



WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN



BHF SERIES

Help wanted: Mentors

Editor's note: This is the first of a two-part series featuring the mentoring programs at Building Healthy Families, the local organization dedicated to providing family support programs in Wallowa County. BHF is currently in search of mentors, and in this opening piece the Chieftain speaks with Maria Weer, executive director of BHF and three of the program's mentors about the need for mentoring and the mentoring experience.

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

"January is National Mentoring Month. It's something we've intended to put a little more emphasis on," said Maria Weer, executive director of Building Healthy Families. While BHF has several mentoring programs and a number of mentors, the need for more volunteer mentors is acute.

The organization's several mentoring programs include a mentor match teen entrepreneurship program, a one-on-one program for at-risk youth, and a reading to children's reading program, as well as an athletic mentoring program.



Weer

"One of the things that can help kids get through tough times is a positive connection to an adult — ideally a parent, but if it's not a parent, or someone in an addition to a parent, sometimes it's a mentor. We have lots of mentoring opportunities," Weer said.

She noted that children who score 4 or higher on the Adverse Childhood Experiences test were at significantly higher risk for not graduating from high school, drug use and even heart attacks. However, those children who felt they had an adult in the community who cared about them were much less likely to experience problems.

"I don't think people know how effective even an hour a week can be," Weer said.

Finding a good fit in the mentoring program is crucial to mentoring success according to Weer.

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Pacific Power prices on the rise

Rate hike, cold temperatures lead to higher electricity bills

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

Soaring electric bills from Pacific Power, some three times their normal amount, are causing complaints as well as prompting concern over the ability of some to pay the bills.

Pacific Power media representative Tom Gauntt said the company understands the concern and offered several explanations for the recent uptick in power bills.

"At the first of January we had a .6 of 1 percent increase," he said.

Residences with usage of more than 1,000 kilowatt hours per month face a rate hike of slightly more than 2 cents per KWH, from 10.043 cents per KWH to 12.073 cents per KWH.

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The severity of this winter has caused electric bills to triple for some Wallowa County residents.

Steve Tool/Chieftain

CITIZEN KUDOS

Chamber honors business, civil leaders at annual banquet



Kathleen Ellyn/Chieftain

Gail Swart poses with Chamber President Joe Wanner as she is honored with the Chamber of Commerce President's Award.

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

An enthusiastic sell-out crowd lightened the dark days of January with a perennial boost of pride at the Chamber of Commerce Citizen Awards Sunday night.

It was an opportunity, as Adrian Harguess said in the invocation, to "honor what is good and right in our community."

And honor this crowd did, giving every single award winner a standing ovation and cheers.

The Chamber Banquet is not a solemn occasion, it is a celebration and part of the fun is surprising the nominees — all of whom were in the dark about their nominations this year.

Unsung Hero

The Unsung Hero Award winner for the evening, Ralph Swinehart of Enterprise, for instance thought he had come to witness nominator Rick Bombaci getting an award and was taken entirely by surprise.

Swinehart volunteers in dozens of clubs and organizations, including the Historic Landmarks Committee, The Rotarians Lostine River Run, as a board member of the Nez Perce Homelands project, an Independent Order of Odd Fellows member who was key to the restoration of the Odd Fellows Hall, and many more.

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Kathleen Ellyn/Chieftain

Maria Weer, executive director for Building Healthy Families, with her crew around her.



Kathleen Ellyn/Chieftain

A surprised Ralph Swinehart (right) poses with nominator Rick Bombaci as he revels in the award of Chamber of Commerce Unsung Hero at the Chamber event Sunday, Jan. 29.

“As leaders the greatest gift we have to give back to the community is our time.”

Joe Wanner
Chamber president

