

Traci Kelley restored this vintage Jeep with the help of her grandfather. Now, she drives and maintains the Jeep to honor his legacy.

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The Jeep by that time had made an enviable transition from the battlefield to the suburbs, morphing into one of the most popular SUV's on the market. Many vintage Jeeps are still road worthy and clubs dedicated to the Jeep can be found across the nation.

The version of the Jeep that millions of American families have driven for decades was originally produced by American Motors but is now produced by the Fiat Chrysler Automotive Corporation.

The Jeep Junction was well attended, including by Traci Kelley, who had an unusual and inspiring family story to share about her Jeep. She inherited it from her grandfather and remembers working on the derelict vehicle as a youngster.

"Grandpa and his sons found the Jeep many years ago in a ravine when they were out hunting in Central Oregon. He said if the Jeep was still there when they came back to hunt next year, they would drag it home. It was there!" Kelley said. "It became the summer projects of my childhood with Grandpa. When I was 7, he had me welding on the Jeep and you can tell. When I was 9, I rewired the Jeep."

Kelley and her boyfriend, Jason Kellam, began working on restoring the Jeep a while back as a way to connect and to honor her grandfather.

"Grandpa knew I would be the best fit for the Jeep," Kelley said. "I have dedicated my life to this Jeep for now and always, I work on it and tune it up before I drive it around the town on a nice slow day."

She and Kellam worked on the vehicle for a number of years, and now the restored Jeep is being used to entertain and educate young people and those who may have little knowledge of WWII.

"Year after year with Jason's help and my tinkering, the Jeep is how you see it today. I make every event that I can, so I can show Grandpa off to the world," Kelley said. "He always hid it under a tarp because people would stop by



PHOTOS BY MARK BRENNAN/SIUSLAW NEWS



Attendees were able to interact with Jeep owners and learn about the vehicles during the Jeep Junction last Saturday.

asking to sell it, so he never had it out. Jason and I both decided to honor him and all of our military family by taking the Jeep out, letting kids climb in it, put the helmets on and enjoy the history and the family history as well."

People can often see Kelley and her Jeep at the annual Rhododendron Parade.

The popularity of the Jeep has ebbed and flowed over the years. After WWII, Korea and Vietnamese deployments, ex-service men would purchase surplus or auctioned Jeeps and refurbish them for personal use. Hundreds of thousands of the durable vehicles were purchased and have been handed down from generation to generation.

The trend led to clubs and groups across the country forming to meet and show the Jeeps they had refurbished. This led to a nationwide slate of Jeep shows that increased the public's interest in the old school SUV.

There has also been a revitalization of the new larger, family entries in the Jeep line as the company sold 973,227 units last year. The renewed interest shown by the buying public assures the now robust Jeep brand will continue into the future.

Kelley also wanted to invite interested community members to stop in next month at the Florence Municipal Airport for one of Florence's most popular summer traditions, the 10th Annual Wings and Wheels Car Show and Fly-In.

"Join us at Wings and Wheels for Jeep rides!" Kelley said. "Come check out the baby book for the Jeep and see all the hard work that was put in to this living history."

The gates will open at 10 a.m. on Saturday, July 6, for Wings and Wheels at the Florence Municipal Airport. Next door, Oregon Coast Military Museum will be celebrating its fourth birthday. Both events are open to the public.

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