

MENTOR

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“Our reading program is pretty warm and fuzzy, but with our one-on-one program you’re dealing with higher-risk kids, it’s hardly ever warm and fuzzy — but it doesn’t mean you’re not making an impact. It takes individuals with a heart,” Weer said.

Stacy Green, who works at Wallowa Memorial Hospital as well as owning her own business, heads the teen entrepreneur program. She normally mentors about 10 students. She started the program in 2010 after noticing a “brain drain” of students leaving the area because of a lack of Wallowa County opportunities.

“We (Wallowa County) were starved for business skills and jobs and needed to get these best and brightest students and get them interested in business subjects and being entrepreneurs because you can create your own job here if you have that skill,” Green said.

The entrepreneur program offers motivated teens opportunities for college scholarships they may not receive otherwise.

“We’ve had nine of the 11 Ford Scholarships awarded in this county,” Green said. A number of other prestigious scholarships have been awarded as well.

Green also noticed other advantages to her program including local businesses calling, interested in hiring youths or offering internships. One student she mentored now works at Wallowa Memorial Hospital as an accountant.

The group also goes on an extended field trip each year to visit with people or companies who have made a mark in the business world. These trips have included visits to Microsoft in Washington state and a New York visit to Tyler Hays, a Wallowa County native who made his mark in the home decor designing world.

Lack of mentoring experience didn’t deter Green from taking on the challenge and she encouraged others to do so.

“I’m proof that anyone can do it,” Green said. “All you need is desire and a sincere interest in doing it.”

“I’ve gotten so much out of mentoring; it’s enriched my life. I’ve really enjoyed connecting with the kids — it’s amazing, learning how much they’re capable of ...

they want to know how to make life work for them,” Green said of her experience.

“I got interested in mentoring probably about 10 years ago working with Jeff Gertner, the youth pastor of the Baptist Church,” said Jason Wilcox, Building Healthy Families prevention coordinator who mentors mostly at-risk youth.

“I was working construction then and making a lot more money than I do now, but something was missing from my life, and it fulfilled a part of me that wasn’t being fulfilled,” Wilcox said.

Wilcox’s group has as many as 60 kids in the summer, and he’s had his share of heartbreak on the job. He’s seen some youth ending up in trouble with the law, dying in car accidents or sentenced to Northern Oregon Regional Correctional Facility.

“Sometimes it’s hard in the day-to-day because it can feel like you don’t make a difference, but it’s nice to see things work out over time,” he said. As an example he recently took a youth he mentored over the years off to their first year in college.

“Things like that are why I do it,” he said.

A skilled basketball player, Wilcox uses sports as a way to gain inroads to youth.

“For me, basketball was my saving grace. When I was playing basketball I was doing good overall in life,” he said. However, a large amount of unsupervised time when not playing basketball led to bad choices that led Wilcox into trouble.

Later, he attempted starting a youth basketball program at the open gyms at both Enterprise and Joseph schools and found them dominated by older men who didn’t necessarily want to share the court with the younger players.

Wilcox worked a deal with Joseph Charter School that allowed his group several nights a week at the gym at a later court time, which proved helpful in the summer months, when youth are more at risk to make bad choices.

“By the time they’re done playing basketball they’re more likely to just go home,” he said. His group pays a nominal fee for the use and JCS puts the money into an account for disadvantaged children to be able to attend summer camps.

The basketball group has to sign in and players must come clean and sober in order to participate. After filling out a survey

regarding the effectiveness of the program, members get a jersey noting their program participation. About 95 percent of those attending said the program helped them make better choices and kept them out of trouble.

“I was fairly terrified before meeting my first mentee match,” mentor Michael Cooler said. “I thought I wouldn’t have anything positive to share with him, and he’d think I was just some dorky old person.”

Cooler’s fears proved unfounded. “The first time I met the kid, he was asking me all the questions,” Cooler said. “All the fear fell away five minutes into that first session.”

An information technology expert, Cooler started working for BHF in 2013, working in the Alternative Education School, a program for students that don’t fit into traditional classroom settings. He has mentored about a half dozen students in that time.

In his 20s Cooler started to withdraw from society, working from home on his computer, which had its good points — at first.

“The more I was away from interacting with people, the more I was getting depressed. I shifted 180 degrees and started working for Building Healthy Families,” he said. Cooler found the experience both inside the classroom and mentoring more rewarding than he’d hoped.

“You may think these are tough kids, but that’s usually not the case. These are kids who can benefit from having an adult in their life who’s consistent, someone they can talk to about what’s going on in their lives,” Cooler said. He pointed out that mentoring isn’t always about incredibly profound moments.

“Sometimes it’s skipping rocks at Wallowa Lake or talking about life skills over coffee,” he said. “Quiet moments is a lot of what mentoring is about.”

Cooler emphasized the community need for more mentors. “Building Healthy Families is always in need of mentors,” he said. “We don’t usually have enough adults willing to be mentors, it seems like. Anybody who feels like they have an hour a week or so, we’re looking for you.”

Wilcox added, “Everyone has something to offer, and you never know what you might get in return.”



Ellen Morris Bishop/For The Chieftain

Karen McFarlane Holman talks about her experiences teaching female Saudi students in the Persian Gulf during a presentation at the Wallowology Natural History Discovery Center in Joseph.

Willamette professor talks Saudi experience

By Ellen Morris Bishop
For the Chieftain

Dr. Karen McFarlane Holman, professor of Chemistry at Willamette University in Salem, shared her experiences teaching in Saudi Arabia with students in Joseph and Enterprise high school science classes on Thursday, Jan. 26.

She also presented a talk for the general public at Wallowology in the evening. Soroptimists and Wallowology sponsored her visit here.

“Saudi culture and customs are starkly different from ours,” she said, “especially for women. No matter what her age, Saudi women and girls always have a male who supervises them.”

Along with five other American professors, Holman taught chemistry to 40 Saudi high school girls at a 10-day science camp in Damman, on the Persian Gulf.

“We did not have to wear full head cover, she said, “but when we were outside the school, it is the law in Saudi Arabia for foreign women to wear an abaya when they are

out in public. The abaya is a plain black, full-length robe that covers everything. You can put decorative embroidery on the long sleeves to individualize them.”

Her Saudi chemistry students were bright.

“They could easily take the intro chemistry class at Willamette,” Holman said. But education does not open all the doors to a career. “Women can be well-educated, but they always seem to hit a wall and can never get to the top of their profession.”

Even today, Saudi society is still very restrictive of women.

“We were locked into the building at night. If I wanted to go outside by myself, I had to stay in a small, walled courtyard,” she noted.

Holman brought two lessons home for herself. One is that here, she can converse freely with men and count them among her friends. The second?

“I love America so very much,” she said. “It was very confining there. Our freedom here is wonderful.”

LETTERS

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3. Not only that, let’s show some support for the ranchers who have tolerated wolf presence, played by the Plan rules, and have watched cattle brutally eaten, maimed, and terrorized by wolf packs in the county that the Plan says can be removed, but due to groups like Oregon Wild, who hover over ODFW, waiting to pounce with a lawsuit, the sweat pours off the foreheads

of ODFW personnel who must make a decision to rightfully take out an aggressive pack. I have never heard supportive comments from your wolf patronizing groups for ranchers who are taking the brunt of financial loss. You know what? RANCHER LIVE MATTER!

Connie Dunham
North Wallowa County

Human rights vs animal rights?

The people who rant about

the rights of women to choose are also the people who rant about, save the spotted owl, don’t cut a tree, and god forbid, don’t break an eagle egg, etc., etc., etc. Not that these aren’t concerns of some people and I respect that everyone has their opinion.

Though I vehemently disagree with the right of anyone to take another human life. Women do have a choice, they either choose to take some form of birth control or abstain from sex to avoid becoming pregnant. They

should not have the right to KILL another human being, one who never asked to be conceived in the first place. Granted, there are mitigating circumstances where a mother’s life might be endangered or if you knew the baby might be deformed or have some mental challenges that abortion may be appropriate.

Some women use the right of choice as a form of birth control because they are too lazy or irresponsible to go to a free clinic and get the proper birth control. There is some-

thing wrong with this society when an eagle egg means more than a human life.

I am speaking for the HUMAN RIGHTS of those poor babies who are discarded in the furnaces of hospitals or abortion clinics, with some of them still kicking when this is done.

How anyone can live with themselves condoning such a thing is beyond me.

If anyone believes in human rights then they should also believe in the lives of those babies.

How hypocritical of someone, on one hand, to protest for a bird, a tree, an egg, etc., but care so little for a human life.

Marta Anderson
Enterprise



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Dear Jessica, Thank you for sharing my life. Please be my Valentine... forever! Love, Kyle

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