

# Rural Response

The state of Oregon must begin grappling with the lack of reliable emergency response in its wildest and most remote places.

Cash-strapped, tax-burdened rural Oregon counties like Wallowa County are playing host to more adventurous visitors, while their own populations age and require more medical care. Meanwhile, the tax base that supports rural emergency responders continues to decline as their economies sputter and their children move elsewhere to find economic opportunity.

To sum up: Adventurous visitors are getting into more and more trouble, but the places where they find that trouble are having a harder and harder time providing reliable emergency response. As we recently reported, Wheeler County is one of these places. With little economic activity after its logging-based economy collapsed in previous decades, Wheeler has become the least populated and fastest shrinking county in the state. And its aging population is straining the volunteer emergency responders that for generations helped support a thin professional crew of law enforcement professionals.

Those volunteer systems are beginning to collapse under the weight of state and federal regulations, heavier burdens being placed on fewer and fewer people, and a lack of institutional resources.

And it's not just Wheeler County. Other poor rural counties in eastern, southern, central and coastal Oregon see the same fate on the horizon. There are no more rocks to squeeze for a little additional funding in many such frontier locales. Tax rates are high while economic prospects are low.

It's hard enough for the professionals to make it out there. Members of the Wheeler County Sheriff's Department must buy their own boots, guns and bulletproof vests, wear uniforms handed down from other departments and type up their reports on hand-me-down computers. On days off, deputies change the oil and do brake work on their own patrol cars. Police evidence storage areas are used as cells for inmates between hearings.

Imagine doing all that hard work, without many resources, and not getting paid. That's what volunteer ambulance drivers, firefighters and EMTs are facing. And if the state doesn't want to see the system collapse entirely over the next years, it needs to find a sustainable, reasonable route of migrating dollars from our tourism and recreation economy to the people tasked with keeping those tourists and recreators safe.

Some have floated a motel tax that would be divided equitably among the state's 36 counties. Just \$1 a night on every hotel stay in Oregon could bring a small county like Wheeler upwards of \$200,000 a year. That would provide a reliable, steady stream of income to help a poor sheriff's department, make life easier for rural ambulance and fire crews, and on down the line. It will save lives.

That help must come from elsewhere. As we said above, there's few options to raise that kind of money on the backs of poor people in poor counties, thanks to Oregon's tax system. Governor Kate Brown has pledged to use her last term to help rural Oregon keep pace with the gains that the rest of the state has enjoyed. The problems facing rural law enforcement and emergency response offers her — and the Legislature — the chance to put her words into meaningful action.

## VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

Christian Ambrosion



## The fajita school of journalism

Back around 2007 I made a career change. Decided it was a good time to shake things up. Do something different. Bold new vistas. Change of pace. That kind of thing. Only problem was, I didn't have any new vistas on deck. No next paycheck. No backup plan. But my philosophy toward life has always kind of been that everything sort of ends up working itself out somehow or another. I may have cribbed this theory from Jean-Paul Sartre, Aristotle, Tom Waits or some other noted thinker. I can't be sure.

My parents came out to Wallowa County for a visit right after I'd turned in my notice on my old job. We were settled into a booth at El Bajio. Just ordered dinner. I got the fajitas, because I was feeling frisky. That sizzle. So exciting. I'd already let my folks know I was shifting gears on the job front and they politely inquired what my next move might be. Well, I said. I'll tell ya. Right after I go visit the restroom.

Now, friends, I assure you the following anecdote and timeline is entirely factual. On my approach to the water closet, with no solid job prospects, I passed then-editor of the Wallowa County Chieftain, Dave Hassler, and we exchanged how-



## AND FURTHERMORE

Jon Rombach

dies. He was aware of my recent job change from having one to not having one ... and right there at the El Bajio cash register he allowed as how he had a somewhat urgent vacancy on the writing staff and encouraged me to come aboard. One of his reporters had recently skedaddled to go travel to either Central or South America, I can't remember which. But it was definitely one of the Americas to the south of us. I already knew about this scenario, the same way he knew I needed a job. It's Wallowa County. Some things you just hear on the wind. Hassler and I made an appointment to iron out details.

So I return to our table, sit down, fiddle with my napkin a little bit, then let my folks know that my next job will be writing for the Chieftain. Phew. A real buzzer beater. A wise man once said: Things always work out one way or another. Same guy followed up with: Unless they don't. Turns out I was not really a good

reporter. It's hard. I admire those who can pull it off.

So I made another career change. Had a nice chat with Penny Arentsen of Winding Waters River Expeditions next to a different cash register in Wallowa County and that turned into me rowing rafts down in Hells Canyon. That was just lovely. There's not much in the way of deadlines when you're rowing boats. During my exit interview from being a temporary Chieftain reporter, Hassler asked if I'd keep writing a column. Well, now. That was the only part of the job that didn't give me night terrors, so I said yeah, sure.

I know our new Chieftain editor, Christian Ambrosion, from his days at Fishtrap. And I know his dad, Rodd, through our mutual friend Gareth Tabor, who — incidentally — was on my raft the one and only time I ever flipped a boat in Hells Canyon. Long story. Don't have time to get into it now. But I can tell you Gareth is a fine swimmer. Back to my main point: Christian, let's go get fajitas one of these days and talk punctuation.

Jon Rombach is a local columnist for the Chieftain. He flipped a raft one time, big deal. Wild Sheep Rapid can be difficult. Give him a break.

## How to cope with allergies at school

Children with food allergies, or food sensitivities, have a harder time than other children when it comes to school celebrations. An allergy is different than a sensitivity.

An allergy to a certain food, e.g., eggs, dairy or peanuts, means if the person eats, or even comes in contact with an allergen, their body reacts in a way that can be life threatening. This is called anaphylaxis. The person may experience some, or all, of the following: swollen face or tongue, difficulty breathing, rash or hives.

The person needs immediate medical attention. Though an intolerance, or sensitivity, can cause some of the same signs and symptoms as a food allergy, people often confuse the two, according to Dr. James Li, MD, of the Mayo Clinic. Many people with food allergies carry a device called an Epi pen. This is administered to counteract the effects of the allergen in the body. Medical attention is still required following use of an Epi pen.

A food sensitivity is generally not considered life threatening, though for the person with the sensitivity, it is still unpleasant. For example, if a person is lactose intolerant, if they eat dairy products they will experience digestive discomfort, such as abdominal bloating. These people know to avoid foods made with dairy, or dairy



## EATING HEALTHY

Ann Bloom

foods.

For the child with a food allergy or a sensitivity, navigating the school celebration maze is challenging at best. For the parent of the child it is just as challenging. What do you pack for lunch? What do you provide for a classroom celebration? With a little planning and communication with the teacher and other parents, the child with a food allergy or food sensitivity can participate equally in school celebrations.

More and more children are presenting with gluten intolerance, i.e., intolerance or sensitivity to foods containing gluten, which includes wheat, pasta, bread and some grains, lactose, eggs or nuts, or peanuts. If the child has a gluten intolerance, many cookies and muffins can be made with a flour replacement, with little or no taste difference.

In the case of lactose, foods such as smoothies made with milk, yogurt parfaits, etc. are off limits. However, some smoothies taste just fine made

with almond milk or soy milk, unless either of these foods is a known allergen. Smoothies can also be made with just fruit juices and frozen fruits. Non-dairy yogurt can be substituted for yogurt made from cow's milk.

In the case of tree nuts, or peanuts, these can usually be eliminated from a recipe as they are often listed as optional.

There are still many snacks which avoid allergens and sensitivities. Good options include gluten free crackers and hummus, sliced fruit, vegetables with a bean dip or non-dairy ranch dressing, slices of lean turkey or chicken, muffins made with a wheat flour replacement, fruit or gluten-free crackers with sunflower butter.

Informing your child's teacher at the beginning of the school year is important. This will allow him or her to keep an eye out for foods containing allergens, and also communicate with other parents as to appropriate snacks they can bring into the classroom. Also, if there happens to be a snack your child cannot have, you can also provide snacks the teacher can keep in the classroom for special occasions.

With a little planning everyone can happily participate in the childhood experience of classroom parties and celebrations.

### WHERE TO WRITE

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### Salem

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