

Siuslaw News
P.O. Box 10
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Opinion

EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE

CATHERINE J. ROURKE
For the Siuslaw News

Greg Williamson



The belly is such an ungrateful rascal, always craving more and dismissing what it devoured yesterday.

After stuffing ours silly with turkey this week, it's easy to forget that others remain empty — not just in Sudan, but right here in Florence.

One man recently decided to do something about that by sharing whatever food he has with the hungry, out of his own pocket. Every Saturday and Sunday, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., Greg Williamson provides “free food and fellowship” out of a 41-foot converted school bus on Quince Street north of Route 126.

“Hunger does not take a holiday,” Williamson said. “My passion is feeding people and hungry lives matter.”

With a mission “to offer people of all backgrounds, denominations, genders and beliefs a healthy free meal in a safe, loving place,” Williamson rolls up his bus and rolls out a “picnic” each weekend despite his own physical and financial shortcomings.

No stranger to hunger like many he feeds, Williamson is disabled without any income and homeless — or “landless,” as he prefers to call it. Yet Williamson opens his shallow pockets and lean pantry to others, using whatever food he can muster

from donations and his own limited supply.

“Word has spread quickly through organizations helping needy and homeless people,” he said. “I’ve been privileged to provide Florence with approximately 300 hot meals.”

Nicknamed “the Bus Boy,” Williamson welcomes all ages and walks of life to break bread and enjoy some conviviality. Picnickers last weekend included a single mom with two kids, several homeless men, a senior on fixed income and a young woman self-described as “the working poor.” On the menu: a vegetarian corn chowder with a salmon option stirred by Williamson’s ladle of heartfelt kindness.

“I don’t judge anyone who comes to the bus for food,” he said. “I am no better or worse than the people I serve.”

Never certain how he will provide food each week, Williamson has managed to sustain his “picnics” for over three months. How does he do it?

“On a wing and prayer,” Williamson said, pointing to the “Emunun” sign on the bus which means “faith.” Like a “loaves and fishes” miracle, he transforms stock and vegetables into a healthy vegetarian meal that feeds dozens of people. Williamson claims he could pre-

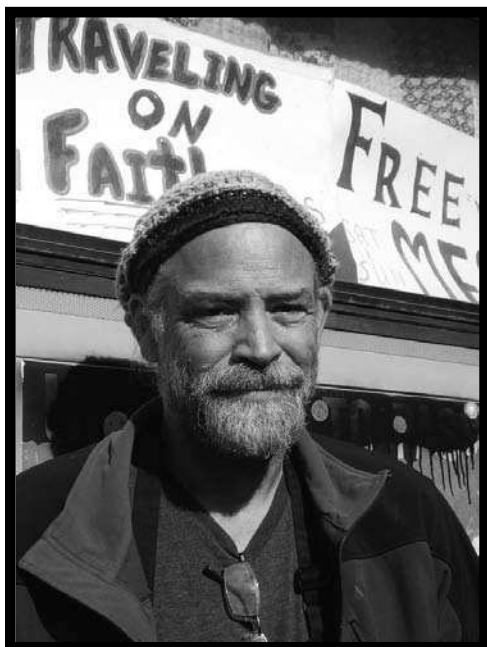


PHOTO BY CATHERINE ROURKE

Greg Williamson offers “free food and fellowship” for hungry folks every weekend out of his own pocket.

pare over 1,000 meals a day with sufficient staff and provisions.

“I really need help and support to keep this going,” he said. Like the birds of the air, Williamson’s picnics find sustenance. But the bus needs repairs and Williamson welcomes food donations and sponsors for his cause.

Self-reliant since age 13, Williamson is proud of his 40-year work history. After washing dishes as a teen, the L.A. native became a line cook in his 20s and spent many years working for restaurants and as

a camp cook and licensed guide at a ranch. He raised three children and supported his family through customer service jobs until he became disabled.

“I’ve worked hard all my life but had to use all of my 401K savings now that I’m fighting for disability,” he said. “If it wasn’t for caring about my fellow man, there were some days I couldn’t have gotten out of bed.”

But what drove Williamson to jump out of bed and drive a bus to feed the hungry?

“Every human has the right to food, water and a safe place to sleep,” he said. “The bible tells us to ‘entertain the stranger for you may be entertaining angels.’ We need to stop reading the Word and start doing it.”

When Home Shalom charity in Portland needed a volunteer for its mobile emergency tented kitchen, Williamson traded his minivan for a school bus large enough to carry it. Converted into a motor home, the bus enabled him to haul volunteers, equipment and 2,000 pounds of donated food to Vermont and serve 12,000 free meals.

Williamson’s “loaves and fishes” miracles didn’t end there. As record floods in West Virginia left hundreds homeless, the Kitchen Hauler steered his bus south, preparing three daily meals for 30 volunteers in two weeks.

“After that, I wondered where my pots and pans could be of service,”

he said. “Then I remembered Florence.”

Williamson had volunteered at Helping Hands when residing here from 2012 to 2015. Now he felt “guided” to return, offering meals along the way. Ten thousand miles later, the bus arrived in Florence and he has been dishing out his hot vegetarian soups since August.

As one who walks his talk, Williamson remains an active member of local groups helping needy people, such as the Florence Emergency Cold Weather Shelter.

“Every life God puts on earth is precious,” he said. “We must start caring for our fallen comrades without looking down on them; it’s time to lift them up.”

A man with a heart as big as his bus, Williamson exemplifies a verse from Proverbs: “When you give a feast, invite the poor; share your bread with the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.”

For more info or to contact Williamson, email gwwid@yahoo.com, call 541-606-7528 or write to him at P.O. Box 1296 in Florence.

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LETTERS

Buyer beware

In just the first ten days of Donald Trump’s election, some alarming, but predictable, stories related to his questionable behavior have emerged.

Among them:

1) Thursday’s Tweet in which he over-exaggerated his role in Ford Motor Company’s

“decision” to keep Kentucky factories out of Mexico when, in actuality, Ford had never intended to close their Louisville Lincoln factory and move it to Mexico in the first place.

Its contract with the UAW forbids it to close that factory. Ford had merely decided to move production of a single model out of Kentucky. It had also talked about moving the production of its Ford Focus to Mexico but, once again, its UAW contract mandates that Ford must ramp up other production in Louisville to offset work lost to Mexico.

The net result was that, even without Trump’s self-proclaimed “help,” no jobs would have been lost to Mexico thanks to UAW contractual agreements.

2) At about the same time, Trump’s team publicized a photo of a meeting in Trump Tower with the President-elect, Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and... Ivanka Trump?

I’d also like to point out that prior to the beginnings of their presidencies, both George W. Bush and Barack Obama liquidated their assets and moved them to others that could not conflict with any policy decisions they might make as presidents. In this regard, Trump has done nothing, except declare that he has created a “blind” trust.

In actuality, he has merely turned his assets over to the control of his children who, immediately after the election, were placed on his transition team.

If this were to happen in a third world country, it would be laughable.

Trump’s daughter will likely become the CEO of his company. The photo I mentioned clearly implies that his organization will have a big hand in choosing key officials in his administration and will most likely play a role in foreign matters — even though nepotism is illegal.

I see this as a colossal conflict of interest. What if a foreign leader refused to allow — or allowed — the U.S. President to pursue a project in his or her country? What could be the implications?

The President is elected to represent the people instead of his private interests.

It makes one wonder if our newly elected and self-proclaimed “outsider,” who pledged to “drain the swamp” of special interests, is quickly becoming the consummate “insider?”

As they say in the world of real estate, “Let the buyer beware.”

*Curt Buttko
Florence*

What makes America great

I have held my tongue through the roller-coaster of emotions since the election of Donald Trump.

I can no longer.

In Trump’s acceptance speech, he appeared to be more dignified and respectful. And when he said he would be a “President for everyone,” I was cautiously hopeful.

I wondered if his Presidency might differ from his inflammatory campaign rhetoric, and that maybe he played on his supporters’ emotions to get elected. However, actions speak louder than words. His selection of reactionary advisors and cabinet members; his plans to deport millions of immigrants; his proposed Muslim registry; and his continued defensive Tweets each time someone says something about him that he doesn’t like — all of it is the same old Trump.

We will support him in ventures that are fair and make sense. All of us would like to see jobs come back to America. And infrastructure jobs

sound great.

But instead of jobs in the fossil fuel industry which only help his own shortsighted investments while lining the pockets of lobbyists, why not make an expansive investment — as China has — in safe alternative energy construction jobs like wind and solar power?

That would be the mark of a “great” and innovative leader who cares about the future of our country and the world.

The majority of us in this country did not vote for Donald Trump. So believe me, those of us of like mind will defend social and environmental justice legally and nonviolently at every turn.

That’s because what makes America “great” is not demonizing a minority, increased consumerism or the accumulation of wealth.

What makes America great is our embrace of diversity and equality, regardless of race, religion, gender or class, as well as our freedom of speech and assembly, affordable health care and education, and a safe and healthy planet for all people.

Now and for generations to come.

*Julie McFarlane
Florence*

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor concerning issues affecting the Florence area and Lane County.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters should be limited to about 300 words and must include the writer’s full name, address and phone number for verification.

Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Libelous and anonymous letters or poetry will not be published.

All submissions become the property of Siuslaw News and will not be returned.

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