

Fighting health inequities to get \$31 million boost

By **LYNNE TERRY**
Oregon Capital Chronicle

SALEM — The Oregon Health Authority will give \$31 million to nonprofits, churches and other community organizations to reduce health care inequities in the state.

The grants aim to help the hundreds of thousands of Oregonians who identify as people of color or those with disabilities, have no permanent home, belong to a tribe, are elderly or part of the LGBTQ community. During the pandemic, racial and ethnic minorities and seniors suffered the worst outcomes from COVID, according to health authority data, accentuating health disparities.

“OHA acknowledges that racism, settler colonialism and historic and contemporary injustices have created policies and programs that led to unfair and unjust health inequities over time,” the agency said in a release. “In centering community strengths and wisdom for health, this grant opportunity supports community-based organizations as partners in Oregon’s public health system.”

The agency has a goal of eliminating health inequities by 2030. The health authority hopes grants will spur community organizations to focus on eight key areas where the state has fallen short, including adolescent health, tobacco prevention, overdose prevention and environmental public health.

The agency approved applications from 147 orga-

nizations that span the state. Adelante Mujeres, for example, which advocates for Latinas in Washington County, will work on bolstering health resources in schools and improving adolescent health.

Other community groups serve several counties. Medicine Wheel Recovery Services, which offers outpatient treatment for addiction and mental health issues, covers Benton, Columbia, Coos, Curry, Douglas, Harney, Jefferson, Klamath, Lane, Lincoln, Linn, Marion, Multnomah, Polk, Tillamook, Umatilla, Wallowa, Wasco, Washington and Yamhill counties.

The organizations “have the power to reach communities the state may not be able to reach,” according to an email from Jonathan Modie, lead spokesman for the health authority. Public health experts with state and county health departments will work with them.

“We expect to see communities thrive, and we expect to reach our goal,” Modie wrote.

As part of its strategic plan to end health inequities, the health authority is trying to strengthen its relationships with groups that are connected to marginalized communities to let them lead the process.

The projects will be funded through June 2023 but the agency has not yet determined how much each organization will get. It will determine the amounts after working with recipients on their budgets and plans, Modie said.



Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin
Kelly Cannon-Miller, Deschutes County Historical Society Museum executive director, discusses the Maxville Heritage Interpretive Timber Culture Traveling Exhibit.

Exhibit in Bend captures history of Black loggers

By **JOE SIESS**
The Bulletin

BEND — Ever since Gwen Trice was a young girl growing up in La Grande, she wanted to move to nearby Wallowa County. Whenever she visited, often as a teenager, she felt something powerful was drawing her there, but she didn’t know what.

Later in life, she learned her father, Lafayette “Lucky” Trice, moved to the area from the Jim Crow South in 1923 to work in the logging industry. Trice’s father was one of the first Black people to live and work in Wallowa County, in a state that at the time of his arrival, excluded Black people in its Constitution.

Trice was fortunate to stumble upon her family history, learning of her father’s past as a logger. The revelation prompted her to make Wallowa County her home.

“It felt like I was a

salmon going up to the original stream where I was spawned,” Trice said. “I was going up to that original stream, and nothing else mattered. I had to go home. And that became my overarching energy.”

That energy turned into a desire to explore and preserve the history of Oregon’s Black loggers who came to a logging town called Maxville. The Bowman-Hicks Lumber Co. established the town in 1923 and it lasted until 1933. After the town closed, some Black loggers stuck around while others moved to Portland or to logging towns in the region.

Today, Trice is the founder and executive director of the Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center, a nonprofit located in Joseph which is dedicated to telling the inclusive American narrative. Part of her work involves providing a traveling exhibit across the state showcasing the multicultural timber history of Oregon, and the Maxville

Timber Culture exhibit is now open to the public at the Deschutes Historical Museum in Bend.

Trice’s journey back to her family’s roots in Oregon began when she was a student at Bellevue College in Washington where she studied film, graphic design and videography.

In 2004, she traveled to Wallowa County for an annual cultural event in the town of Promise, where she was introduced to the crowd of around 300 mostly older individuals as the daughter of Lafayette “Lucky” Trice.

She would spend the next three days listening to stories about her father from those who knew him.

At the age of 19, “Lucky” traveled to Oregon with his father in a box car from a logging camp in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and later sent for his family. Experienced loggers like “Lucky” were in demand and the Missouri-based Bowman

Hicks Lumber Co. recruited loggers, both Black and white, in the South and the Midwest to work out West.

At the time, it was technically illegal for a Black person to come to Oregon, a law that wasn’t struck from the state Constitution until 1926.

“Essentially, they set up a southern town. They set up a segregated town in Eastern Oregon,” Trice said of Maxville. “They were from the South. There was no way white people were going to live side by side with Blacks.”

Despite the founding of Maxville in the image of the Jim Crow South, the town was relatively far removed from mainstream society, and so relationships between Blacks and whites did exist, Trice said.

In the end, while Jim Crow was alive and well across the country, Oregon was a good bet for the skilled Black loggers who chose to leave the South to make the state their new home.

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