

Cossacks: Defying death on motorcycles at Pendleton Bike Week

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said, shrugging.

On Friday afternoon, the Wrights and the Seattle Cossacks returned to Pendleton Bike Week and ignited a weekend full of stunts, human pyramids and maneuvers on 1930s- and 1940s-style Harley-Davidsons throughout the Pendleton Convention Center parking lot.

The Cossacks were originally formed in 1938 and named after a Russian cavalry that was famous for its horsemanship. Now, the group consists of 14 active members that perform 20 to 30 shows around the country each year.

George is just the latest member of the Wright family to become a part of the group's stunt and drill shows. Jimi Wright's grandfather, father and uncle were also members of the team. Jimi joined along with his brother in the 1970s.

George's three brothers, including Cole Wright and Brayden Laukala who are also performing this weekend, are also members.

Now an apprentice on the team, George rode along on the back of the bikes, fulfill-



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

A member of the Seattle Cossacks Motorcycle Stunt and Drill Team jumps over another pair of team members during a performance at the Pendleton Convention Center Friday afternoon.

ing his role as a "top man" and climbing atop the group's three-body-high human pyramid with three bikes as the base. As he rose to the top, his arms stretched high into the sky, arms locked with two others beside him as dozens of people sat around to watch.

Still without his license or motorcycle endorsement at just 15 years old and easily one of the smallest on the older and experienced team,

George will have to wait to drive in shows until he's been accepted as a full-time member.

But given his family's history, being a Seattle Cossack always seemed like a forgone conclusion.

"We always knew we'd be a part of the team," Cole said. "We grew up going to and watching the shows, so we've always wanted to be a part of them."

Jimi Wright doesn't shy away from bringing their family dynamic to the show.

One of the team's stunts includes propping a plank of wood up on one of its members as a couple of others lie down perpendicular to the ramp. Then, a rider revs his bike up and off the ramp, jumping over the other members.

As the team arranged for the stunt on Friday, Jimi



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Members of the Seattle Cossacks Motorcycle Stunt and Drill Team perform at the Pendleton Convention Center Friday afternoon. The performance was one of five that took place as a part of Pendleton Bike Week.

Wright got onto his bike while George and the others positioned themselves on the asphalt, the plank leaning against George's stomach.

"You're going to run over your own son?" one of the members called from the center of the lot as Jimi started his bike.

"I've been waiting for this for years," Jimi said, chuckling to the crowd and riding over to the front of the makeshift straightaway.

Revvng his engine, Jimi began burning out his tires on the asphalt to build the tension before speeding toward George and the ramp only to

pull away several feet before going over it.

As the crowd laughed, the Cossacks repositioned themselves with some larger members below the plank this time so that Jimi could actually complete the jump.

With their jump and other stunts completed, the entire team rode around the edges of the lot to give every member of the crowd a high five before settling into a line. As they took off their caps and tipped them to the crowd, the Seattle Cossacks were greeted with cheers and applause for the show that's been generations in the making.

Guns: Similar bill withdrawn last year

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back the storage requirements as a standalone proposal.

Initiative Petition 40 would require that gun owners store their guns with a cable or trigger lock engaged, or in a secure container with a tamper-resistant lock. Specifications for the container would be established by the state's health agency.

Generally speaking, the petition's provisions would only be felt by gun owners after it became evident that a gun wasn't stored to the specifications in the measure: For example, if a child obtained a gun that was not securely stored, and got hurt, the gun owner would be held liable.

Under the measure, a gun owner would be expected to report lost or stolen guns to police within 24 hours of learning of the loss or theft.

The measure wouldn't mean that police would go proactively into homes to check that guns are stored safely.

Henry Wessinger, who filed the petition in person Thursday, believes the bill can pass if it is its own bill in the short legislative session next year.

"While we were disappointed that we didn't get safe storage passed in 2019, we're not discouraged," Wessinger said, "Because we think that we've built a really strong base of support, and are well positioned for passing it in the 2020 short session."

Oregon lawmakers have a roughly five-month-long session in odd-numbered years, and meet for up to 35 days in even-num-

bered years.

Safe storage is the House's top gun safety priority in 2020, a spokesman for House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, said in an email to the Oregon Capital Bureau.

Proposing the ballot initiative is a sort of insurance policy — a backup plan in case lawmakers don't pass a safe storage bill in the 2020 session.

In order for the measure to pass next year, it will have to gain support from a majority of representatives and senators in each chamber.

Democrats hold comfortable majorities in each chamber, but not all of them have supported stricter gun laws in the past.

Wessinger believes the bill can get enough support.

He maintains a good share of Oregonians support the proposal, and that it's not a partisan issue.

When petitioners attempted to get a similar measure on the ballot last year, they commissioned a poll from Patinkin Research Strategies that showed 65% of respondents would have supported a measure "requiring firearms be locked up when they are not being used and requiring the reporting of lost or stolen guns."

Senate Republican Leader Herman Baertschiger Jr., of Grants Pass, said Thursday that he had not had a chance to review the initiative petition, but there is a possibility he could support some kind of safe storage bill.

"I certainly don't know what they would look like," Baertschiger said.

Baertschiger said he

believes more education would help keep children safe from accessing guns.

"I grew up around guns in our household, and kids were taught, 'Don't touch guns,' period," Baertschiger said. "No problem. When you were a kid, and you see a gun, you knew, don't touch it. ... I think we've lost some of that in our households ... we're not going to let our 6-year-old go out and run a chain saw, are we? Why would we let him have access to a gun?"

The National Rifle Association would likely oppose another storage bill, according to Roger Beyer, an Oregon lobbyist for the group.

The NRA opposed Senate Bill 978, the overall gun control bill.

That bill contained the safe storage provisions, with some key differences from the petition.

For instance, SB 978 contained criminal penalties for the gun owner if a minor obtained a firearm unlawfully, and the minor killed or injured someone, a provision that petitioners have removed from IP 40.

"We feel very strongly that we'd like to use a seat belt model of changing behavior," Wessinger said. "The goal is not to penalize gun owners."

Most Oregon gun owners store their guns in ways that align with the petition, Wessinger said. His goal is to encourage the remainder to do so.

Supporters must gather 1,000 sponsorship signatures to get ballot language approved to circulate Initiative Petition 40.

The petition then needs 112,020 signatures to get onto Oregonians' ballots next November.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Angela Walken stands in front of her Southwest Court Avenue vacation rental. Walken rents out her house through a variety of services such as Airbnb to both short-term and long-term renters.

Airbnb: Property owners must comply

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Carter said the problem is that many Airbnb operators either don't know they need to pay a lodging tax or assume Airbnb is already collecting the lodging tax on their behalf.

Although Airbnb has deals with some Oregon cities and counties to act as a tax collector, it doesn't have an agreement with Pendleton.

Carter said the lack of tax collection coordination isn't just restricted to vacation rental website, but also extends to third-party online booking services, which is increasingly becoming the way many travelers arrange for lodging.

The city assesses two different taxes on travelers who stay the night in Pendleton: an 8% lodging room tax and a \$1.50-per-night tourism promotion assessment charge.

The majority of the money generated from those two taxes goes toward the Pendleton Convention Center and the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce.

With Oregon charging its

own lodging taxes, the state has been discussing the issue of tax collection with Airbnb for years.

In 2018, the Legislature passed a bill that gave local governments the ability to collect taxes from Airbnb and other travel intermediaries.

Once the letter went out, the need to collect their own taxes came as a surprise to a couple of Airbnb operators.

Andre Rauch and his wife are currently based in the Portland area, but they recently bought a home on the North Hill to be closer to his family's wheat farms in the Pendleton and Lexington areas.

The house has operated as an Airbnb for the past six months as the couple plans its eventual move back, and Rauch said it would probably be booked every day if he didn't block out time for personal use.

Rauch said his vacation rental has found an audience with people looking to find a meet-up destination between the Northwest epicenters of Portland, Spokane and Boise.

Angela Walken has also

found her Southwest Court Avenue Airbnb, which goes by the "The Court House," to be very popular.

"It's been as busy as I can handle," she said.

Walken splits her time between Eugene and Pendleton, and her entry into vacation rental sprung out of curiosity over whether she could take advantage of her property's proximity to the downtown area and the Round-Up grounds.

The Court House does host guests for big events like the recent Pendleton Whisky Music Fest, but Walken said it also attracts people looking to stay in town months at a time.

Although both Walker and Rauch are now complying with the city's lodging tax laws, they both said it would be easier if Airbnb collected the taxes for them.

Carter said the city is working on drafting a law that would require Airbnb to collect taxes on the city's behalf to address this issue.

Airbnb did not respond to a request for comment as of press time.

Marijuana: Kind Leaf trying to bring in more tourists with billboards

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"This is by far the most organized one, in my opinion," Jake said. "A lot more professional, I have to say, compared to the other ones I've been to on the coast."

That's the kind of praise Kind Leaf owner Brandon Krenzler aims to achieve. The store has 300 to 500 customers a day, he said, and 70% — roughly 100,000 customers a year — are from out of the area. Those numbers spiked with the festival.

"We saw double the number of people we see in a normal Friday," he said. "That was the best Whisky Fest Friday we've seen."

Kind Leaf's claim to

fame is its stock of variety — 160 strains of marijuana and close to 3,000 cannabis products in the store. Staffers said as many as 25 customers shopped at any given time on the Saturday of the festival, with 10 or more waiting to pass through the door to the interior. The store sold 284 marijuana cartridges for vaporizer pens, a large amount for any day, and so many "pre-rolls" — joints — they could not count them all Saturday night. Krenzler added he had no doubt the two marijuana stores in town also experienced an uptick with the festival.

Staff at Pendleton Cannabis estimated 35% of its customers are people from

outside Pendleton. The business had a boost during the music fest but also benefits year-round from its location on Southgate/Highway 395 near the Interstate 84 interchange at milepost 209.

Kristen Dollarhide is the tourism and hospitality coordinator for Travel Pendleton, the tourism arm of the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce (Kind Leaf, Pendleton Cannabis and the *East Oregonian* are chamber members). She said she would not be surprised if Krenzler's 100,000 visitors was correct.

"There is a piece of touring that does belong to marijuana," she said.

People come from Idaho to visit Pendleton's dispen-

saries, she said, and the local stores likely draw residents from neighboring Union County, while Huntington's successful marijuana store pulls in people from Baker County and the like. She also said the "Oregon 2017 Regional Visitor Report Eastern Region" from the travel industry research firm Longwoods International included marijuana tourism for the first time (voters legalized recreational marijuana in 2014), and placed it under the list of "activities of special interest."

Oregon's eastern region totaled 2.5 million overnight trips, according to the report. About 5% of those were for business, 42% to

visit friends or family, and 53%, or 1.3 million, were marketable trips, that is, leisure trips. And 42% of those trips visited historic places, topping the special interest list. But 7% of the trips included marijuana tourism. That was higher than agritourism (6%), traveling with grandchildren (6%) and going to weddings (5%).

Visitors on marketable trips spent an average of \$95 a day, including \$39 for lodging, \$20 for food and \$10 for sightseeing and entertainment.

Dollarhide said a couple of people at trade shows have asked about cannabis tours, but that's not on her radar. Such tours could happen in bigger cities with

legal pot, she said, but Eastern Oregon's open spaces provide a problem because no one wants people driving high.

Krenzler is trying to bring in more tourists. Kind Leaf put up an advertising billboard along Interstate 84 west of Baker City urging travelers to come to Pendleton and a second billboard near I-83 exit 213 welcoming them to town. Krenzler said the goal is to grow tourism beyond relying on the annual Pendleton Round-Up to buoy the local economy, and marijuana is one more draw to the area.

"Instead of surviving on one week of tourism a year," he said, "we're helping with year-long tourism."