Impressive rodeo lived up to its billing

WAHL TO WALL

Paul Wahl

Another Chief Joseph Days is in the record books, and a number of us are breathing a sigh of relief. It was a terrific celebration and a lot of work. Everyone we ran into was having a great time.

The rodeo performances were nothing short of impressive, from the organization that obviously went into each night to the quality of the contestants.

As they say, this wasn't our "first rodeo," and we have seen a lot of stumbling and fumbling over the years. Kudos to the Chief Joseph Days committee for keeping everything running like clockwork, even when last-minute changes were necessary.

The food vendors were outstanding. If you left the rodeo hungry, it was your own dang fault. Another opportunity to eat Indian fry bread, what more could you ask?

I'll admit, I'm not a huge parade fan, but both versions were fun events that brought out large numbers of spectators and participants.

Walking up and down the route both days shooting photos, I was greeted by many friendly faces. Next year, the Chieftain will have a parade entry.

I was a tad disappointed there was no marching band in the parade.

It's unfortunate we couldn't have convinced the New Old Time Chautauqua band to hang around and participate.

The group of performers had been in Enterprise for events concluding Friday evening. Their musicians were top-notch.

A number of towns have community bands that perform for parades and such. It's a nice touch.

It's been several years since Chief Joseph Days had included a carnival midway, but a number of folks sure remember those days fondly. Several people wondered why it had been dropped from the schedule.

Special thanks to Ellen Bishop for her work behind the lens. Her images are nothing short of amazing.

We hope you will enjoy all of the coverage in this week's edition.

We will only have room for about a 10th of the photos we took in the print edition, so check us out at walowa.com for "the rest of the story."

CAN YOU BELIEVE it's almost time for the school year to begin? Where did the summer go?

I know there are a few parents out there who are breathing a sigh of relief.

Fortunately, there were any number of programs, camps and workshops to keep children's minds active. That means less summer learning loss. That's what researchers call it.

According to one source, six weeks in the fall are spent on average relearning old material to make up for summer learning loss. I would have to believe Wallowa County is ahead of the game given all of the learning opportunities.

This is also where a vital library system comes into play.

NEXT MONTH, we will bid a sad farewell to our Wallowa Gal columnist Katherine Strickroth. She is going to pursue other projects. We will miss her sense of humor greatly.

That means we will have an opening for a monthly columnist on our opinion page. If you'd like to throw your hat into the ring, drop me an email.

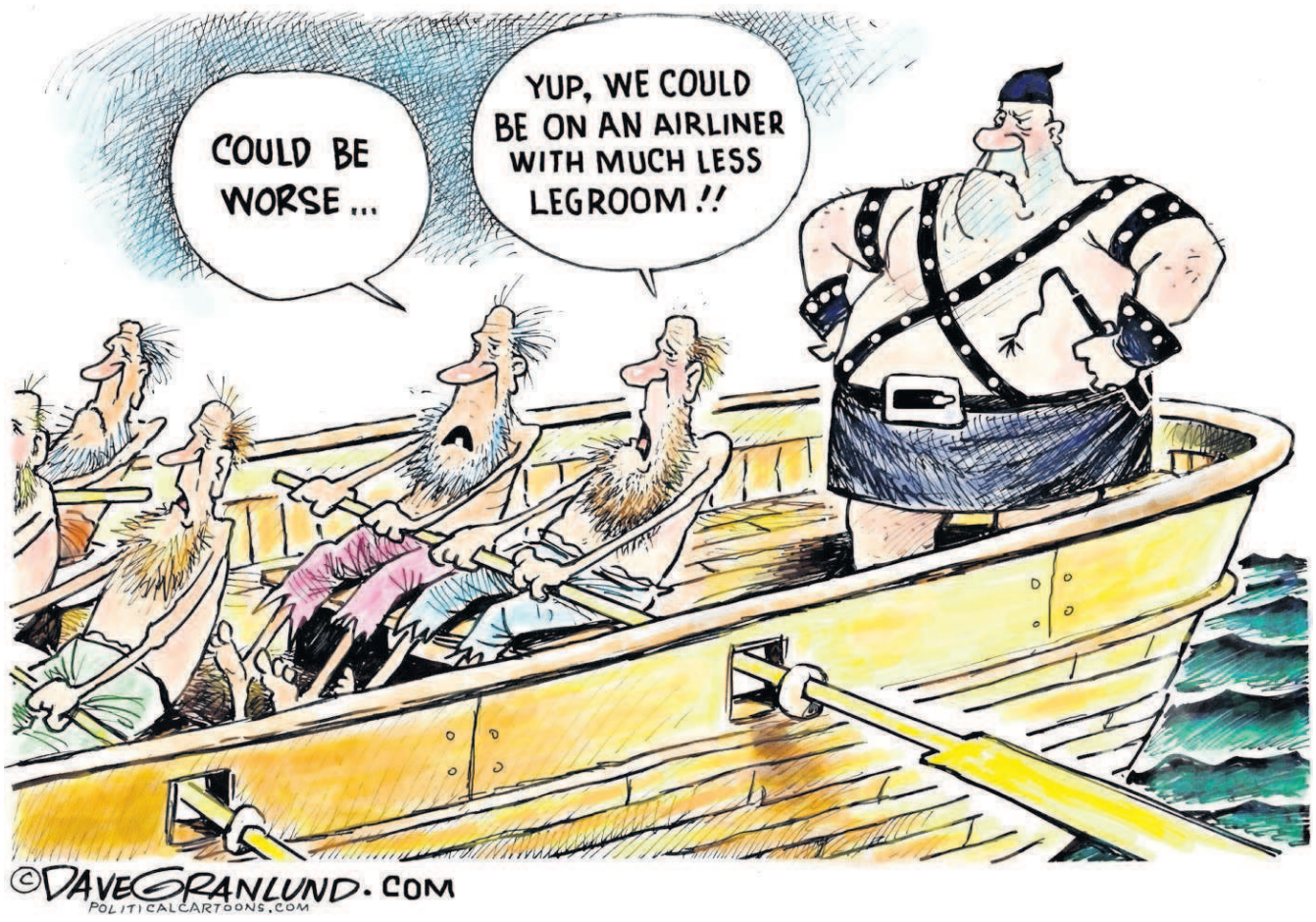
There's even a small stipend that goes with it.

We have had several readers suggest that we find someone to write a politically conservative column to give those folks a greater voice. We are open to that suggestion.

While I am on the topic of journalism, the ink has recently dried on agreement between the Chieftain and Fishtrap to present a free program on journalism this fall.

It will be an opportunity to learn more about journalism as a form of writing, but also a chance to discuss the direction it has taken the past few years.

Stay tuned for registration details or drop me an email, and I can put you on a list of people who have asked to be updated.



Dark skies are on the horizon

AND FURTHERMORE

Jon Rombach

Behold. I shall now make a bold and mighty prediction sure to astonish and amaze. Gather 'round, people.

After careful observation and consultating of the signs, I bring you this startling news: On the day of the calendar known to many as Aug. 21 2017, at precisely 10:25-ish or so in the morning, the sun will go dark. Day will become night.

Birds will be like, "What the? Guys, guys ... stop chirping. Shush. Is day becoming night? I only ate like four worms today, haven't pooped on a single car that was just washed and Aug. 21 is over already? I have got to get better at time management."

Do not tremble in fear, people. I can explain the mystery of our sun going dark. The science words for the sun being turned off are, "solar eclipse." This happens when the cost of hotels and rental properties across parts of Oregon rise so high that they blot out solar rays. It's pretty rare.

To help everyone enjoy the spectacle of our life-giving star disappearing for a few minutes, here is your Solar Eclipse Viewing Guide, Wallowa County Edition.

The Wallowas will fall just outside the swath where the sun gets completely blotted out. We'll be eclipsed just 98.6 percent, which really isn't too shabby and may, in fact, be a blessing when you consider that towns falling within "the path of totality" expect to be swarmed with visitors to the tune of 98.6 Chief Joseph Days.

Astronomers have figured out that "The Path of Totality" sounds exactly like a sub-par band from the '80s heavy on the synthesizer, or — even worse — the subtitle of an above-par science fiction movie.

One thing to keep in mind for a solar eclipse is that, if you have to work that day, you can bill your employer double. Because, technically, it became nighttime and then daytime again and you were still working.

See ROMBACH, Page A5

Oh, the things you'll see in our county

Wallowa GAL

Katharine Stickroth

With the upcoming solar eclipse sensationalized and capitalized upon for tourism's sake, I recall a solar eclipse experience in the early '90s.

The pending partial eclipse was mentioned in the news, but to me, it was another work day. My helper and I headed out from the office to survey. While we positioned range poles and drove stakes, the daylight began to diminish. The eclipse had begun.

We continued working, yet the shadow cast over us created a surreal feeling, as though we were working in an altered reality. Everything — the truck, our equipment, the trees in the woods, each other — all looked exactly the same, but it wasn't. It felt unnatural to be out there working, like maybe we were supposed to be somewhere else. Maybe in a church.

During lunch, my coworker pinholed a piece of cardboard ripped from a cracker box, then placed a second fragment underneath, and we watched the eclipse's image in silence, forgetting our sandwiches.

Wallowa County offers its own wonders. The things I've been able to see in nature, only because I was at the right place at the right time, simply catch my breath.

A couple of months ago in the back country, I discovered an osprey nest with two fledglings. On the next visit, I was glassing these two perched on the edge of the nest, the parents gone. I nearly dropped my binoculars when the mother suddenly appeared in my lens and dropped a six-foot snake dangling lifeless from her claws into the nest. She flew away as quickly as she appeared, and the babies dropped down to eat.

I lowered the binos,

"What did I just see?"

Then raised them again, expecting an instant replay. Nothing.

Last hunting season, while scouting with a friend, we rounded a curve and surprised a golden eagle enjoying a road kill. So engorged with a good meal, he lifted in slow motion about 10 feet off the ground to cross to a safer spot, still within sight of his food.

"What is this place I live in?" I often ask myself.

It seems the idea of science likes to have an answer for everything. And once that was my pursuit as I graduated with an engineering degree: 1+1=2, the area of a circle is πr^2, a square has four equal sides.

Yet this place, the wildness of Wallowa County, cuts through my need to have answers to everything. I am more compliant with surprises, like the eclipse experience and the snake dropping.

Nothing like that can be planned. When I came here, much of my life was built on pretense, that I must know everything. But this place demands that I follow its teachings rather than the other way around. And when I offer the respect that is due, I am gifted with amazing experiences that leave me in awe.

For all these and more, I am grateful.

Katherine Stickroth is a freelance writer who blogs at awallowagal.com.

WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN

USPS No. 665-100

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Wallowa County's Newspaper Since 1884
Enterprise, Oregon

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PUBLISHED EVERY WEDNESDAY BY:
EO Media Group

Periodical Postage Paid at Enterprise and additional mailing offices

Subscription rates (includes online access)	1 Year
Wallowa County	$40.00
Out-of-County	$57.00

Subscriptions must be paid prior to delivery

See the Wallowa County Chieftain on the Internet
Wallowa.com
facebook.com/Wallowa | twitter.com/wcchieftain

POSTMASTER — Send address changes to
Wallowa County Chieftain
P.O. Box 338
Enterprise, OR 97828

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Volume 134

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Do humans have the 'right' to build, alter?

I'd like to echo the sentiment shared in Garik Asplund's letter (July 26 edition) about listening to the land.

We humans often see great swaths of land in terms of resources, calculation and personal value. If only we could turn off this analytic discursive mind, we might see the true beauty of the forest — not as a series of economic figures, but as a magnificent interdependent network, teeming with the miracle of life.

Sometimes we catch glimpses of the land's true nature, but it is time and again interrupted by our thoughts of owning or capturing it and turning it into personal gain.

I share this not as a criticism of rancher or retiree agendas, but as an acknowledgment that this is the way we think about our environment.

We naturally feel we have the "right" to build on or alter whatever property we own or to retire to a peaceful setting after a hard life's work.

Where does this right come from? Who gave it to us? How is it possible for humans to "own" the land they live on? How does this possessive mind affect our natural world?

These issues, ranging from elk grazing, deforestation and human overpopulation, are deeply connected and cannot be solved by picking out one conflict and barricading it from others. To live in harmony — as agriculturists, artists and neighbors — we must question this urge to own and "know best" when our individual survival is indistinguishable from the collective good of human, plant and animal.

Seth Kinzie
Joseph

Opportunity to create healthy forest in Lostine

Some of the comments by the environmental groups concerning the Lostine River Corridor Safety Project would be laughable if they were not so wrong.

For example, four million board feet is not a major timber sale. In the '70s and '80s, the Tussock moth epidemic and large fires killed most of the trees over large acres of private and public timberland. In both of these catastrophic events, dead trees were sold, logged and hauled to various mills and the acres were planted.

As the stands grew, they were precommercially thinned and later commercially thinned creating a healthy stand that can be managed for many years into the future.

Another example was the Hells Canyon Preservation Council. At the last stop on a recent field tour, an over- mature stand of Grand Fir, they were asked how they wanted this to be treated. As I have noticed at previous meetings and tours, they did not have an answer other than they would have to consult their people.

My vision for the area was to remove most of the dead, dying and down trees to reduce fuel levels. Then plant a mixture of Doug Fir, Ponderosa Pine and Western Larch. This would create a healthy forest that would provide hiding cover and grazing for the elk.

Maybe it is time to think about adjusting the Equal Access to Justice Act that pays the attorneys who always prevail at the Ninth Circuit Court $192.68 per hour.

I wonder who will feel responsible when both sides of the canyon turn black. The canyon will in time recover from the fire, but the tourists and the fire fighters and their family's may not.

Roy Garten
Enterprise

Garten is a retired forester.

Economy that works is answer to housing crisis

Regarding the housing crisis in Wallowa County and "the demographic shift away from the middle class" (July 26 edition), I suggest we direct our attention to 40 years of stagnant wages across our nation. In other words, we should look at the "demand" side of the "supply and demand" equation.

We've seen the benefits of increased productivity go to those at the very top as working Americans lost their bargaining power when jobs were automated or sent overseas. More than 20 percent of our national income now goes to the top one percent, compared to less than 10 percent of the total in the '70s. That extra 10 percent represents our lost wage increases. Free markets have not solved the problem. They have made it worse.

That extra 10 percent now amounts to well over a trillion dollars annually, which would work wonders if it were in the hands of working families where it belongs. A "big-time" increase in the federal Earned Income Tax Credit is recommended by Warren Buffett, one of our most astute businessmen.

The Page 4 editorial calls for "new ways of thinking and innovation." We could get together and demand and achieve a fair and growing economy that works for everyone.

Marshall McComb
Baker City