

# Longtime leader of Union County Safe Communities Coalition dies

By DICK MASON The Observer

WALLOWA — Northeastern Oregon lost a youth leader of vision, who could see in young people what they could not see in themselves.

Robin Wortman, of Wallowa, a former 4-H leader and a former director of the Union County Safe Communities Coalition, died Tuesday, Aug. 2, at a hospital in White Salmon, Washington at the age of 59.

“Robin pushed people in the right direction. She was able to get kids to see their potential, to get them to realize they had abilities they did not know they had,” said DeAnne Mansveld, a member of the Union County Safe Communities Coalition’s executive committee.

Wortman directed the coalition from 2011 through October 2019. As its director, she helped the organization implement a number of community events, such as October’s Red Ribbon month and an annual multimedia conference for seventh graders to teach them about online safety and the dangers of substance abuse. She was also a member of the coalition’s Youth Council and worked with various community organizations including police, Grande Ronde Hospital, school districts and fire departments to put on events.

The youth council, composed of teenagers from school districts throughout Union County, works directly with middle and high school students to create messaging that peers will respond to.

Wortman worked closely with programs like “Reward and Remind,” where under age high school students would go into convenience stores and attempt to purchase tobacco. If the clerk did not ask for identification, their store would be sent a letter from the Youth Coalition reminding it that it is illegal to sell tobacco in Oregon to anyone under 18. Stores where identification was requested were sent letters commending them for adhering to the state law.

The program was popular with program students.

“The kids loved it,” said Sheryl Roberts, a member of UCSCC’s executive committee.



Robin Wortman, far right, walks with friends at the old 12-hour Drug Free Relay at La Grande High School's track about six years ago. Wortman, of Wallowa, a former 4-H leader and a former director of the Union County Safe Communities Coalition, died Tuesday, Aug. 2, at the age of 59.

Contributed Photo

Roberts credits Wortman with doing an excellent job of making the members of the youth council understand that they did not have to use drugs and alcohol to have a good time, a message the students conveyed to peers when they conducted anti-substance abuse projects at Union County schools.

Wortman did an excellent job putting students in leadership positions for Youth Coalition projects, placements that brought out the best in them, Roberts said.

“This built kids up, boosting their self esteem,” she said.

Roberts said it was easy for Wortman to make connections with young people.

“Robin enjoyed kids and made it fun for them,” she said.

Wortman found herself in the role of an educator for not only young people but also parents while serving as the coalition’s coordinator. Roberts noted that when she was hired it was legal in Oregon for parents to provide alcohol to their children in their homes.

To counteract this, Wortman helped the UCSCC conduct information campaigns to inform parents about how alcohol can affect brain development in children and

**“SHE EXCELLED AT MAKING EVERYONE FEEL THAT THEY WERE PART OF A GROUP AND A TEAM.”**

— Billie-Jo Nickens, UCSCC executive committee member

teenagers. Speakers about youth drinking were brought in and information about its detrimental impact was provided throughout the community.

Wortman was able to tackle many responsibilities and projects at once because of her meticulous attention to planning.

“She was so organized. She always had every detail covered no matter what. She had every bullet point written down — even the most minute detail,” said Billie-Jo Nickens, a member of the executive committee of the UCSCC.

Wortman was also known for working long hours. She attended all of the events and activities run by the UCSCC, including its 12-hour Drug Free Relay at the La Grande High School track, an event that evolved into an annual run at the Mount Emily Recreation Area.

“She was not an 8 to 5 employee, she attended all of the extra activities,” said Tracy Christopher, a member of UCSCC’s executive committee.

Wortman would not even let health issues sideline her. Mansveld noted that in 2016, the

## CELEBRATION OF LIFE

A celebration of life ceremony for Wortman will be conducted from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturday, Aug. 20, in Wallowa at its senior center.

UCSCC leader broke her ankle shortly before a work-related trip to Washington, D.C.

“She was such a trooper that she managed to make the trip to D.C. and attended the related meetings in December with a cast and crutches. She was very determined to follow through on any commitment she made,” Mansveld said.

Members of Wortman’s family were a common sight at the events she helped put on, often assisting her.

“She always included her family in her work,” Nickens said. “She was a huge advocate for the family.”

Wortman was the guiding light of the Union County Safe Communities Coalition but she never referred to herself at its leader and did not like being referred to as such. This reflected her deep collaborative spirit.

“She excelled at making everyone feel that they were part of a group and a team,” Nickens said. “She would never say it was my project. She was community minded that way.”

Not surprisingly, Wortman was not one to seek the spotlight — she felt strongly about others getting credit for their contributions, Nickens said.

Sometimes this meant Wortman’s contributions were overlooked.

“There were many times that she should have been in the limelight, but she stepped back when she really should have gotten the recognition,” Nickens said.

Wortman dodged the spotlight even though she was good at articulating UCSCC’s mission.

“She was a great communicator, she drew people into the coalition,” Christopher said. “She was definitely amazing and definitely an inspiration.”

Leaf Filter Gutter Protection advertisement with 15% and 10% off discounts and financing options.

Generac PWRcell advertisement for power outages and solar panels, offering a \$300 special offer.

Generac advertisement for home standby generators, offering a free 7-year warranty.

# Coffee Break!

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for various words.

- CLUES ACROSS: 1. Influential Swedish, Belgian clan; 6. Swiss river; 9. Nocturnal S. American rodent; 13. Like coagulated milk; 14. Lima is its capital; 15. Lying down; 16. Jai \_\_\_\_, sport; 17. Egyptian statesman; 18. Napoleon Dynamite's uncle; 19. Renovated; 21. Chadic language; 22. 18-year period; 23. Beverage container; 24. Natural logarithm; 25. The "mecca" of basketball; 28. A way to darken; 29. Mackerels; 31. Actor Pitt; 33. Places to buy seafood; 36. True firs; 38. Neither; 39. Fencing sword; 41. Italian pastas; 44. Island nation close to the U.S.; 45. Begets; 46. Resembles a pouch; 48. \_\_ student, learns healing; 49. Sodium; 51. Indicates position; 52. The world has one; 54. Partner to pains; 56. Photographer; 60. Chew the fat; 61. Culture of the

- British Iron Age; 62. Weaverbird; 63. Advice or counsel; 64. Asian nation; 65. Brought on board; 66. German river; 67. Airborne (abbr.); 68. Leaf-footed bug genus; CLUES DOWN: 1. Mark left behind; 2. Cry weakly; 3. Ancient region in modern Syria; 4. Farewell; 5. Blue grass state; 6. Genus of mosquitoes; 7. S. Israeli city; 8. You can get stuck in one; 9. One who mistrusts others unjustifiably; 10. First month of ancient Hebrew calendar; 11. Tigers legend; 12. Make more attractive; 14. Horses; 17. Slight projection in typefaces; 20. Male parent; 21. Jack and Jill are two; 23. After B; 25. Licensed for Wall Street; 26. Missile with about 600-mile range; 27. Goddesses; 29. A day kids love; 30. Oily secretion; 32. One-tenth of a meter; 34. A father's male child; 35. One point east of southeast; 37. Silk garments; 40. Cool!; 42. The color of anger; 43. Trade profession; 47. It can get you around; 49. Mother-of-pearl; 50. Hurt; 52. Legendary slugger Hank; 53. Polio vaccine developer; 55. Incline from vertical; 56. Sea creature; 57. Actress Kate; 58. Affirmative votes; 59. Nothing; 61. Pie \_\_\_\_ mode; 65. Expresses surprise

WORD SCRAMBLE: REMSEG. Rearrange the letters to spell something pertaining to traffic awareness.

SUDOKU puzzle grid with clues and difficulty level: Intermediate.

Guess Who? puzzle: I am a pop singer born in Arizona on August 15, 1989. My brothers and I made an appearance on the TV show Hannah Montana and won legions of fans. As a trio, we're quite popular. In 2011, I released a solo album.

CRYPTO FUN: Solve the code to discover words related to traffic. A. 11 10 22 21. B. 13 19 8 19 21 15 22 9 10 5 21. C. 21 10 7 19 15 12. D. 22 3 10 8 17 10 12 21.

TRAFFIC SAFETY WORD SEARCH: Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards. Includes a list of words like ACCELERATE, ACCIDENT, AIRBAG, ASPHALT, AUTOMOBILE, AVENUE, BOULEVARD, BRACKES, BRIDGE, CLOVERLEAF, CRASH, CRUISE, CURVE, DANGER, DEFENSIVE, DENT, EXHAUST, EXPRESSWAY, FAST, FUEL, GEAR, INTERCHANGE, LICENSE, PATROL.

BE OUR EXCLUSIVE Coffee Break SPONSOR! WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN. Reach over 2,300 print and digital readers each week in the all Wallowa County Chieftain. Call Jennifer Cooney today at 541-805-9630 for more information on this new weekly feature!