

Siuslaw News

Community Voices

NATURAL PERSPECTIVE — Going Batty



By EMILY J. UHRIG, Ph.D.
Special to Siuslaw News

With Halloween near, decorations everywhere sport

“scary” creatures like black cats, spiders or ravens. However, many of the holiday’s animal icons get a bad rap in real life — and that’s especially true for bats. Perhaps because of their nocturnal nature, and Bram Stoker certainly didn’t help either, bats are widely misunderstood.

Despite popular notions, bats are not rodents. As the world’s only flying mammal, they’re members of their own group, Chiroptera, which means “hand wing.” This name refers to their wings being formed by thin skin stretched across elongated

finger bones similar to those in our hands. The claw on the wing’s upper edge, which helps with grasping, is actually their thumb.

Images of bats as blood connoisseurs are also mostly misplaced. While blood-drinking bats do exist, their feeding habits are more mundane than Dracula’s. Real vampire bats, found in Central and South America, are tiny creatures that don’t suck blood, but rather lap it up much like a puppy.

Blood meals, however, are limited to only a few species;

most bats feed on insects, fruit, or nectar.

Oregon’s 15 bat species are all insect eaters. Their taste for bugs makes them useful visitors to yards and gardens, yet their role in pest control tends to be underappreciated. Instead, bats themselves are often seen as pests, particularly when roosting in barns or attics, which is common this time of year with weather becoming cooler.

Bats do sometimes carry diseases, but transmission to humans is fairly rare, usually occurring only through close

contact with bats or their droppings. In large numbers, bats make quite a mess, so removing them from buildings is reasonable, but best done non-lethally. Bats can be evicted by simply waiting until they leave then sealing up the structure to prevent their re-entry.

About half of Oregon’s bats have populations considered in need of conservation efforts. They are important ecosystem members, but bats are often victims of habitat loss, frequently due to human activities. Additionally, bats are

threatened by an emerging fungal disease called White Nose Syndrome. While humans are seemingly unaffected, the disease is deadly to bats and has caused dramatic population declines in the eastern U.S. Recently, the disease was found in Washington and, unfortunately, will likely travel to Oregon despite prevention efforts.

So, enjoy your spooky holiday decorations, but look beyond the bats’ traditional reputation. They’re more than just holiday icons and can really use some support.

SIUSLAW VALLEY FIRE & RESCUE — Man, we’re really running some calls!



CAPT. PETE “BOA” WARREN
Special to Siuslaw News

At 2:19 a.m. on Sept. 16, Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue was tapped out to its 500th call of the year.

So, what’s so significant about the number 500, well other than that after race milk drenching in Indianapolis?

Well fine folks, that’s how many calls we’ve been tapped out to this year. That being the case, we’ve already exceeded the amount of calls we’ve ever done in any single year.

Last year’s new high was 495 —

and we still have a quarter to go!

When do you think we get the most calls? You’ll find out at the bottom of this article.

Most of our calls (47 percent) are rescue calls of some type. Those include assisting Western Lane Ambulance District on medical calls, search and rescue, water rescue, technical rescue, dunes calls and motor vehicle incidents.

Fire prevention has been doing a great job, as our actual fire calls have dropped from 2017’s 8.9 per-

cent fires versus 6.4 percent fires so far this year. Then again, it’s getting cooler already, so ...

Our normal on-scene response time from being called out is 8.5 minutes, with about seven responders jumping in their rigs.

When there’s truly a rip-roaring fire, we’re averaging 14 firefighters showing up to put the wet on the red. It would be great to have 20, and that’s one reason we’re getting the word out — come on in and volunteer!

People aren’t driving any bet-

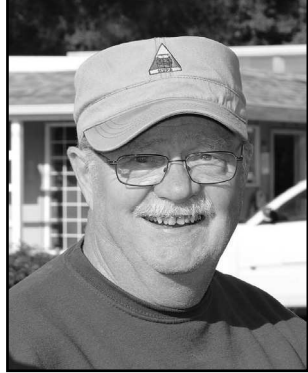
ter either, in fact, as of Sept. 26, vehicle collisions have increased to 113 from last year’s total of 80. That’s higher than the national average for a small town like ours. Slow down y’all!

We’ve been running a lot of Duty Chief (DC) calls this year. Our Duty Chief program has really taken off since we added four of our volunteer captains to the program. This relieves a lot of stress on our responding crews as they don’t have to respond when one DC can take care of the issue.

Oh, don’t forget something else your department does: Training. There are numerous training events during a week. This adds to the amount of time your Siuslaw Valley firefighters are dedicating to the protection of our area.

What did I forget? Oh yeah, I recommend chilling out on a lounge around 4 p.m. on Saturday as it’s rock’n in Florence and there’s a good chance you’ll hear sirens at this time. According to the numbers, Saturdays are when we get our most calls.

MILITARY HERITAGE CHRONICLES — Umatilla Military Facility



CAL APPLEBEE
Special to Siuslaw News

I recently hauled home yet another derelict old military jeep that brought back some childhood memories, and caused me to re-discover an iconic Oregon

military facility I had nearly forgotten. The jeep is a 1952 M38A1, which was originally purchased in 1975 by a family in Hermiston, Ore., at a surplus auction at the then Umatilla Chemical Depot.

When I was a kid in junior and high school, I made numerous trips, some by car and some by Greyhound, along I-84, shuffling back and forth between my real parents in Tillamook and my foster family in Idaho. That road trip always went through the area around Hermiston, including the Umatilla Indian reservation and the Umatilla Chemical Depot.

As with many of the military facilities created around the United States in preparation of World

War II, it was established in 1941, encompassing slightly more than 17,000 acres. Its original mission was to store and maintain a variety of military items, from blankets to ammunition.

At the height of WWII, an unexplained nighttime explosion of 265 500-pound bombs at one of the huge underground vaults, called igloos, took the lives of six people. The resulting crater is still there; the Army never determined the cause of the accident.

In 1962 the mission changed with the addition of chemical weapons, including nerve agents and a blistering agent often referred to as mustard gas. Although these chemical weapons

were stored in our backyard for decades, they were never officially used, and constituted 10 percent of the nation’s stockpile of such weapons.

Environmental as well as humanitarian concerns grew in the 1970s and led Congress to direct the U.S. Army in 1985 to destroy the entire U.S. chemical agent stockpile, beginning a process that would take decades itself to accomplish. In 1994, the base was scheduled for closure, but it wouldn’t be until 2004 that disposal actually began, and 2017 when it was considered completed.

In late 2017/early 2018, the Oregon Military Department

became the owner of 7,500 acres, to be transformed into “Camp Umatilla,” a state facility designed to serve numerous roles for various elements of the Oregon National Guard. Roles will include training facilities for both Oregon National Guard as well as other military branches, shooting ranges for both public as well as law enforcement agencies, and the Guard’s 249th Regional Training Institute.

Despite the vintage nature of the aging facility and its infrastructure, the Oregon Military Department plans to preserve a historical district, which will include a chunk of concrete from the tragic 1944 igloo explosion,

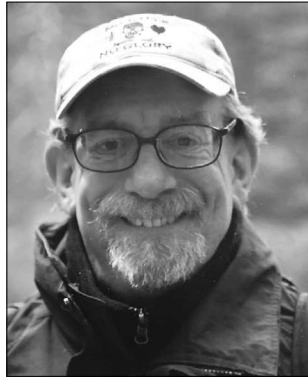
with some public access as well.

Like so many other hidden gems around our State, this is just one more example of the state’s rich military heritage — and it appears we will eventually get to visit and enjoy this one.

And yes, when its finished, my vintage jeep will carry the markings of the Umatilla Chemical Depot.

The Oregon Coast Military Museum is located on Kingwood Street adjacent to the Florence Municipal Airport, and is open from noon to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. You can learn more about military heritage by visiting the museum online at oregoncoastmilitarymuseum.com.

NOTES FROM THE SILTCOOS — The importance of being less earnest



By BARRY SOMMER
Special to Siuslaw News

As humans we have, despite ourselves, blurred the line between want and need. Our consumer culture tells us what we “want” and then goes about laying out the details as to the “how” of the “want.” You know, low interest or no interest for a year, free delivery, no payment until next year (which always seems to pop up in November), your choice of colors and styles or my favorite,

the deal where for the one price you get two, just pay a separate handling and postage fee. I mean really, it’s as if they don’t know we know that in the end we will pay for two items in full, hidden fees and charges notwithstanding.

Us ruralites are just as prone to this siren song of want as our city dwelling cousins, but instead of, oh let’s say a new BMW or dog sweater, we here in the sticks tend to be drawn to things like glitter finish bass boats, a new hunting trailer and “Oh, I gotta have that four-seater quad with electric steering and a turbo.”

Sure, we sign on the dotted line and snatch the keys from the salesman’s hand and run (skip, actually) to our new toy and do doughnuts in the parking lot before the engine is warmed up, yet in that fleeting rush of endorphins we forget that fleeting it is — just a temporary flood of brain chemicals that justifies our spending the

kids’ inheritance.

Let’s not fool ourselves. In this laissez-faire theater that we all agree to be actors in, being the good consumer means our “want” is the fuel that drives the engine of business (hat-tip to Harvey Mackay.) It’s not the everyday costs of living that keeps everything afloat, that figure is pretty much a constant. It’s the “want” spending that really drives our headlong rush towards the belief that the more we spend the more we save, and the greater and greater need to find somewhere to store the stuff acquired because of all the money we saved.

Kind of silly if you ask me.

When I lost a long-time job to the follies of the financial collapse of ‘09, I had to make some hard decisions regarding lifestyle. Not so hard I found out, if one has no emotional attachments to their things. And therein lies the rub.

Pride of ownership, especially

after spending many Benjamins, creates for most an emotional attachment. Our hard work and the savings build-up enables the purchase of that thing we want, and darn it if we don’t treat it almost as a child, loved and protected as well as susceptible to our whims and desires. It is no longer just an inanimate object; it is a reflection of who we are. Look at me, I have this, isn’t it cool and trendy? Like having children attached to retractable leashes (you’ve seen them at the supermarket) we display but keep close, we don’t want anything to happen to our new thing but we are proud as punch to show it off. Doesn’t matter if it rolls, floats, glitters, flashes, sparkles or lets food slide out with no sticking, we are completely sold on what it will do for life and we willingly accept the emotional responsibility of ownership. Otherwise, why would we throw a fit when the almost new thing

doesn’t work like we were told it should?

The ease with which we can buy things today plays a very important part in determining how many things of want we have. PayPal, Google wallet, MasterPass, any manner of online payment options provide the greenback an easy avenue from A to B. Since the movement of little green pieces of paper is quickly being replaced with digital dots and dashes memorialized within small pieces of plastic, our concept of the value of money has changed.

If we had to use real paper money for transactions instead of digital plastic, how we think about what we want versus what we need would, I believe, slow us down. Hopefully, enough to allow for introspection on the question, “I want it but do I really need it?”

There are things we absolutely need — food, shelter, clothing, transportation and the ancillar-

ies that go with each. Without these, we cease to exist. These cost money. We pay the asking price because those are our needs. We complain, but we endure the cost of life.

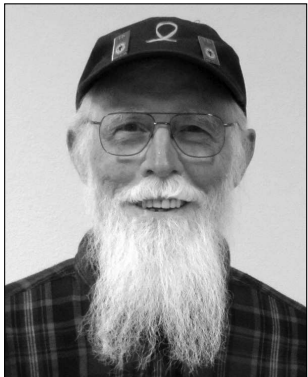
For me, and I hope for many of you, those things that satisfy the want are comprised of that which is simple. I’ll let John Burroughs speak:

“To find the universal elements enough; to find the air and the water exhilarating; to be refreshed by a morning walk or an evening saunter ... to be thrilled by the stars at night; to be elated over a bird’s nest or a wildflower in spring — these are some of the rewards of the simple life.”

We live, work and play in one of God’s most beautiful places on earth. Just look around. Everything we could want, family, friends and a life worth living, is right in front of us.

It couldn’t be simpler.

Us TOO FLORENCE — Behind the headlines October



By BOB HORNEY
Special to Siuslaw News

If you think the information and recommendations available for men to decide whether to be screened for prostate cancer with the PSA blood test is confusing, you are absolutely right. And, if you thought it couldn’t get worse, guess again — and follow along.

The only information I intended to write about this month (until I received the October HOTSHEET) was a retrospective cohort study done by Dr. Paul F. Alpert, M.D., Department of Urology, Kaiser Permanente Medical center, San Rafael, Calif.; Department of Urology, University of California San Francisco School of Medicine. The headline that caught my eye was: “New Evidence for the Benefit of Prostate-specific Antigen Screening: Data From 400,887 Kaiser Permanente Patients.”

This was a study of 400,887 men under age 80, with no history of prostate cancer, who had PSA testing at Kaiser Permanente Northern California in 1998 through 2002, with a follow-up of 12 to 16 years.

The objective of Dr. Alpert’s study was to see, first, if prostate cancer screening with the PSA

is beneficial in reducing prostate cancer mortality, and if so, to determine the optimal screening intervals and age groups benefiting from screening.

The results of his study showed that PSA screening did, in fact, reduce prostate cancer mortality. The optimal (most effective) screening interval was — get this — annually. When used with men ages 55 to 74, it reduced mortality 64 percent. Wow! With these same men, if the screening interval was 18 to 24 months, reduced mortality dropped to 54 percent. At 2 or 3 year screening, it dropped to 46 percent, losing its statistical significance. The study showed no screening benefit at any interval for men under age 55.

Dr. Alpert stratified the study group into six groups based on the PSA screening interval: 12 to

18 months, 18 to 24 months, 2 to 3 years, 4 to 9 years, and no prior PSA test. He also categorized the patients into seven groups based on age: younger than 50, 50 to 54, 55 to 59, 60 to 64, 65 to 69, 70 to 74, and 75 to 79. Of the 400,887 men in the study, 8,542 had a biopsy-proven prostate cancer diagnosis during the 5-year study period. During the 12 to 16 years of follow-up, 770 of those diagnosed died of prostate cancer, 2,512 died from other causes and 5,260 remained alive.

The study also showed a reduction in all-cause mortality of 24 percent.

This Kaiser Permanente study had me feeling pretty good ... and then along came my monthly supply of the Us TOO HOTSHEET. This monthly newsletter features current published articles that

provide important prostate cancer information. Us TOO CEO, Chuck Strand, started his cover page with a personal note, “You’ll notice a controversial article about the value of PSA screening on page one.”

Going to page 1, there it was, a new systematic review and meta-analysis proclaiming “Prostate Cancer Screening Has No Effect on Overall Mortality.” In addition to having no effect on overall mortality, the article also states that screening with a PSA blood test leads to only a small reduction in disease-specific mortality. This corresponds to one fewer deaths per 1,000 men screened over 10 years. These results were published online Sept. 5 in the British Medical Journal.

Reading further: Routine testing for prostate cancer is not rec-

ommended for most men because the benefit is small and uncertain and there are clear harms, say a panel of international experts. This international panel consisted of clinicians, men at risk of prostate cancer, and research methodologists who reviewed five randomized controlled studies, one of which was the U.S. PLCO.

With the above differing results having been published, what is a guy supposed to believe? To sort it out, I suggest attending an Us TOO Florence Prostate Cancer Education/Support Group meeting, held twice a month — the second Tuesday from 5 to 7 p.m. with Dr. Bryan Mehlhaff and the third Tuesday lunch from noon to 1 p.m. with Dr. Roger McKimmy — both at Ichiban Restaurant.

Come with questions — leave with answers.