



CATHERINE J. ROURKE
For the Siuslaw News

EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE

Annie Schmidt



PHOTO BY CATHERINE ROURKE

Volunteer Annie Schmidt has been “giving back” to the local community for nearly 25 years.

They seek neither fame or fortune. There are no statues or monuments erected in their honor, nor any airports, boulevards or libraries in their name. And they shudder at any hint of recognition.

Florence’s volunteers prefer to remain quietly behind the scenes and out of the headlines. Since April is National Volunteer Month, volunteer Annie Schmidt agreed to step into the spotlight as a sterling example of the prevailing spirit of service in this community. With nearly 25 years of local volunteer efforts under her hat, she has donated an incalculable amount of time to making a difference for others.

“Volunteering is so much fun,” said Schmidt, a former educator and school administrator who moved to Florence with her husband in 1993 after retiring from their overseas teaching jobs. “We had lived by the academic calendar our entire lives. But upon our arrival here, we were now able to get involved in everything.”

Still in its growing stages, with the construction of a new hospital and library, Florence offered plenty of volunteer opportunities for Schmidt. For starters, she joined the fundraising campaign for the Florence Events Center and served as an ambassador for the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce.

Next, she became involved as a charter member of the

Last Resort Players, participating in the first play produced in a tent in 1994. Since then she continues to participate in “any play they’ll give me a chance.”

Schmidt has been cast for the leading role of Maria Callas in “Master Class,” which opens in June.

“As a teacher for 25 years, I was always performing on stage before kids,” she said. “The best teachers engage their students and never sit at their desks.”

After that, Schmidt joined the Florence Performing Arts, now known as Seacoast Entertainment Association, an all-volunteer organization that has showcased musical and dance productions for more than 30 years. She eventually became its board president and joined the Friends of the Library board as well.

But that still wasn’t enough to quench Schmidt’s thirst for volunteering. To this roster, she added lunch preparation for building crews at Habitat for Humanity and working as a volunteer cashier in the Habitat ReStore. In addition, she served on the board of the Western Lane Community Foundation, helping to improve local quality of life through philanthropy and eventually becoming its executive director.

“This town runs on volunteer hours,” Schmidt said. “The library volunteers, for example, help free up the staff for developmental pursuits.”

Schmidt has done her share of shelving and stacking the books.

“It’s been scientifically

proven that any volunteering enhances physical and mental aspects,” she said. “It keeps you in touch with people instead of just doing nothing and deteriorating. Giving back gives you back so much more than you could ever imagine.”

Schmidt currently devotes her time to Meals on Wheels, in addition to remaining active with the Last Resort Players and Friends of the Library.

“Meals on Wheels is the primary contact for so many shut-in people,” she said. “It’s such a good feeling to know you’ve helped people.”

What inspires the lifelong educator to keep serving others? In addition to strong ethics inherited from the women in her family “who always worked,” Schmidt attributes her passion for vol-

unteering to early mentorship from a junior high school teacher in her native Kentucky.

“She was a fabulous English teacher who cared about kids and engaged us in intellectual discussions,” Schmidt said. “That’s where I learned to engage students and to give back.”

Schmidt’s family moved to Germany after her high school graduation since her stepfather, a military career man, was stationed

there. While attending a college for military dependents, she met her husband at a university language program in Salzburg. It was love at first sight, and the couple married

the following year.

After returning with her husband to his native Seattle, Schmidt received a degree in comparative literature from the University of Washington. She took her first teaching job at Cottage Grove High School and earned a master’s degree at the University of Oregon. The couple often visited friends in Florence during summers, in between teaching at overseas schools for military families, and then made it their retirement home.

“I love dealing with kids and opening doors for them in any subject,” she said. “I just love showing them the wonders of literature and poetry and learned as much from the kids as they learned from me. I miss teaching to this day.”

Schmidt travels to St. Louis every year to visit her mentor who, at 103, still manages to keep her former pupil engaged. And Schmidt still just keeps giving and shows no signs of giving up.

“I am so happy with what I

do,” she said. “It’s so important to keep active and stay open to alternatives by expanding your vision. But I consider my role as a good mother, teacher and wife my greatest achievement.”

National Volunteer Month offers an opportunity to shine a light on our local volunteers who demonstrate the power of the individual to spark change. It has been said we have two hands, one for helping ourselves and another for helping others. With that in mind, we salute all the extraordinary volunteers lending a hand to improve our little corner of the universe and motivating us all to make a difference.

Catherine J. Rourke is an award-winning journalist, author and book editor who teaches creative writing at the Florence Regional Arts Alliance. Email her at CJReditor@gmail.com.

PEO Sisterhood regional luncheon set

Regional members of the P.E.O. Sisterhood will meet for their annual spring luncheon on Saturday, April 15, at The Mill Casino, 3201 Tremont Ave., in North Bend.

Registration begins at 11:30 a.m. and lunch will be served at noon.

The South Coast Reciprocity area, eight chap-

ters representing Coos Bay, North Bend, Reedsport, Florence and Coquille, will gather to renew friendships and welcome new members as well as any unaffiliated members in the area.

Any PEO Sister who would like to attend is encouraged to call Nada Rose at 541-271-4181.

PEO is a women’s philanthropic educational organization that promotes the education of women and raises money for scholarships and educational grants.

Palm Sunday to kick off Holy Week

St. Mary, Our Lady of the Dunes, will commence Holy Week with an outdoor procession on Palm Sunday.

Everyone is invited to join Fr. Selvam and parish children as they lead the procession from outside of the parish hall,

around the church building and into the church proper.

There will also be a blessing of the palms, and palms for everyone to take home.

Contact the St. Mary’s office at 541-997-2312 for more details.

...need a friend?

Meet Tina Louise

Tina Louise is a sweetheart. She is loving and affectionate and enjoys being held while you walk around. Lap time is a must and her favorite quiet area is on a blanket on a shelf in the closet. She loves head scratches and body massages; meows when she is hungry or wanting to be picked up. She was a stray in the neighborhood and endeared herself but the folks that found her were traveling indefinitely otherwise she would have her forever home. The caretakers stated that she preferred to go outside to do her litter box duties. She does fine in her cage and out and about in the small room no messes made. Would benefit from starting in a small space so she gets used to where her box is just to be on the safe side.



If you would like to meet Tina Louise or any of her friends, please visit us at:

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Helping Seniors Manage Chronic Diseases

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Senior Finances, What to Do When It's Time To Help

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Celebrate National Library Week April 9-15, 2017

FRIENDS HELP CELEBRATE NATIONAL LIBRARY WEEK

The Friends will be signing up new members Tuesday April 11th and Thursday April 13th from 10am-2pm and Wed April 12th from 10am-4pm.

Wed April 12th the Friends will be serving cookies as we thank the community for their support of the Siuslaw Library during National Library Week.

This message brought to you by these sponsors:

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