Community is strong in Wallowa County

WAHL TO WALL

Paul Wahl

You don't need to spend much time in Wallowa County to get a good sense of community. Everyone seems to be involved in one way or another, and most of them appear to be open to a newcomer joining in the fun.

That was evident Friday night at an event featuring several readers at Fishtrap in Enterprise. The place was packed out; we were lucky to get a seat.

Writers are near and dear to my heart. I can't really remember ever wanting to be anything else when I "grew up."

Although journalism is somewhat at the opposite end of the spectrum from what was read Friday, the amount of talent in and around the community is obvious. And I'm pleased to say that two who shared their works are columnists for the Chieftain.

Maybe one of these weeks I'll write this column in quatrain or perhaps Haiku.

Fishtrap is taking a "reading" breather for the summer months, but we anticipate many more such events this fall and into next winter.

ANOTHER GREAT example of community was the full house that turned out for the Enterprise School Centennial Celebration Thursday. All of the children in the district, along with around 200 members of the community, packed into the gym for the event.

And although it was a substantial ceremony, everyone down to the youngest students seemed to enjoy each minute.

The star of the day was 101-year-old Neva Forstrom Grover who traveled from Portland to attend. She attended Enterprise schools beginning with her sophomore year and graduated in 1932. Now that's longevity.

AROUND 200 folks packed into the Joseph Community Center Saturday night to see Haley Miller crowned queen of the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo. It was a terrific evening highlighted by some really great grub.

It is encouraging to see the level of support for the rodeo and all that goes with it. We've lived in several communities where the idea of hosting a PRCA-sanctioned rodeo had come and gone. It's a lot of work, as anyone who has ever served on a rodeo committee will tell you.

This year's event seems to be coming along nicely under the direction of Terry Jones and his board, and we can't wait to attend in July. There was even an announcement about a spinoff event from the Eschler family. We'll have more to report on that shortly.

ONE THING a new resident of the county cannot help but notice are the amazing supplies of wood chopped and ready for consumption. Our neighbor must have at least a year's supply on hand. It's like a second currency.

Rich Wandschneider is looking for several specific pieces of wood — ponderosa, Douglas fir or cottonwood — from which a traditional Nez Perce dugout canoe will be fashioned. It will be built following old photos and historic canoes held by the Nez Perce National Historical Park in Spalding, Idaho.

Wandschneider is assisting artist Allen Pinkham Jr. in finding a 30- to 40-foot straight run that is 26 inches or greater in diameter. Not dead, but dying is okay, Rich says. If you can help, call the Josephy Center at 541-432-0505.

Wahl is editor of the Chieftain and can be reached with story suggestions at editor@wallowa.com.

Luck — and getting back to even

MAIN STREET

Rich Wandschneider

My brother Phil is an economist. I'd never taken a class in economics, so one day on a three-hour drive, I asked him to give me Econ 101 — and he did.

That was 45 years ago, and since then there have been several updates. One long-standing discussion has been about the nature of "luck." Phil once wrote a paper describing the impact of making choice A or B — maybe by the flip of a coin — about which college to go to or what job to take and how that random choice impacts the rest of a life and that of many others.

He recently told me that several new studies discuss the role of luck in economics and that they generally conclude that luck has its impacts, and that rich people have more of it than poor people do. As Alec Baldwin, playing President Trump on "Saturday Night Live," says to his son-in-law, "You've shown everybody that if you're born rich and marry my daughter, you can do anything you want."

When I took the Extension Service job in Wallowa County 46 years ago, I took a small pay cut — I'd been making $11,000 a year on Peace Corps staff, and the OSU job paid $10,400. One of my Washington, D.C., friends told me that I would never be able to afford the city again — that this discrepancy would get multiplied by percentages, meaning smaller raises and that "coming back" to an urban job, I would get pegged lower.

I've never wanted to go back to an urban job, but the idea makes me think about the tremendous dollar differentials in hip, urban places and most rural places in the country. On our spring break trip to Sacramento, we learned that modest houses in decent neighborhoods there sell for almost a million dollars.

Rents in the Bay Area hover at $4,000 per month. A high school classmate who keeps us current on goings-on in Oceanside, in Southern California, says that houses in South Oceanside — now the toniest part of town, average $600,000.

My dad, bless his soul, happened to pass away in Oceanside while California was going through one of its periodic housing slumps. The house he had paid $35,000 for 40 years earlier sold for a modest $100,000. I and my three siblings each received $25,000 — a wonderful gift, but one that might have been double or triple that had he lived a few more years, or even, dare I say it, died sooner.

There is much discussion of the increasing blue and red divisions across the country, of how people with similar values tend to congregate, and thus some counties and states are becoming predominantly Republican or Democrat. Other migration trackers site Sun and South as attractions; still others technology centers and youth.

But a recent radio news blast — I admit I can't locate the source right now — said that a decade or two ago three percent of us, 3 in 100, moved from one state to another in a given year, and that the percentage is now half that.

Among other things, they cited the cost of housing. It makes sense: someone who bought a Wallowa County home for $50,000 a decade ago cannot easily sell — for $100,000 or $150,000 — and move to Portland, where the average home price is more than $400,000. Unless, of course, they have rich parents or in-laws or have made a pile of money in some previous high-end occupation.

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Do your part in ending child abuse

GUEST COLUMN

Maria Weer

In honor of National Child Abuse Prevention Month, Building Healthy Families is issuing a call to action for residents of Wallowa County to stand against child abuse and take action to support children who have been abused or neglected.

At any given time, there are at least 5 children in foster care in Wallowa County. In addition to foster care, Building Healthy Families staff have also noticed an increase in the needs of all family support services that help reduce child abuse and neglect. Services are often needed to support families with risk factors including substance abuse, poverty, risky behaviors and lack of parenting skills.

Throughout April, we are calling on members of the community to help our program serve more of Wallowa County's most vulnerable children. Opportunities include attending a Darkness to Light Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training 9 a.m. to noon April 14 to learn how to prevent, recognize and react to child sexual abuse, volunteering with CASA or donate needed items to Building Healthy Families.

The needs of Wallowa County's children are more complicated than ever before. Every child deserves the support of caring, consistent adults with the training to help them heal and thrive.

Without intervention, the odds are stacked against children in foster care. A child with a CASA volunteer, however, will leave the foster care system two-and-a-half months earlier, on average, compared to a child without a CASA volunteer. Studies show children with a CASA volunteer receive more services that are critical to their well-being than children without an advocate, and those children are more likely to achieve educational success.

CASA volunteers are a constant for the child in a time of chaos, according to Julie Rogers, Wallowa County CASA Program Manager. A child may have multiple social workers, attorneys, therapists and foster placements throughout the life of the case but only one CASA volunteer, which can make all the difference for the child's future.

Building Healthy Families is a member of the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (National CASA), a nationwide network of programs in nearly 1,000 communities. In Wallowa County, there are two volunteer advocates fighting for the best interests of five children, but three more children need the care and support of a CASA volunteer.

Maria Weer is executive director of Building Healthy Families.

Development threatens Lostine wildlife area

LETTERS to the EDITOR

A group of concerned citizens who hunt, hike, horseback ride, mountain bike, ski, observe, track and photograph wildlife and explore historical homestead and mining sites became alarmed when they recently learned that Wallowa County's Planning Department had secretly approved development of 38 acres, zoned Timber Grazing, surrounded by the Lostine Wildlife Area and the Lostine River, without telling ODFW, affected neighbors or the public.

ODFW has designated the Lostine Wildlife Area as critical winter habitat for bighorn sheep, rocky mountain elk and mule deer.

Jim Akenson, conservation director for the Oregon Hunters Association, says this: "Hunters' dollars provided the funds [for the purchase of the Lostine Wildlife Area]... as representatives of Oregon's hunting community, OHA opposes any development of the property ... Any development within this area is a potential threat to the purpose of this area."

ODFW's wildlife biologist, Michael Hansen, says: "Development of additional dwellings in that constricted area will have an adverse impact on the movement of big game (especially elk) into and through the property to our Lostine Wildlife Area. The adverse impact on animal movement is cumulative and because of previous building in this portion of the Lostine River Valley, the property straddles the only remaining undeveloped travel corridor for these animals."

An appeal of the Planning Department's approval of the 38-acre development filed by the "Friends of the Lostine Wildlife Area" will come before the Planning Commission 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 25, at the courthouse. Please consider writing an email or letter, attending the hearing or joining the Friends of the Lostine Wildlife Area to help protect this important public resource.

Michael Eng

Eng is affiliated with Friends of the Lostine Wildlife Area.

Lostine

Not all government entities are secretive

I am responding to your editorial of April 12 in which you write that the Malheur Enterprise was denied records regarding the mental health or lack of mental health of a fellow who killed two people after the Security Review Board released him. Because we are a country of government of the people, for the people and by the people, you are doing your part as a citizen to point out a perceived wrong committed by this board. I commend you for that.

As I see it, you are right to say that taxpayers will be footing the bill for the Security Review Board suit against the newspaper that asked for the records. It is your citizenship duty to point out this incident that you believe is wrong.

You are right to point out that information held by government agencies should be transparent. When citizens, especially newspapers, are aware of a wrong taking place, it is the right thing to do to object and work toward correcting that wrong.

In these things mentioned in your editorial, I have no objection, and I believe you are doing as you should by pointing them out.

In your editorial, you extend this incident to imply that the government in general has "become more aggressive about shutting down public record releases" and you talk about "brazen attempts of government agencies to obscure the truth." You are insinuating that these "brazen attempts" of "shutting down" happen throughout the government.

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