

A golden weekend

A 'healing' visit to Walla Walla for Stella the goldendoodle

By JEDIDIAH MAYNES
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — The "town so nice they named it twice" truly was twice as nice for Stella the dog.

Stella, a goldendoodle from Anacortes, Washington, got to visit Walla Walla, Washington, recently while taking a break from cancer treatments at Washington State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital.

It was a golden weekend in September when Stella came with her family. Lisa Strandberg, who's had Stella for 10 years, wasn't in the greatest of spirits before the visit. In July, Stella had been diagnosed with "very aggressive cancer" in her face — a tumor above her eye that was the "size of a golf ball."

Strandberg's veterinarian told her to take Stella to the WSU hospital, renowned for its work.

So Stella was spending five days a week at the hospital and getting "breaks" on the weekends.

"It was a pretty major surgery," Strandberg said. "Her whole face and radiation and everything. Just like a human."

Strandberg and her partner, Patrick Neri, made the four-hour trek across the state one weekend to visit Stella and opted to take a detour to Walla Walla, a place Strandberg became familiar with on previous visits with friends.

But this visit would be different. Little did Strandberg know how different it would be, and in a good way.

"It was all about (Stella) and where she was gonna be comfortable," Strandberg said. "It ended up being even more relaxing in so many ways."

They called ahead of time and asked some wineries if it was OK to bring Stella. Not only did they welcome Stella, they invited the dog to run free through the vineyards.

"They would say, 'Oh, go sit out in the grass and let your dog run through the vines,'" Strandberg said with a laugh of disbelief. "I mean, where else can you get that?"

"If I were to come back as a vineyard dog, that's how I'd wanna come back. That's the life, let me tell you, and she got to live it for a weekend."

The goldendoodle got to gallop alongside the grapes at Rasa Vineyards, Woodward Canyon and Tero Estates, to name a few.

And then there was the bacon — Bacon & Eggs, to be specific.

The well-known breakfast spot on East Main Street was recommended by staff at the Visit Walla Walla downtown information kiosk. The



Walla Walla Union-Bulletin/Contributed Photo
Stella the goldendoodle cuddles with her stuffed toy, gifted by the staff at Bacon & Eggs of Walla Walla, Wash.



Walla Walla Union-Bulletin/Contributed Photo
Staff members and owners at Bacon & Eggs hang out with Stella the goldendoodle. Back row, left to right: Michelle Giannunzio, Kylie Woody and Michelle Adams. Front row: Dawn Olsen with Stella.

restaurant staff took note immediately of Stella as she came with Strandberg and Neri.

The three got settled on the dog-friendly patio and Stella was treated to water, bacon and affection.

"They were so nice, like, incredibly nice," Bacon & Eggs co-owner Michelle Adams said of Strandberg and Neri. "It really was mostly two of my employees who just connected. I know it really meant a lot to them."

Dawn Olsen, a server, and co-worker Kylie Woody immediately grew fond of Stella.

"I'm just a huge dog person," Olsen said. She said she gets playful with basically every dog that comes to the patio.

Olsen heard Stella's story and was compelled to do more.

"The whole story just really touched my heart," Olsen said.

Strandberg and Neri said they'd be coming back the next day for more breakfast, so Olsen hatched a plan and Woody got on board.

After leaving the restaurant that morning, the couple got to see a full day of Stella running free, soaking

in the September sunshine and shunning any sickness or sadness.

Good on their word, Strandberg and Neri returned to Bacon & Eggs the next morning. They expected more good food and perhaps more bacon for Stella. They received much more than that.

"Their kindness, it brings me to tears," Strandberg said, pausing to reflect on the moment.

Stella was presented with a bedazzled collar, made by Woody, that read "I beat cancer." Gifts also included a new stuffed animal, some of Stella's favorite treats and even some canine-approved CBD treatments to help relieve the pain of the tumor and surgery.

Then Adams, along with wife and co-owner Michelle Giannunzio and the rest of the staff, offered their meal for free.

"If you own a restaurant, (I think) you should do kind things that you can financially handle doing," Adams said.

Strandberg, knowing how hard hit restaurants are right now during COVID-19-related restrictions, could hardly believe it.

"I couldn't stop crying, overwhelmed with this kindness," Strandberg said. "This girl, Dawn, works two jobs and she was going to be working late that night."

Strandberg, Neri and Stella left the Walla Walla Valley overwhelmed by the kindness of its people. When Stella returned to WSU, the students at the school told Strandberg that Stella had a spring in her step.

"You can just tell they have a really cool vibe," Strandberg said of the staff. "They've just got something going on and we ran into that a lot in Walla Walla, which was a surprise."

"There's something you've done over there to keep your businesses alive; it really shows a community effort and that was surprising to us."

Two months later, not everything is quite a happy ending yet.

After being given the all-clear on Stella's cancer, the family found a new growth on her.

Meanwhile, Bacon & Eggs has been closed entirely for a few weeks because of the latest pandemic shutdown. Adams said they've been selling rum cakes to meet rent this month.

But the memory of the experience lingers, like a streak of blue sky on gray day.

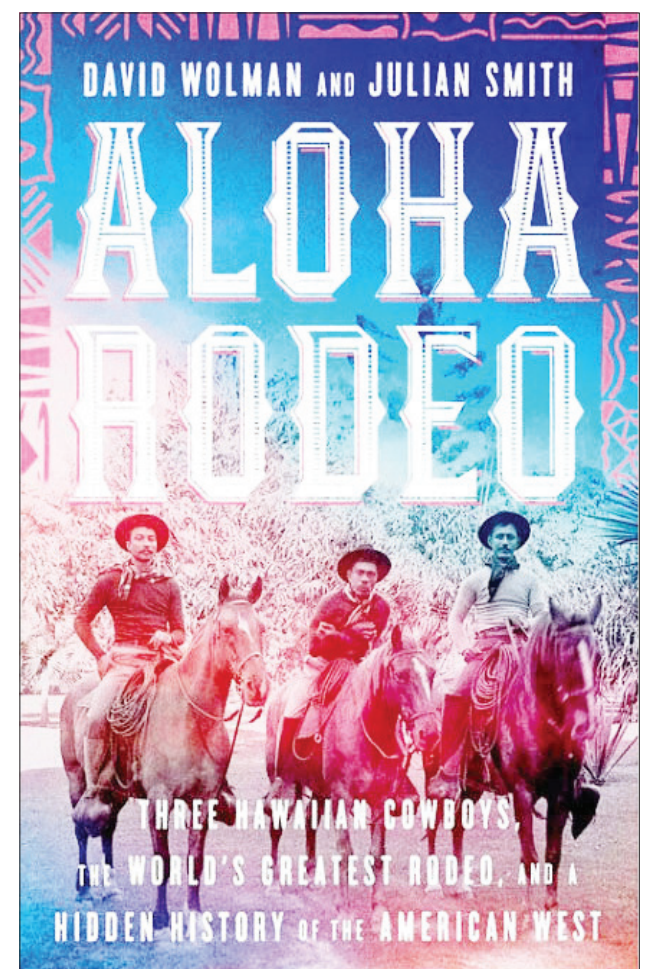
Strandberg is hopeful the new growth is nothing serious and will get it checked at WSU.

Adams said the rum cakes have been selling like hotcakes and they are hopeful to open again soon. The state's ban on indoor dining lifts Dec. 14. Those interested in getting a rum cake can email the restaurant at baconandeggswallawalla@gmail.com.

The toy and the collar Woody and Olsen gave Stella will always be a token to Strandberg and her family of a place so nice they named it twice.

"It was a really cool experience," Strandberg said. "A healing one."

COMMUNITY BRIEFING



Contributed Photo

"Aloha Rodeo" by David Wolman and Julian Smith will be featured at December's First Draft Writer's Series, via Zoom.

First Draft to feature 'Aloha Rodeo' via Zoom

PENDLETON — The First Draft Writers' Series is returning to the Pendleton Center for the Arts as a Zoom-based offering on Thursday, Dec. 17, at 7 p.m. Journalists David Wolman and Julian Smith, both of whom have published work in some of the country's most high-profile publications, will read from their book "Aloha Rodeo." The book won the Oregon Book Award for 2020 and was on the NPR list of best 100 books.

In August 1908, three unknown riders arrived in Cheyenne, Wyoming, their hats adorned with wildflowers, to compete in the world's greatest rodeo. Steer-roping virtuoso Ikua Purdy and his cousins Jack Low and Archie Ka'au'a had traveled 3,000 miles from Hawaii, of all places, to test themselves against the toughest riders in the West.

Dismissed by whites, who considered themselves the only true cowboys, the native Hawaiians would astonish the country, returning home champions — and American legends.

An unforgettable human drama set against the rough-knuckled frontier, "Aloha Rodeo" unspools the fascinating and little-known true story of the Hawaiian cowboys, or paniolo, whose 1908 adventure upended the conventional history of the American West.

Those wanting to attend the event via Zoom are asked to email director@pendletonarts.org before noon on Dec. 17 to receive an invitation. There will be spots for up to 10 attendees to read from their own 3-5 minute original works during Open Mic.

Those not familiar with how to use Zoom may attend a one-hour Introduction to Zoom class offered Tuesday, Dec. 15, for free. More information is available at pendletonarts.org or by calling 541-310-7413.

Hermiston assistant principal named to ODE committee

HERMISTON — Armand Larive Middle School Assistant Principal Juan Rodriguez has been selected to serve on the Oregon Department of Education's Latino/a/x Advisory Committee, which will advise ODE on educational matters affecting Latino/a/x students and families, in an effort to address systemic inequities experienced by these students, through focused investments and commu-

nity partnerships.

Rodriguez

applied to serve on the committee. The process included an application form and a letter of interest, in which he outlined his experience, explained issues affecting this subgroup of students in the Hermiston community, and shared insights as to why he wanted to serve. Rodriguez may serve two, 2-year terms.

"The Hermiston Latino/a/x population continues to grow, and we need to find a way to best support these families and students," said Rodriguez in a press release from the Hermiston School District. "I was a first-generation college student and a naturalized citizen. My path to where I am now is not too dissimilar to many of our students. I hope that my service will give me the ability to understand more of what families need, not just in my own community but statewide."

The Latino/a/x Advisory Committee, part of ODE's priorities under the Student Success Act (SSA), depicts ODE's commitment to improving access and opportunities for Latino/a/x and MesoAmerican Indigenous students. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, ODE states that this group of students is experiencing disproportionate impacts due to health, social, and economic effects of the virus, which is compounding inequities already facing these students.

Rodriguez grew up in HSD schools and graduated in 2005 from Hermiston High School. He is married to Amanda, a West Park Elementary School teacher, and they have three students: Sofia (11), Jakoby (9), and Kamila (5). This is his 11th year working for HSD.

Agape House plans final 2020 garage sale

HERMISTON — The final garage sale of 2020 at Agape House, 500 W. Harper Road, is planned for Saturday, Dec. 16, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the center's parking lot. The food bank also will be open that day from 9 a.m. to noon and 1-3 p.m.

Mark Gomolski, the new Agape House director, reports the center will be closed on Dec. 24-25 in observance of the Christmas holiday. For more information, call him at 541-567-8774 or email agapehouse@eotnet.net.

— EO Media Group

Film fest to include 48-hour challenge

Lostine theater group hosting online film and photography festival

By BILL BRADSHAW
Wallowa County Chieftain

LOSTINE — Closing out 2020 on a note of creativity and connection, MidValley Theatre Co., of Lostine, is hosting an online film and photography festival, with submissions to run Dec. 26-28.

A broad range of submissions are welcome, including short films (less than seven minutes), ultra-short films (less than one minute), nature, art and other still photography. General entries will be accepted starting Tuesday, Dec. 15, and can include original work done throughout the calendar year.

The festival will also include a traditional 48-hour film challenge.

The challenge is a film competition in which teams of filmmakers are assigned a genre, a character, a prop and a line of dialogue, and have 48 hours to create a short film containing those elements.

"There just haven't been a lot of theatrical opportunities this year, and this seemed like the perfect outlet," said Jennifer Hobbs, the event organizer and a board member of MidValley Theatre Co. "We're encouraging people of all ages and experience levels to participate, and there are a ton of possibilities for what you can choose to do — films, music, skits, jokes, photos, very short vignettes — we just really want people to enjoy themselves and share their creative visions and energies."

The deadline for submissions is Dec. 28. Prizes will be awarded Dec. 30, with the hope that local merchants can contribute toward them, Hobbs said. An online gallery of entries will be made available to the public to help ring in the New Year. Thanks to an \$1,800 grant from the Wallowa County Cultural Trust Coalition, entry is free.

MidValley was founded in 1995 based in Lostine, where its president lives. Although the group has no physical home, it has historically used the Lostine Grange, the Lostine Presbyterian Church and primarily — for many years — the old Lostine school gymnasium for performances. It also has used the OK Theatre in Enterprise, most recently for its original show "Common Threads" in November 2019, the Joseph Center for Art

and Culture in Joseph and the Enterprise Odd Fellows Hall for shows.

The event is a new one for MidValley and a one-off because of the COVID pandemic.

Hobbs emphasized it is not an attempt to replace the Ruby Peak Film Festival or even plan to make it a regular part of MidValley's normal offerings.

"But since we can't do normal, live theater this year, this seemed like the best way, under the circumstances, to offer a theatrical opportunity for both actors and audiences," she said. "We look forward to returning to live theater as soon as we can do so safely, but in the meantime, this is the next best thing."

For more information or to request an entry form, email jhobbs@eoni.com or call 541-398-1055.

VISIT US ON THE WEB AT:

www.EastOregonian.com