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'WE'RE A FAMILY'



AT HAPPY CANYON

Night time pageant continues to thrive as generations pass down the tradition

By NICK ROSENBERGER
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — American Indian history, the Wild West, someone getting both their legs sawed off — these are normal scenes from the annual Happy Canyon Night Show, which brings thousands of spectators Wednesday through Saturday of Round-Up week for a night of arena-shaking action.

With nonstop action, the play has an excessive number of moving parts. The legions of volunteers and dedicated staff, many of whom have passed their roles down generations, are the only ones standing between chaos and a successful, safe show.

"A big part of this is improv and rolling with it," said Rylan Still, a second-time volunteer who will be acting as part of the fire crew scene and assisting with the undertaker.

Any number of unexpected things can happen with roughly 750 participants involved, from someone missing their cue to a horse acting up. The show can be pure pandemonium, but many feel passion and love for the big presentation.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Becky Waggoner, right, a third-generation director of the Happy Canyon Night Show, talks through plans for a scene with Happy Canyon Princesses Mary Rivera, center, and Clarise Huesties during a dress rehearsal Thursday, Sept. 9, 2021, for the show in the Happy Canyon Arena, Pendleton.

Still, who watched his dad act as a part of a now-retired scene, loved the show since he first saw it and knew he wanted to be a part of it. His favorite scene, outside of his dad's, was when the firefighters came to rescue someone from a burning building. This year, he was excited to play his favorite part.

"I'm going to do it as much as I can," he said. "It's so fun."

This excitement runs through the volunteers and staff like an electric cord, all the way up to the Happy Canyon Board of Directors. It would undoubtedly be difficult to find someone more exhilarated when the show rolls around every September than Becky Waggoner, director of the Happy Canyon Night Show. "I love it with all my heart,"

Waggoner said, answering questions between a never-ending onslaught of greetings, thanks and congratulations to what seemed like nearly everyone involved.

"We're a family," she said.

She's not wrong. Most involved, such as Still, have family members who brought them into the mix. Waggoner's own roots in the show run deep. Her great grandfather played the show's first sheriff in 1914, while her grandfather and father were both show directors. As the first female director, Waggoner lives and breathes Happy Canyon. She loves it so much, she even published a book in 2016 about it titled, "Happy Canyon: A History of the World's Most Unique Indian Pageant and Wild West Show."

According to Waggoner, the original event began in 1914 when Roy Raley created the original Wild West segment, later enlisting the help of Anna Minthorn Wannasay, whose father was Chief Yellow Hawk (Petamyo-mox-mox) of the Cayuse, to help write the Indian portion.

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Bernice Charlton, the owner of the Long Branch Cafe & Saloon, poses for a portrait Thursday, Sept. 9, 2021, behind the fire tape that rings her Weston eatery after a Sept. 5 fire ravaged the restaurant portion of the establishment.

Long Branch begins recovery after recent fire

By BRYCE DOLE
East Oregonian

WESTON — Bernice Charlton was sitting in her office on Sunday, Sept. 5, when a couple came knocking on her door.

She had no clue that smoke was billowing from the roof of the Weston business she's owned for three decades.

"They told me, 'Get out! It's on fire!'" Charlton said.

She ran into the kitchen of the Long Branch Cafe & Saloon, hoping to save some of her belongings and possibly put out the fire herself. By then, the flames were reaching toward the ceiling.

Another person — Charlton never saw their face — came knocking on the back door with a fire extinguisher and put out the blaze emanating from the deep fryer. But as the flames reached higher into the overhead vents, she ran back outside, just as firefighters arrived.

Charlton spent most of the next six hours sitting at the post office across the street. She thought of little besides hoping that the flames would be extinguished quickly. She was not thinking of what she would do next. She sat there and watched the flames consuming the beloved Weston business — an institution that had drawn people from far and wide for decades — fizzle out.

Plans to rebuild

Four days later, Charlton sat on the bench in the front of her business, the smell of smoke and char still lingering in the air.

She has red hair and wore a green and white flannel, blue jeans and crocs. She was tired from a busy week of talking to state agencies, insurers and countless concerned friends and family members asking what she would do now. The day was eerily quiet, devoid of the customers that frequent the longstanding business.

"It's just not the same," Jackie Howard, Charlton's sister, said while standing outside the business that day.

By then, Charlton had begun the long process of salvaging the restaurant. Most of the ceiling over the restaurant had caved in and the water damage was extensive. Insulation covered the ground along with beer cans and fully wrapped loaves of bread. But the bar, from waist height, looked almost as if nothing had ever happened. The rows of classic salt and pepper shakers — donations from community members to commemorate the deaths of parents — remained.

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Shortage of employees leads to new business models

Local businesses remain flexible to survive worker scarcity during COVID-19

By DAVIS CARBAUGH AND ALEX WITTMER
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Enterprise isn't the largest town in Eastern Oregon, with a population of 2,052. But it's just a few miles from the ever popular town of Joseph and its vistas across Wallowa Lake to the peaks of the Eagle Cap Wilderness.

In a normal summer, the town's Terminal Gravity Brewing would be busy all days of the week serving local, handcrafted beers to patrons and traditional brewpub fare. But due to a labor shortage this summer the company had to cut hours during its

EDITOR'S NOTE

This is the second in a five-part series by EO Media Group looking at the issue of the lack of workers for jobs in Central and Eastern Oregon — why workers are not returning to previously held jobs and how businesses are pivoting to function without being fully staffed.

lunch rush, and close altogether on Tuesdays.

Natalie Millar, chief executive officer of the Wallowa County brewery, said it's an inevitability it will have to close for even more days as their skeleton crew of cooks, servers and hostesses return to school — high school, to be exact.

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Alex Wittmer/EO Media Group/La Grande Observer

Mariah Davis pours out an IPA for a flight of beers on Sept. 2, 2021, at Terminal Gravity Brewing, Enterprise. Terminal Gravity recently closed down operations on Tuesdays following a staff shortage. Many of the kitchen staff are high school students who have returned to school, leaving the brewpub further short staffed.



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