TOURISM

Continued from Page A1

The smell of campfires has begun wafting through Wallowa Lake State Park as staff and volunteers work to assure those occupying the 200 campsites and two yurts are given the royal treatment.

Around the corner, the 150 horsepower electric motor that drives the 19,300-foot haul rope at the Wallowa Lake Tram began churning visitors to the top of Mt. Howard Saturday.

"There's a lot more snow up there than usual, but we're ready to go," said Michael Lockhart, president of the company that operates the tram.

Constructed in 1970, it is the steepest vertical lift for a four passenger gondola in North America, rising roughly 4,000 feet.

Paul Wahl/Chieftain

Sarah Hambleton and her mom, Toj, got in an early run Saturday at Wallowa Lake Karts.

Lockhart said the tram will operate weekends only in May and then move to daily treks in June.

Joseph Branch Railriders also opened Saturday, ferrying passengers by pedal-powered vehicles from Joseph to Enterprise and beyond.

Near the tram, the staff at Eagle Cap Chalets has been busy learning to operate a new coffee machine, which is the centerpiece for the operation's coffee shop.

"Everything is ready," said manager Joshua Marchlewski.

A number of rooms have been remodeled during the winter and bookings have been strong.

"We have a few spots open on weekdays, but not much left of the weekends," said Marchlewski, who is beginning his second full year in his post.

In addition to lodging, the business also offers a miniature golf course and a concessions stand.

The sound of go-karts racing their way around the track greeted visitors at Wallowa Lake Karts Saturday. Testing of the vehicles were in full swing.

Proprietor Greg Jarman paused from his lawn trimming to say he was looking forward to a great summer. Besides go-karting, there is a mini golf course, an arcade, a basketball court, a sand volleyball court, a ping-pong table and a horseshoe pit, among other amenities.

Most excited about the start of the tourist season is Jarman's Great Dane Conan.

"He loves the tourists," Jarman noted. "He can't wait for them to get here."

New Events for 2017

PUGET SOUND ANTIQUE AIRPLANE TOUR

Forty vintage or classic planes will roar into Joseph Airport July 10. The visitors will be on hand 10 a.m. to noon, and the public is invited to come out and see the planes.

A barbecue with live music is planned 5:30 p.m. along with a raffle for rides in vintage aircraft. The event is hosted by the Northeast Oregon Aviation Foundation.

BACK COUNTRY BASH

Three alternative country acts will take the stage at the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo Grounds Aug. 5, part of the first-ever Back Country Bash. Cody Canada and the Departed will be headlining. Gates open at 3 p.m. and music begins at 4 p.m. A beer garden and food vendors will be available.

Tickets are $40 and are available at backcountrybashjoseph.com. The event is presented by the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo Committee.

Wallowa County Direct Travel Impacts, 2000-2016

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2016p	avg. annual % chg 15-16	00-16
Spending ($Millions)							
Total	19.0	21.7	25.7	28.4	29.3	3.2%	2.9%
Other	0.6	0.8	1.0	0.8	0.8	-05.8%	2.3%
Visitor	18.5	20.9	24.7	27.6	28.5	3.5%	2.9%
Non-transportation	17.2	19.1	22.6	25.6	26.7	4.1%	3.0%
Transportation	1.3	1.8	2.1	1.9	1.9	-4.1%	2.6%
Earnings ($Millions)							
Earnings	6.1	6.9	8.4	11.9	12.7	6.7%	5.0%
Employment							
Employment	480	440	490	580	590	2.3%	1.4%
Tax Revenue ($Millions)							
Total	0.6	0.7	0.9	1.1	1.2	8.3%	4.3%
Local	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4	9.4%	3.7%
State	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.8	0.9	9.3%	4.5%

Other spending includes air travel and ground transportation impacts for travel to other Oregon visitor destinations, travel arrangements and reservation services and convention and trade show organizers. **Non-transportation visitor spending** includes accommodations, food service, retail, food stores and arts, entertainment and recreation. **Visitor transportation spending** includes private auto, auto rental and other local ground transportation.

Earnings include wages and salaries, earned benefits and proprietor income.

Employment includes all full- and part-time employment of payroll employees and proprietors.

Local tax revenue includes lodging taxes and auto rental taxes paid by visitors.

State tax revenue includes the lodging and motor fuel tax payments of visitors, and the income tax payments attributable to travel industry businesses and employees.

SOURCE: Oregon Travel Impacts, 1992-2016, Oregon Tourism Commission.

STUDY

Continued from Page A1

Around 50 retail jobs were also part of the tally.

The report, authored by Dean Runyan Associates of Portland, estimated that a job was created in tourism for each $48,500 spent in the county, with employee earnings accounting for $44 of each $100 spent by tourists.

Analysis contained in the report suggests that visitors who stay in commercial lodging typically have the greater economic impact over those who stay in private homes.

In Wallowa County, the bulk of residents stay in hotels and motels, an estimated 142,000 person nights in 2016. Private homes accounted for 70,000 person nights, but only a fraction of the revenue — $12.7 million for hotel guests and $1.4 million for those in private homes.

Statewide, tourism numbers have been trending upward, something Davidson he expects to be ongoing.

"This is our seventh year of growth," Davidson said. "Although the rate of growth may fluctuate from year to year, I believe growth will continue."

Davidson said Wallowa County was one of the first to engage in Travel Oregon's Rural Tourism Studio in 2009.

A series of workshops were held to talk about tourism planning, agritourism development and tourism marketing, among other topics.

A vision for tourism in the county developed out of the program supported visitors having an authentic experience, controlling the direction of tourism growth locally and expanding interest in the shoulder and winter seasons.

Spending by tourists also rose in northeast Oregon, which includes Union and Baker counties in addition to Wallowa.

The regional total of direct spending was $352 million, up slightly from 2015.

Total direct employment for the three counties was pegged at 5,700 jobs, mostly in accommodations and food service.

BUDGET

Continued from Page A1

Depending on other revenue sources, the department could get more funding or sustain more cuts.

The county budget committee is composed of the three commissioners: Susan Roberts, Paul Castilleja and Todd Nash. In addition, administrative services director Brenda Micka serves on the committee along with three county residents: Stephen Wolfe, Leslie Carlsen and Kathy Duncan-Casper. Roberts is the committee chair.

Budget preparation is a three-step process. Micka submits a proposed budget to the committee, which looks it over and compares it to available funding and other factors. From it, essentially a working budget guides the process until the county submits its adopted budget, which will be at the final budget committee meeting June 20. That budget will be adopted by commissioners June 29 in time to meet the state-mandated July 1 deadline.

County officials say residents shouldn't be surprised at the proposed cuts to county services. An open public meeting of the Wallowa County Budget Committee meeting was held April 18-19. The meetings are posted well in advance in the Chieftain's public notices. The notes from the meetings are available as well.

All three commissioners said they wished for more public attendance and input. This year only one member of the public attended.

A quick look at the committee notes indicate that a number of departments will suffer cuts of one kind or another, depending on the county's ability to fill the holes left from the loss of federal funds as well as increasing costs

While revenue has remained relatively stagnant, the county's expenditures continue to increase. Employee health insurance costs the county more than $700,000 annually and employees receive cost of living adjustments as well. The county is currently in the midst of contract talks with the employee labor union. Nonunion employees are not receiving pay increases.

If there's a shortfall, why don't the commissioners raise taxes? It's not an option.

Because of Measure 5, approved by Oregon voters in 1990, property taxes are capped. Subsequent state measures 47 and 50 further constricted the ability of counties to collect revenue by rolling back assessments by 10 percent and limiting annual increases to three percent.

The county is already assessing nearly the maximum allowed under state law. Records show that the county's assessor collected $8,373,385 in property tax revenue in the 2013-2014 tax year. The 2016-2017 revenue was $8,676,294.

Another factor exacerbating the situation is that the federal government owns about 60 percent of the land in the county — land that cannot be taxed. The feds kick in Payment In Lieu of Taxes, the grand total of about 50 cents per acre per year.

"If you could rent an acre of land for 50 cents per year, wouldn't you do it?" Nash asked.

In the meantime the budget committee is waiting for final numbers on grant funding from the state, which will arrive some time in June.

Also, the PILT program was recently funded by the federal government, something that was in doubt until the last couple of weeks. The amount is generally between $300,000 and $400,000, which will go into the county's general fund and could help lessen the impact of cutbacks. This year's revenue is expected to be $425,000.

Nash encouraged citizens to get involved.

"I'm all for that. Honestly, if people are upset, I want to know about it. I don't expect every decision to be popular," he said.

•

The $1.25 million question ...

Wait a minute, didn't the county just get $1.25 million from the state?

That question has been making the rounds across Wallowa County over the past few days.

The answer is "yes," according to County Commissioner Susan Roberts.

However, the funds are part of a state grant to make improvements to the courthouse building. The money is earmarked and cannot be channeled into the general fund, Roberts told the Chieftain.

Crews have been on site at the courthouse the past week making final preparations for the construction. Heading the list of improvements will be an elevator that will allow access for all county residents to all three floors of the building.

Construction should begin shortly after July 1, Robert said.

Donald Oliver Knodell

Donald "Don" Oliver Knodell was born in Enterprise, Oregon to Clayton Leroy Knodell and Isel Hunter Knodell Hug on Aug. 1, 1930. He died Jan. 2, 2017 in Eagle, Idaho.

Don graduated from Enterprise High School in 1948 and remained lifelong friends with his classmates. He was a member of Elks Lodge # 1829 for more than 40 years. He graduated from Oregon State University and attended the University of Oregon for graduate work after serving in the Air Force during the Korean War.

Don was preceded in death by his oldest son Mark. He is survived by his wife of 59 years Mary, of Eagle. Idaho; by his brother Bill Knodell of Portland, Ore; by his children Kristi Knodell (wife Kristin Kinnamon) of Marysville, Wash.; and Scott Knodell of Boise, Idaho; and by nieces and nephews.

Friends and family are welcome at a graveside memorial at 1 p.m. May 27, 2017 at the Enterprise Cemetery. Five generations of Don's family are buried in Wallowa County.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the American Heart Association or the American Cancer Society.

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

A note of Thanks from Polly DeVore

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the people during the May 16th general election, for electing me to the Wallowa School Board District # 12 – School Board Position # 5. I want to thank the voters for their support and trust in me. I will be honest and work hard for you.

Those of whom know me either personally or professionally, know of my belief in accountability and transparency; I promise to bring this with me in this position I've been elected. I look forward to continuing support and advocating for our most important and valuable resource, our Children. I look forward to supporting the Staff and Administration of Wallowa School District # 12 in their quest to provide the best educational and extra-curricular experience for our students and a positive vibrant future for Wallowa Elementary, Middle and High Schools. I look forward to hearing from parents and members of our community. I encourage a future of our community building a partnership and building pride in our Wallowa Schools... Helping us to make prudent decisions, supporting our Students, Athletes, Staff and Administration. Let's have honest conversation(s) about the great things that are happening and lend our continued support! Let's also welcome and recognize the need for conversations that we can explore finding new and exciting ways of doing things! Please consider this an invitation to attend Wallowa School Board meetings. Stay active, have a voice in your school, let's make it even greater! Go Cougars!

Thank you, Polly DeVore

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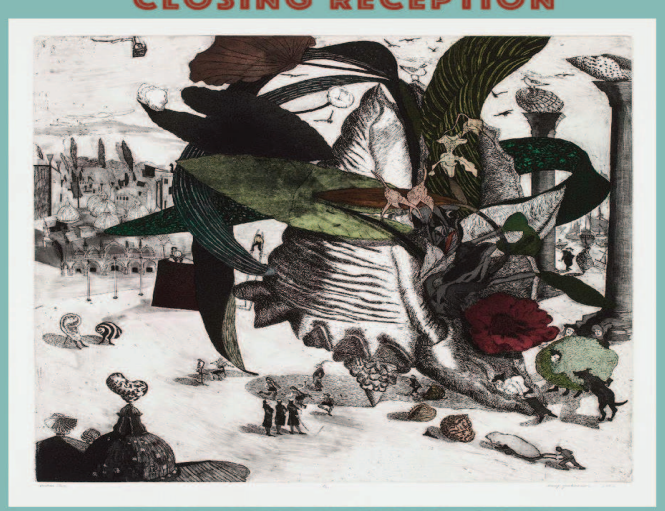

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