

Tiny house provides big lessons



PHOTO BY CAITLYN MAY/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

The caption for the photo would look like this on the page. It explains all about the photo and what is in it.

By Caitlyn May
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The drive to Dorena is a quiet one. The two-lane highway doesn't allow for congestion and the scenery, doesn't allow for distraction. Trees untouched by timber trade long enough to grow tall enough to encroach on the shoulder, line the road while the houses fade into the rearview mirror and a winding trail stretches away from Cottage Grove.

It's easy to miss. The sign is tethered to a chainlink fence just below the sight line and the shadow of fir leaves threaten its borders. "Child's Way" is barely visible.

The unpaved driveway yields to a cluster of house-like structures and in the middle, on the stoop of the main building more fit for a 1920's commune in update New York than a school, stands Mike Kerns.

He watches teenagers chat at tables and lay in the grass, teachers play basketball and dogs run between. It's lunchtime at Child's Way and Kerns, principal of the charter school, stands watch.

Child's Way currently houses 40 students from grades five through 12, sharing them among 10 teachers. With a different approach to teaching (and learning), there's usually something exciting going on at the school in Dorena but this term, there's something special.

Just beyond an art space lined with whiteboards for walls and a room scattered with typewriters, metal scrap and painting supplies there's a shop. It sits behind heavy plastic strips reminiscent of old dock warehouses and steps away from the school's bike shop and Ebay staging area and it's currently home to, a house.

The students at Child's Way are building a house. A tiny house.

"We're doing more projects," Kerns said. "It's a wood shop project and when it's done, we're going to sell it."

Students have been working on the project since September and have gotten far enough that the structure is recognizable for what it is; a house. Studs form four walls and a roof. There's a loft bed, a bathroom with a sink and a kitchen. An electric hot water heater sits on the rear of the house and wire and cables snake in and out of beams.

"We had an electrician come out and show them how to wire everything," Kerns said. Next, they'll be a plumber to help on the two days a week students venture into the space to work on the project.

"We're not going fast," Kerns said. "They've actually built it twice already. If it's screwed so the stud doesn't line up with the base plate, they have to do it again."

Materials for the house, other than a portion of the wood that was donated, come out of the school's budget and when the house sells, they'll buy material to build another one.

And the kids chip in.

Not far from the tiny house, piles of donated items sit waiting to be fixed, cleaned and photographed so they can be listed on Ebay or Craigslist. The item staged and ready for its close-up—a bike, that was fixed by students in the bike shop to the right of the online-selling operation—Kerns said, is worth several hundred dollars.

"They (the students) do a lot of research to price the items," he said.

The shop gives way to narrow hallways dotted with antiques and things from yesterday and classrooms that hold no more than eight children per class, outfitted with leather chairs for reading in, long tables for group discussions and piles and piles of fabric for sewing and stitching. The dogs have ventured back inside, some on leashes, some following close behind a teacher. Others, nestled comfortable in beds tucked away in the corner of a classroom. There's seven, Kerns says. Three of them, service dogs.

Standing again on the stoop, Kerns searches for an answer on why parents would choose Child's Way.

"They want a small school," he says. "Maybe it's that we don't say 'ok you're getting in trouble' and kick them out. I don't know, really," he adds. "It's really just word of mouth."

Bob Ehler fixes his 1,000th bike

The announcement comes one week after reaching his 990th bicycle giveaway



PHOTO COURTESY FACEBOOK

Bob Ehler's 1,000th bike that will be given away on May 26.

Cottage Grove City Councilor Bob Ehler has done it. He's repaired his 1,000th bike nearly a week to the day after giving away his 990th bicycle as part of a three-year-long effort to utilize his repair skills to provide bicycles for community members in need.

To mark the occasion, Ehler and Pay it Forward--a community Facebook page that facilitates Ehler's giveaways and repairs--will be holding a contest. To enter, residents can visit the Facebook page to contact the administrator or simply inquire about the bike in a post. On May 26, administrators will choose a lucky new owner of the 1951 Elswick, three-speed bicycle.

"It's a rare bird," Ehler said. "It's all original."

Since reaching the milestone, Ehler has been contacted by Lane Community College and will begin teaching a bicycle repair class on July 25.

"It's a new chapter for me," he said. "I've been behind a desk but never teaching."

SLMH, Jack Sprats team up for mental health awareness month

On Wednesday, May 16, Jack Sprat's, 510 E. Main St. in Cottage Grove, will join in celebrating May as Mental Health Awareness Month by donating 25 percent of all proceeds earned between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. to South Lane Mental Health. South Lane Mental Health is a nonprofit comprehensive mental health services provider based in Cottage

Grove. For more information about the agency's services and programs, or to make an appointment, call 541-942-3939. May is Mental Health Awareness Month was started 69 years ago by Mental Health America to raise awareness about mental health conditions and the importance of good mental health for everyone.



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