

OPINION

Guest Viewpoint

Aloha Sharon Jean and Ron Rice

By Cathy Simmons
For Sharon Jean

Sharon Jean and Ron Rice have become two of my dearest friends. I met Sharon back in 2011, when I was searching for some way to give my time to the community. I offered my service to her at the Community Center kitchen where she was serving food to the public every Sunday. She took me under her wing (so to speak) and told me about the wonderful service she was providing to the public; anyone who wanted a warm meal. Anyone could come, not just the needy or homeless.

I watched her as she mingled among the tables saying hello to everyone there and even giving many of them hugs. She treated each one as though they had been friends for a very long time. Her sincere concern and friendship to everyone she met is what I admire the most about her.

I continued to watch and learn from her. With her loving compassion passing on to many, I also noticed The Man behind the scenes. Not only did he play wonderful music on his guitar and sing for the event, he was the man that jumped on any need Sharon would have. He packed up the van with all the necessities of the day, delivered them there, unpacked them, helped setup tables chairs. Then when the event was over, he vacuumed, put tables away and

repacked everything up in the van.

This he did with a smile on his face, well most of the time. Ron Rice is this wonderful man who seemed to have endless energy to get the job done, whatever job was thrown his way by his loving wife. They are quite a team. In case some of you did not know, Ron is an engineer and owns the company at the T of Ninth Street and Woodson Place called GEOMAX.

Sharon invited me to be on the Bohemia Mining Days Board in 2012. I was so excited because I loved the festival and I knew her leadership would be wonderful to work under. I have been on the board for my seventh festival now and am presently serving as president. She has guided me along the way and I would never had been able to do this without her mentoring.

In 2013, Sharon introduced me to my wonderful husband whom has been a huge blessing in my life. Bill and I have spent many wonderful evenings at Sharon and Ron's; Ron and Bill play guitars and Sharon and I visit.

I have been amazed at all the things she and Ron have been involved in throughout their lives. Sharon has been involved in many different political events in her life. She has created child care services/centers. She has spent many years in the area of domestic violence. I've even heard

many stories of how she just steps in and gets involved with situations where she sees the need. I love her stories. Not many 5-foot-tall women could make a 6-foot-tall man cower down.

She is really 7-feet tall, but in a short body.

I will miss our dinners. She's an amazing cook. She is able to gather items from six different people and make a meal out of it. It's always something new. Things I would probably never have tried otherwise.

Sharon is one of those people that is known for getting it done. Not just done, but done successfully. If Sharon is involved in the project, you know it will be a success. It has been said that she has more charisma in her little pinky than the five of us have all together.

As they depart Oregon and start their new adventure in Hawaii, I am saddened to see them go — but am so happy they are able to spend their golden years in a place they called home for many years; a place where they have many friends and family that will be there for them.

May God bless you and keep you safe and happy my dear friends.

All are welcome to come say 'Aloha' to our dear friends, Sharon Jean and Ron Rice this Saturday, June 2, at 5 p.m. at Coiner Park (Sharon Jean's favorite spot). Hawaiian theme if you want.

LETTERS

Thankful for legacy of Sharon Jean

I've had the pleasure of calling Sharon Jean my friend and mentor since 2003. I interviewed Sharon a dozen years ago and learned many details of her journey to The Grove.

She is full of great stories of how she brought people together to accomplish something important, which initially seemed impossible. Her can-do attitude served her well, both as an Alaskan elected official and as an effective community leader.

In every town she has lived, Sharon spearheaded civic projects that left the community better off than when she arrived. A few examples are: creating a battered-women's shelter, a childcare center, affordable housing, meal sites and senior center program improvements.

Her contributions in Cottage Grove are significant: she helped keep a hospital in town, established the Soup's On Sunday supper project and the tiny homes project. It's no surprise she was honored by the Chamber of Commerce with the Distinguished Service and First Citizen Awards.

But I believe the greatest legacy Sharon leaves us is Bohemia Mining Days. Next year the festival celebrates its 60th year. If not for her leadership, persuasion and planning experience, it would've surely died soon after its 40th anniversary.

For nearly a decade, under her leadership, BMD enjoyed financial stability and transformed into a more professionally structured organization.

In my eight years as a Lane County Commissioner, my South Lane County constituents often said how much they respected Ron and his skills as an engineer and surveyor.

Sharon and Ron are a community-minded power couple we will surely miss around here!

My husband Ralph and I wish them much happiness with their kids and grandkids in Hawaii as they begin this newest chapter of their lives.

—Cindy Weeldreyer
Cottage Grove

BMD near and dear to hearts of many

I would like to tell you a story about the time that Bohemia Mining Days almost died.

It was six or seven years ago,

as I recall. I was a relatively new member of the city council, and had been invited to sit on the Bohemia Mining Days board of directors.

BMD had been one of the many reasons I'd fallen in love with Cottage Grove, so I was very happy to be involved.

Unfortunately, at that time, BMD was having severe money troubles. When that fact came to light, there was a spate of resignations and the organization was left with a handful of board members, \$20,000 of debt, and a little over \$8 in the bank ... and around six months to put on Cottage Grove's biggest annual festival.

As you can imagine, the death of BMD seemed imminent. So, I called Sharon Jean.

Sharon had been the festival coordinator some years previous, and had left the organization in great financial shape. I figured that if anyone could overcome these seemingly insurmountable obstacles, it'd be Sharon.

Spoiler alert: I was right. Despite the insane amount of work it took to bootstrap the festival into existence from nearly nothing, Sharon put in

long hours, reached out to her network of contacts and leveraged her exhaustive understanding of all aspects of the festival. Because that was my first year as president of the BMD board, I sometimes get credit for turning the festival around; but that credit rightfully belongs to Sharon Jean.

I am not exaggerating when I say that she absolutely saved the festival that year. If she hadn't stepped in, we wouldn't have had a BMD that year, and there's a very good chance we wouldn't have had another one ever.

While many people may know Sharon Jean from her tireless efforts on philanthropic projects like Soup's On and Cottage Village, I know that BMD is near and dear to the hearts of a huge proportion of our community. So the next time you're listening to music, panning for gold, or arresting villains in Coiner Park during BMD, save a thought for Sharon Jean, the unstoppable heroine of Bohemia Mining Days.

We wouldn't have it without her.

—Jake Boone
Cottage Grove City Councilor

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The Sentinel welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

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