

MALHEUR: County newspaper bucks a trend

Continued from 1C

when he took over the Cowboys," Caldwell recalled. "He said, 'We're going to turn this thing around. We're not going to be a sleepy weekly. We're going to be a powerhouse.'"

Caldwell remembers feeling a tad dubious, but willing to follow the lead of his new boss. No rookie, Caldwell has more than 20 years of experience as reporter, editor and combat correspondent who was published all over the world. The 51-year-old had been working as a successful freelancer when he was invited to fill in after the paper's only reporter at the time, John Braese, fell gravely ill. When Braese returned months later, Caldwell was offered a full-time job. He embraced it as a way to learn at the knee of a two-time Pulitzer finalist.

"From the very beginning he said to us, 'We're going to be the best there ever was,'" Caldwell said. "We needed to get on board. So we did."

Caldwell remembers turning in stories "that would have flown anywhere else" and getting them handed back.

"The first three months were the equivalent of basic training," he said. "I've learned more in a year and a half under Les than I've learned in my entire career."

In early 2017, the news team uncovered a story of a man who had faked insanity to avoid prison for kidnapping. After release from the Oregon State Hospital (despite reservations by a state psychiatrist), Anthony Montwheeler kidnapped and stabbed his ex-wife to death in his pickup. A Vale man died in a collision during the police pursuit of Montwheeler. In the course of the *Enterprise* investigation, Zaitz pressed the state psychiatric board to provide 218 exhibits presented at Montwheeler's Psychiatric Security Review Board evaluation hearing. Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum ordered the release of records. But instead of providing them, the board sued the *Enterprise*, which responded by crowdsourcing the \$20,000 needed for defense and hiring an attorney. The board relented after Gov. Kate Brown argued "no one requesting public records should be at risk of being sued by a state agency."

Zaitz encapsulated several months of investigation into the story, "Deadly Decisions." Investigative Reporters and Editors this month awarded its FOI (freedom of information) Award to the *Enterprise* team of Zaitz, Braese and Caldwell. The honor marked the first time in the 20-year history of the award that the national news organization honored a community newspaper.

As another perk of the paper's investigative success, Pro Publica is financing a full-time reporter for a year, so the team can ramp up its investigations. The arrival of Jayme Fraser bumps the number of reporters to three.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The *Malheur Enterprise* is a small weekly newspaper located in agricultural town of Vale west of Ontario.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Les Zaitz had planned on retiring from *The Oregonian* to his ranch outside of John Day before he and his wife, Scotta Callister, bought the weekly newspaper the *Malheur Enterprise*, in Vale.

Braese, the only holdover from the previous owner, marvels at the metamorphosis of the *Enterprise*. He remembers the days he shared a tiny hallway-shaped space in a former Idaho Power pay station with three staff members.

"Basically four of us were within 10 feet of each other. You could reach out and touch everybody," Braese said. "There were times I'd announce I have a phone interview to do and please everybody be quiet for the next 10 minutes."

Braese did the best he could, Zaitz said, covering sports, attending meetings, rewriting press releases and keeping in contact with the Tacoma-based former music critic that owned the paper at the time. But it was a

losing battle.

These days, based out of a bigger building, the reporters don't waste time covering meetings, rather developing their sources enough to know in advance what may happen. They concentrate on stories about issues, such as a recent series on the foster care system.

"It's truly amazing in an era where we see dailies cutting staff and reports of massive layoffs at this paper or that paper that a weekly in such a small area has taken such a new direction in newspapers and is not only remaining stable, but actually expanding," Braese said. "Truthfully, we're the model that maybe the *Post* and the *Times* might be looking at, rather than laying off

and hoping it gets better down the road."

The *Enterprise* strategy seems to be working. The newspaper is nimble enough to pivot quickly if readers respond negatively to something.

"I wondered if we could be in some small way an inspiration for others to not give up," Zaitz said. "Yeah, newspapers are losing resources, but good Lord, if I can do it in Vale, then you can't come to me and complain you don't have enough resources in Pendleton, Bend, Cinnati, Orlando."

Overseeing it all is Zaitz, who keeps his reporters cranking. The first thing Caldwell does when he gets up every morning is check his email for messages from Zaitz, some sent hours earlier.

"I don't want to say he's like a mad scientist, but he's got these ideas coming all the time," Caldwell said. "He'll be like, you know that guy did this and I bet it's connected to this and we need to call these people and those people."

Zaitz may retire — someday. He admitted that if he won the state lottery, he might use it to buy more newspapers. His wife doesn't expect him full-time at the ranch any time soon.

"It's been a great ride for him," Callister said. "He loves a challenge and he's having so much fun. He's not good at retirement."

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The *Malheur Enterprise* newsroom, from left, Pat Caldwell, John Braese, Jayme Fraser and Les Zaitz discuss the merits of a story involving Facebook on Monday in Vale.

Wine and waterfalls in the Columbia River Gorge

By SALLY CARPENTER HALE
Associated Press

HOODRIVER — The Columbia River Gorge is a marvel of nature known for spectacular waterfalls, scenery and hiking. But it's also famous in the world of wine.

The region's geology has given rise to a wine industry that's growing in both number and reputation, with more than 40 wineries within a 40-mile stretch. In 2004, the Columbia Gorge was designated an American Viticultural Area, a wine grape region distinguished by geographic features.

Here's a look at the gorge, the wine region and wineries, along with what visitors need to know about the wildfire that made headlines last year.

The Gorge, the falls and the fire

The gorge is an 80-mile-long canyon with dozens of waterfalls spilling down towering cliffs. The most famous is Multnomah Falls, 620 feet high.

The Columbia River cuts through the gorge on its way to the Pacific Ocean, forming the boundary between Oregon and Washington through the Cascade Range mountains north of Mount Hood and past heavily forested hillsides and huge boulders.

Interstate 84 on the Oregon

side of the river and Highway 14 on the Washington side offer easy access to trailheads, viewpoints and rugged parks. The windy gorge is also a favorite spot for wind- and kite-surfers.

A wildfire burned more than 20,000 acres of the gorge last fall. But little evidence of it can be seen from the road, aside from a very few scorched trees cut down just east of Multnomah Falls. The lower viewing platform at the falls has reopened, though the trail to the upper platform remains closed. Elsewhere, Horsetail and Wahkeena Falls are also closed and not expected to reopen until at least this summer, but others like Latourell Falls are open. An updated list of the status of hiking trails and recreational areas can be found here: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recremain/crgnsa/recreation>.

The wine region

Many of the wineries are clustered around Hood River, an hour east of Portland. Wine tasting in the region is a relaxing contrast to the Willamette Valley south of Portland, where traffic and crowded tasting rooms can detract from the experience. Tasting fees are comparable, \$10-\$15 per person.

Wine tasting was our mission one day while in Portland for a reunion show by my husband Rick's rock band. We rented a party bus and



AP Photo/Sally Carpenter Hale

Oregon's Columbia River Gorge is known for spectacular waterfalls but it's also famous for wine, with more than 40 wineries in 40 miles, including Cathedral Ridge Winery (above). The Columbia Gorge is a designated American Viticultural Area, a wine grape region distinguished by geographic features.

filled it with 16 people — college buddies from around the country and local friends and family.

With a soundtrack of classic garage rock, we headed across the Columbia and east on Highway 14, past Wind Mountain, Dog Mountain — known for its spring wildflowers — and Beacon Rock State Park. We saw the Bonneville Dam, which generates enough electricity to power half a million homes. We passed the Bridge of the Gods, a steel truss cantilever bridge that leads to Cascade Locks, Oregon.

Nearby Stevenson, Washington, is home to Skamania Lodge, a resort that features 254 guest rooms, two restaurants, a golf course, an outdoor zipline and aerial park, and onsite hiking trails. Stevenson also offers many restaurants and watering holes, such as the Walking Man Brewery, to those just passing through.

Deeper into the gorge, we passed through White Salmon, Washington, a popular spot for whitewater rafting and kayaking on the White Salmon River. Whimsical street art and restaurants line

its tiny main street, including the Everybody's Brewing pub, with an outside deck and a view of Mount Hood across the river in Oregon.

The wineries

At COR Cellars, in Lyle, Washington, we were treated to a lovely view of Mount Hood. The winery, founded in 2003 by Luke Bradford, produces 10 wines just west of the boundary between the Columbia Gorge and Columbia Valley AVAs, and uses grapes from both regions.

COR has won acclaim for its cabernet franc, malbec, cabernet franc rose and Alba white, a blend of gewurztraminer and pinot gris. We especially liked the 2015 cab franc. Picnicking is welcome in the courtyard garden.

Next, we headed back west and crossed the Columbia to Hood River for lunch. The town has a huge beer scene — Full Sail, pFriem and Double Mountain among the breweries — but that tour would have to wait for another day. We settled in at Solstice Wood Fire Cafe and sampled some unusual and delicious pizzas, including a cherry and chorizo pie and one made with local cremini mushrooms.

Of Hood River's 15 wineries, we chose two: Viento Wines and Cathedral Ridge Winery. Viento's winemaker, Rich Cushman, is a Hood River native who founded the winery in 2007.