byways. From Sept. 8-15 (yes, that's right in the heart of Round-Up Week), thousands of two-wheelers will navigate our country roads and plop down in our small towns. Stops include Baker City, Halfway, Wallowa Lake, Elgin, Pendleton and La Grande. For more info, read the magazine piece, and check out the elevation map to see it can be done.

And if you're more into the engine doing the work for you, there are plenty of events for motorcycles. Harleys arrive in droves to Pendleton each July for Bike Week, while changes are coming to the annual Nitro in the Blues festival. And if you want that engine to be of the animal variety, we've got rodeos aplenty to please your inner cowboy.

But Eastern Oregon remains a wild, wide-open place for all sorts of outdoor



The Corral Springs Oregon Trail site offers explorers a quarter-mile stretch of the original trail east of Echo. Staff photo by E.J. Harris

adventures.

Hopefully the magazine gives you some ideas for hitting the hills.

On Umatilla National Forest land, hike the 19-mile length of the South Fork Walla Walls Trail, or climb to the top of Nine Mile Ridge (it's only 6.8 miles!). We also document the joys of waterfowl hunting — few places in the West offer the wide variety of species and hunting environments that Eastern Oregon does.

You'll find golf courses and sno-parks galore, so no matter what time of year you arrive, there will be plenty to do. Or get out onto our beautiful rivers, with rafting or kayaking trips down the

Umatilla, Grande Ronde or John Day rivers.

But we're not just about roughing it outdoors here on the dry side. When visitors come, feel free to point them to our range of museums and historic sites, from the Round-Up Hall of Fame to Tamastlikt Cultural Institute.

And then wash it all down with our incredible breweries, wineries and distilleries.

It's fun to live in and document a place like ours. It behooves us to explore it, conserve it and celebrate it. So let's make a plan to discover Eastern Oregon this year, and help others discover it, too.



OTHER VIEWS

Welcome home Vietnam vets

By MITCH SPARKS
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Forty-five years ago, combat and combat support units withdrew from South Vietnam. This marked the beginning of the end of nearly two decades of direct U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia, but the social, cultural and psychological wounds of the Vietnam War still linger for those Americans who lived through it, and especially for the veterans who served during this turbulent time in our nation's history.

There are over 120,000 Vietnam-era veterans living in Oregon today, representing more than a third of our total veteran population. They represent the largest demographic and the true leaders in our veteran community.

And yet, too often and in too many ways, our Vietnam-era veterans remain invisible to the general public. Their incredible courage and remarkable achievements, both in Southeast Asia and here at home, too often go unrecognized. Their unique challenges and adversities too often go unacknowledged.

Young men and women returning from their service in Vietnam were not welcomed



This photo, found in the ODVA archives several years ago, depicts three unidentified service members and two apparent civilians holding a State of Oregon flag at the Tan Son Nhut Air Base in southern Vietnam.

home. They were shunned and ignored. They were not allowed to take their rightful place among America's heroes. They came home, not to the soldier's rest that they deserved, but to a new battlefield, one in which they would be forced to struggle for the respect and recognition they had rightfully earned.

It has taken generations for the fruits of their labor to be known, but today we stand as a proud and grateful nation, humbled by the valor and sacrifice of those who answered their nation's call — including the 58,000 U.S. service members who went to Vietnam and never came

home.

They did not make the decision to go to war; they went because their country asked them to. They kept the faith. They represented the best the United States of America had to offer and they fought for freedom, the mark of a true patriot. They put their lives on the line to help and save others.

We stand together to say now, what we should have done 45 years ago: "Thank you, and welcome home."

Mitch Sparks is a retired Navy veteran and director of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs.

OTHER VIEWS

Actually, you can fix stupid

Pope Francis opened the holiest week of the Christian calendar with an admonition to the generation that will own the 21st century. "Dear young people, you have it in you to shout," he said in his homily. "It is up to you not to keep quiet."

Other voices were more censorious. On "Fox & Friends," which provides President Donald Trump with a steady ration of half-truths and hatreds to fill an empty head and an empty schedule, a co-host had some advice for younger citizens just now learning how to use the wings of democracy.

"These 17-year-olds should go back to civics class," said Pete Hegseth, scowling at the March for Our Lives demonstrators.

Actually, civics class has come to them, in the form of a hail of bullets from a weapon of war that is legal because of a broken political system. They've been forced, by triage, to learn how to use the tools of democracy that were largely denied them by passive educators.

It's no secret that in the rush to produce adults who are adept at applying science and technology to modern life, we left them ill-trained in the basic duties of citizenship. Nearly a third of Americans cannot name a single branch of government, and almost 40 percent are unable to cite a right guaranteed by the First Amendment.

But it's not the kids who are the doofuses. "There's a big difference between being ignorant and being stupid," said Sonia Sotomayor, associate justice of the Supreme Court. She's been touring the country — 38 states so far — promoting civic competence among the young, a virtue that used to be a bedrock part of American education.

"No one is born a citizen," she said during a stopover in Seattle. "You have to be taught what that means."

The teaching, for a generation that has come of age since the 1999 Columbine massacre, for the 187,000 students who have experienced a shooting on campus during school since then, has been largely do-it-yourself.

Only a handful of states require proficiency in civics and government as a condition of graduation. The educational system, with its fear of confrontational topics and its corporate-driven emphasis on STEM, has failed them.

But one of the great surprises of the Trump era is the renaissance of civic engagement — at a level of urgency not seen in half a century. It's a reaction to severe stress on democracy; Trump is both the cause, and leading symptom, of that stress.

The awakening started with the revulsion of women — at a president who is credibly accused of sleeping with porn

stars while his wife nursed their newborn child and who bragged of sexual assault, and at his daily slights to truth, dignity and other values that mothers teach their children.

And now it's the young's turn. Critical thinking has arrived at a critical time. They're not afraid of trolls; they grew up with snark from a screen. So after Laura Ingraham at Fox taunted a Parkland shooting survivor for not getting into his college of choice, the student immediately tweeted out a list of her advertisers. When they threatened to bail, she apologized.

"These self-righteous kids screaming at you on television over the weekend aren't helping out at all," said Tucker Carlson, another Fox scold.

As he knows, they are helping — but just not his side. "First we march, then we vote," was a leading slogan of the demonstrations.

The problem is that Americans are among the least-active voters in developed countries — another consequence, I would argue, of not teaching the manual of democracy in school. And young people are the least likely to vote.

"Adults mess up a lot," Sotomayor told the high school kids in her audience in Seattle. "We don't have all the answers. We need you to come up with fresher and better ideas."

So today, these young people wonder why even the most obvious legislation, universal background checks on all gun purchases, can't pass in Congress despite support from 90 percent of the public. They learn quickly that it's because a single lobby owns the politicians. The obvious solution, which jaded political minds often forget, is to vote the bums out. It's not complicated.

And again, it shouldn't be a DIY thing. Let's teach people how to tell fake news from real news. They do this in Italy, and many universities in the United States have taken it up as well. It should be, like learning road signs before you can get a driver's license, one of the courses that everyone takes before getting out of high school.

Democracies die when citizens feel powerless. The biggest stress test will come if Trump fires special counsel Robert Mueller. Then, all the people new to the process will see what a constitutional crisis looks like. But thanks to recent, real-life lessons, they'll recognize it for what it is. And they won't feel powerless to do something about it.

Timothy Egan worked for 18 years as a writer for The New York Times, first as the Pacific Northwest correspondent, then as a national enterprise reporter.

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