

RELAY: Racers compete for a chance to qualify for championship in Walla Walla

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This year, she worked with Calvin Ghost Bear, the president of the Horse Nations Indian Relay Council and a member of the Oglala Lakota tribe in South Dakota, to accredit the Round-Up as a qualifier for the Walla Walla championship.

In its second year, Ghost Bear said the council’s goal is to promote Indian relay by creating a unifying league.

“We realize that’s it’s not easy to do,” he said.

The problem is that all of the top relay races are spread across the Northwest and Midwest. With a season that stretches from May through September, Indian relays take place in Auburn, Washington, Shakopee, Minnesota, and everywhere in between.

Ghost Bear said the council held the first Championship of Champions in Gillette, Wyoming, but realizing it was quite a haul for Northwestern tribes, the council moved the 2018 championship to Walla Walla.

For the rodeo’s part, Round-Up Competitive Events Director Nick Sirovatka said he considered the council’s effort similar to the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association’s



Umatilla Express rider JonMarc Skunkcap, in purple, goes neck and neck with Arrow Lakes Express rider Terrence Holford during the third heat of the Indian relay races Thursday at the Pendleton Round-Up.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

efforts to organize rodeo. While Umatilla Express now has a chance to compete in a town named after one of its tribes, none of the team members actually come from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla

Indian Reservation. James Tone and his sons are from the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes in Idaho and horse caretaker D.L. Shakespeare is a member of the Northern Arapaho Tribe in Wyoming.

Minthorn said she knew the Tones for many years and when she needed riders, she called on them to join forces with Umatilla Express. Down a horse on their team, the Tones agreed and have been racing under the Umatilla Express banner since July.

Although he and his family comes from different tribes, he thinks it’s a symbol of Native American unity that the team is comprised of different tribes.

Shakespeare was excited when he heard that the Tones would be joining Umatilla Express, pointing to the Tone family’s legendary reputation on the relay racing circuit.

Even if the team doesn’t win the finals, Minthorn said the current iteration of the Umatilla Express will race in Walla Walla to get a chance at being crowned the second champion of champions.

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HUB: “You get a totally different appreciation for what people are facing”

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Oregon native, University of Oregon alum and former county commissioner.

Their political careers brought them together as allies and friends. And Round-Up brought them to Eastern Oregon.

The Round-Up brings ’em from all over the state. For a few days every year, Pendleton is not just home to one of the biggest outdoor rodeos, the town becomes Oregon’s political and cultural hub.

Plenty of communities in Oregon have festivals and events. But Pendleton developed the infrastructure to host the Round-Up throng, from the stadium and arena to the multitude of hotels and restaurants. But Steiner Hayward said the draw goes deeper:

“I think the Round-Up speaks to Oregon history better than any other event.”

And coming here, she said, is “an opportunity to connect with the part of the state we don’t get to connect to very much.”

That “we” means folks from the Willamette Valley and Portland-metro area. Steiner Hayward said she is big on meeting people where they are.

“You get a totally different appreciation for what people are facing,” she said. “There’s stuff we can learn from each other. To think the Valley has all the answers is hokey.”

Steiner Hayward is not a total newbie to Eastern Oregon. She did 10 weeks of a medical residency in John Day and eight more in Pendleton. She was a member of the Senate Committee On Health Care that toured the state last year, including Morrow County, where she met Lindsay and county commissioners. Hansell aims to expand her experiences with an agenda that includes a swing through Wallowa County, judging the Jr. Indian Pageant and the VFW’s Cowboy Breakfast.

Hansell called Round-Up the magnet that helps bridge the notorious rural-urban divide.

That magnet draws Oregon university presidents and state politicians of all stripes. They have become regulars in the Friday morning Westward Ho! Parade through downtown Pendleton. Steiner Hayward will ride with Hansell and his wife, Margaret. Republican Rep. Greg Barreto of Cove will be there. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown and her Republican challenger Knute Bue-



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward of Portland, right, shops for western-style pants with Kimberly Lindsay, mother of Round-Up Princess Kaelyn Lindsay, on Tuesday at D&B Supply in Pendleton.

hler are in the parade. Jamie McLeod-Skinner will be on horseback. She’s the Democrat looking to oust Republican Greg Walden as U.S. representative for the 2nd Congressional District. Walden is not in this year’s parade.

Mike Thorne, a former Round-Up board member, state senator from Pendleton and Port of Portland director, said the Round-Up is increasingly vital to Pendleton’s economic future and has grown beyond a mere local event.

“You talk to anybody in the state about big events, and the Pendleton Round-Up gets on everyone’s schedule or agenda or bucket list,” he said.

The Urban League of Portland put Round-Up on its list three years ago. Members of the 73-year-old African-American service, civil rights and advocacy organization will participate in the Westward Ho!

Urban League President and CEO Nkenge Harmon Johnson said she attended Round-Up with her family as a child, then years later she and her husband attended with friends. When she became president of the Urban League in 2015, the organization published the “State of Black Oregon,” she said, and that created “an opportunity with the public to highlight the vibrant past, present and future of Black people in Oregon,” such as the stories of cowboy George Fletcher and businessmen Leon Ransom.

“So we decided to Let ’er Buck,” Harmon Johnson said, “and add our own touch to this fun, cultural tradition.”

The visits also helped the Urban League move forward with more advocacy

and engagement in Pendleton and elsewhere in Eastern Oregon.

“We are increasing the visibility of sometimes overlooked communities with lawmakers and service providers,” Harmon Johnson continued. “Beyond that, the Urban League is also signaling that events like the Pendleton Round-Up, and Ore-

gon State Fair for example, are not only fun but safe, welcoming options for Black families to enjoy. Given the tense, scary, and sometimes dangerous incidents that are too often directed at Black people and other people of color, we understand that our presence is a powerful signal.”

Many people would love

to come to the rodeo or other events in the area, she stated, but the Urban League and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation are the two organizations she knew of that are driving a concerted effort to make these events more inclusive.

Real estate mogul and art aficionado Jordan Schnitzer said he has been coming to Round-Up “37-38 years now” and each year enjoys bringing people “who don’t know anything about the way of life in Eastern Oregon.” He said the value of the Round-Up is the window it opens to something gone from many places.

Pendleton’s children work with other children during Round-Up, he said,

they work under the guidance of adults who are not their parents, and they see adults working together to make Round-Up a benefit for the community.

“And that’s an expectation and that’s a critical thing that I think many of us that come and see the Round-Up recognize and admire,” Schnitzer said. “But it certainly is lost in the bigger cities.”

For Hansell and Steiner Hayward, the Round-Up helps cement their friendship. He also pointed out crossing the urban-rural divide requires two.

“It’s not just they come here, someone needs to invite them,” he said. “You invite, you set up a forum to make it worth their time to come.”



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