

Enterprise free lunch program canceled

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

It's good news and bad news for the free lunch program in the park in Enterprise.

The good news is that more than 50 percent of parents in the school district make enough money that they don't qualify for the program. The bad news

is that the Department of Human Services requires 50 percent of a district's students be in need for the program to be approved.

So, the program is canceled, effective immediately, leaving about 25 kids (ages 1-18) without lunch unless private sponsors are found.

Organizers of the free lunch

program learned of the change in eligibility when Community Connection Assistant Director Jeff Hensley sent in the usual paperwork and was told Enterprise wasn't going to qualify. "I said, 'What? How is that possible?'" Hensley said. "It's very aggravating. We have children to feed."

The Joseph and Wallowa

free lunch program is unaffected and will continue as usual.

The Enterprise program generally runs for eight weeks during summer break — approximately 36-38 days. Based on last year's numbers, Community Connection Manager Connie Guentert estimates the program costs about \$100 per day of operation.

The program had been full-steam-ahead and making improvements, having recently partnered with Building Healthy Families, which was providing their kitchen free of charge. "We were trying to save money and then: Bam!" Guentert said.

So, it's on to plan B. "I'm going out there and

beat feet," Guentert said. "We're looking for sponsors willing to help us provide the lunches. We've got everything worked out with regard to menus and staff."

To sponsor a day, a week, or the whole program contact either Connie Guentert or Jeanette Hibbert at Community Connection, 541-426-3840.

Drivers rev up for new tax

By Rob Ruth
Wallowa County Chieftain

Oregon is kicking things up a notch in the state's long-running effort to develop an alternative revenue scheme for roads, which lose more gas tax dollars as vehicles' fuel efficiency improves.

On July 1, the state will launch OReGO, a new program that calculates a 1.5-cent-per-mile tax for participating Oregon drivers for their vehicle travel over Oregon roads, and then issues either a credit or a charge, depending on how much tax the motorist already paid at the pump.

If this sounds somewhat familiar, it's probably because an Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) pilot program has already tested the 1.5-cent concept, and in reporting on this taxing alternative in December 2014, the Chieftain additionally noted that Wallowa County Commissioner Susan Roberts volunteered for the larger program that starts in July.

For this next, expanded stage, ODOT plans to begin with 5,000 vehicles, at most, divided into segments according to their fuel mileage: 1,500 that get 17 miles per gallon (mpg) or less; 1,500 in the 17-22 mpg range; and 2,000 rated for better than 22 mpg.

ODOT information officers Michelle Godfrey and Tom Strandberg, who visited Wallowa County and other Northeast Oregon locations late last week to talk up the merits of the latest volunteer tax program, reported approximately 2,200 drivers had tentatively signed up by the previous week. Sign-ups to OReGO's "Interest List" occur on the Web at myOReGo.org. Joining the list early provides greater assurance of a spot when the program formally launches July 1, at which time more details will be announced and drivers who've signed up can decide whether to follow through with volunteering.

According to Godfrey and Strandberg, most vehicles on the road today are suitable for the program because they have data ports, which have been common in vehicles since 1993. The state has contracted with private telematics firms Azuga and Verizon Telematics to provide in-vehicle devices that will report pertinent travel data while offering volunteers various value-added services, including, for example, one that allows the vehicle owner to define "safe" geographic zones for a household's teen driver to travel.

"This is all part of a larger market that is developing around the connected car," Godfrey explains.

The private firms' devices are both GPS-enabled. The OReGO program also offers a non-GPS device, available through ODOT.

Because drivers of less fuel-efficient vehicles pay a greater number of gas tax dollars than operators of higher-efficiency vehicles traveling the same distance, members of the former group are more likely to see some reimbursement for what they paid at the pump. Oregon's gas tax is 30 cents per gallon. This makes 20 mpg a kind of break-even point in the 1.5 cent program — the point at which gas tax collections from a vehicle figure to 1.5 cents per mile.

Godfrey says OReGO is designed to help the state determine if the per-mile fee "could be that long-term viable solution" to reversing the widening gap in funding Oregon's roads.

Hotel gets face-lift

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — It's easy to look at the building that houses Arrowhead Chocolates in Joseph and forget that another business resides just above it. That is the Jennings Hotel, an eight-room establishment currently undergoing a complete restoration at the hands of new owner, Greg Hennes.

A Minnesota native, Hennes has lived in Oregon about 16 years, mainly in Portland, where he owns a photo equipment rental business, and several other concerns, including "Campfire Cologne," which is sold at several local stores. Hennes bought the Jennings Hotel in May of 2014 and moved to Joseph several months ago.

Hennes started visiting Wallowa County over a decade ago on backpacking and camping trips and eventually fell in love with Joseph. He returned to the area once or twice a year and got interested in the Jennings Hotel several years ago. "About five years ago, I saw it was for sale, and I'd look at it every time I'd visit. I'd think about it, and eventually I took the plunge and bought it," Hennes said.

Currently, the hotel houses a couple of resident artists from the Joseph Center. In the meantime, Hennes has gotten a team of seven designers from around the country who will each have creative control in designing individual rooms.

Besides refurbishing the inside of the hotel, Hennes also installed a sauna and adjacent shower for guests. For the moment, Hennes is doing the remodeling himself although he's trying something that he hopes will enable him to hire help: using the popular crowdfunding site Kickstarter to help finance the hotel's renovation. "No one's done this before, and once Kickstarter and crowdfunding gained in popularity, I thought it would be a good way to go about this. I can raise funds without going to a bank," Hennes said.

In Hennes' case, Kickstarter will allow individuals to contribute to the renovation



Steve Tool/Chieftain
Greg Hennes standing in one of his nearly completed Jennings Hotel rooms

costs, exchanging donations for reduced room rental rates, or even a month's stay for a contribution of \$650. Other rewards include various hotel amenities or even art work when the renovation is completed. "It's a self-perpetuating animal, as people talk about it or come to visit," Hennes said.

Hennes' 30-day Kickstarter campaign has approximately one week left, and the campaign has raised about 75 percent of the desired total. Hennes says he's gotten responses from all over the United States as well as from overseas.

People who contributed to the Kickstarter campaign can obtain rooms for as low as \$75

per night, as compared to the \$95-\$125 nightly rate that applies during summer months. During the winter, the hotel will revert back to artist residences. Hennes will choose which artists obtain residences at the hotel.

Hennes doesn't have a particular time-line to complete the project. "We're going to open our first room probably at the end of June. We're taking it one room at a time. It's a labor of love, as they say," he said.

Donations sought for lake fireworks show

The Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce is currently seeking donations for "Shake the Lake," the annual 4th of July fireworks show at Wallowa Lake.

Early this week, the Chamber reported that donations to date totaled nearly \$3,000, but the fund-raising goal is \$11,000.

The Chamber asks for donations of \$25, \$50 or \$100.

All donors of \$25 or more are entered into a drawing for a jet boat trip for two on the Snake River. The prize is honored by Beemers Landing of Clarkston, Wash.

Donations should be sent to: Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce; P.O. Box 427, Enterprise, OR 97828.

The fireworks show starts at dusk (around 10 p.m.) on Saturday, July 4.

Weed Tour Friday

Now is your chance to learn about weeds.

And get a free lunch.

Wallowa County Vegetation Department, Wallowa Resources and Asotin County Vegetation Department are loading up the vans for the 12th annual Weed Tour, Friday, June 12.

Learn from local weed managers about basic weed identification, rangeland management for landowners, how to calibrate your spray equipment to best manage weeds,

and collaborative projects to help you manage weeds on your property.

This year's tour will be held June 12 from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Asotin County Courthouse Annex in Asotin, Wash. Transportation to Asotin is available. Vans depart from the Wallowa Resources Building, 401 NE First Street, Enterprise, at 7 a.m. sharp.

Contact Ashley Spaur at 541-398-2626 or aspaur@co.wallowa.or.us to reserve a lunch and a spot in the van.

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