

Garden from C1

Some students who have gone through KCC have continued on to get apprenticeships through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act program. “Most recently we’ve got a student who just got his second part-time job with the county,” said Hall. “His endeavor is to become a full-time member of the county workforce.”

Education is also a large part of the program. Many activities involve hands-on learning experiences in various subjects like environmental science and math which has seen students measuring pH levels in soil, identifying plants, building structures for rainwater collection and studying chemical compositions.

“He has definitely taught me more about plants than any other individual in my life,” Kane said of Hall.

Kane joined the KCC last summer and continued working through the following school year and summer break.

“It teaches you good work ethic, I think, just being forced to get up and be in the sun for six hours at once and being asked to actually work with tools and do something for several hours straight,” she said. “It takes energy from you, but it’s also what will be expected from you when you get older. ... So I think it’s good to give kids an opportunity to get out like that and just get a feel for what it’s like to be working in the real world.”

For senior Haley Montoya, working on the KCC summer crew was her first job.

“When I first started, I was really, really shy,” she said. “Now I’m really confident about myself. Because of the things we’ve done, I can look back and say, ‘Oh, I did that. So I if I did this, I can



Damien Sherwood/Cottage Grove Sentinel

Transition specialist and KCC crew supervisor Matt hall overlooks the garden at Al Kennedy High School, which produces plants and vegetables to be shared with the community and other entities.

do that.’ It really gives you this motivation in yourself, so it feels really good at the end of the day.” Montoya also spoke highly of the program’s impact on the area’s youth. “I think it’s really good for the community,” she said. “If you go to this school, certain kids might not have certain opportunities, so you come, you make money and you’re getting credit for it. ... It’s really good for your mental health, too.”

Recent AKHS graduate Wyatt Leach found

particular benefit from the program as his previous challenges at Cottage Grove High School saw his grades and attendance suffer, putting his future at risk.

“At CG (High School) I struggled to get help,” Leach said. “When I came here, teachers were really one-on-one. ... If you’re struggling, they’ll seek you out.”

The personal engagement Leach experienced at Kennedy set him on a trajectory he said would have been much different

otherwise.

“I’d probably be a super-senior,” said Leach.

After dropping out of Cottage Grove High School for two weeks, he was told he would have to redo a year. Coming to Kennedy changed that.

“If you have motivation and drive and actually use all these programs they have, you can easily get credit,” Leach said.

Leach was struggling particularly in math and met with teachers after school to get caught up, which enabled him to then

pass his essential skills test, qualifying him for graduation.

“I passed that on my first try and that’s what I was really worried about,” he said. “I know I would have been pretty discouraged if I had to do a whole other year. ... It would have been a whole different direction.”

Leach’s turnaround is in part owed to the experiences he had in the KCC.

“Getting to do such different things in one job,” Leach said. “Some days we were doing trail

maintenance, some days we were picking weeds for the community, some days we were deconstructing bridges. There was a lot to do and lot of skills we were learning instead of just one set thing like most jobs.”

The crew jobs taught Leach to use power saws, reciprocating saws, weed eaters and a variety of other equipment.

“This job taught me how to work long hours outside in boots and full uniforms, being all sweaty and having to push through,” said Leach. “It’s a really good program because you can learn a crazy amount of things in a short amount of time.”

The program also gave Leach an appreciation for the work he was committed to.

“In the past, I’ve worked at fast food and retail stores,” he said. “What I’ve noticed that was different from most jobs, in this job I really care about my work because I knew it was going toward something I cared about.”

Leach plans on enlisting in the military and later using the GI Bill and a \$750 OYCC scholarship to pursue interests in zoology or photography.

“I actually want to work with animals and do conservation work in the future,” he said.

As the summer crew wraps up its projects, Hall is hoping to have a school-year crew ready as soon as possible.

“I have an open hiring period, so I hire the school year from now through May,” he said.

Looking forward to future projects this school year, Hall is prepared for new challenges.

“Who knows what will come up?” he said. “Who knows what will come up?” he said.

SAFE ROUTES IMPROVEMENT PROJECT DELAYED APPROXIMATELY SIX MONTHS

By DAMIEN SHERWOOD
Cottage Grove Sentinel

Construction plans on streets leading to Cottage Grove schools as part of the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program hit a snag last month.

“Between the surveying and design changes, it’s thrown the project off,” said Public Works and Development Director Faye Stewart. “The project was actually scheduled in the application to be done in February. It looks like the project’s going to be about six months longer to complete provided we can get it out to bid toward the middle to end of September.”

SRTS is a nationwide effort to assist communities in identifying and reducing barriers and hazards to children walking or bicycling to and from school through infrastructure improvements and safety education.

At an estimated cost of almost \$1.7 million, the project will address key safety concerns on five routes to Cottage Grove schools. For most of these routes, safe sidewalks are an issue.

A \$1,272,143 grant from the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) toward the SRTS program was approved by a City Council vote Jan. 11.

In the SRTS grant agreement, the five identified routes are: East Harrison Avenue from South River Road to South 3rd Street; South 4th Street from Central Pacific



Damien Sherwood/Cottage Grove Sentinel

Railroad to Grant Avenue; Grant Avenue from South 4th Street to South 6th Street; Fillmore Avenue from South 4th Street to South 6th Street; and Taylor Avenue from South 4th Street to South 8th Street.

A solar-powered stop sign in front of Harrison Elementary School lights up to warn drivers of pedestrians.

to improve the area between its elementary and middle schools, the city was an obvious contender.

The project will not only include enhancing street safety for cyclists and pedestrians, but also replacing aged water, sewer and storm pipes, mainly under a stretch of Fourth Street from about the railroad to Grant Street.

The grant, however, does not apply to such work.

“Anything that improves the access and commute for kids going to school, either bikes or pedestrian-wise,” Stewart said. “It will not pay for paving or any of the piping work or for the water, sewer and

storm upgrades.”

Now looking at a new timeline, part of the city’s strategy is to solicit bids at a time when contractors are not in peak construction.

“It’s not by design and desire that the project has taken longer to get ready to bid,” said Stewart, “but it might be to the advantage of the city that we might have some folks looking for winter work and early spring work.”

Ultimately, this could end up saving on the cost to landowners.

A municipal ordinance in place since 1999 holds Cottage Grove landowners responsible for improving adjacent streets and sidewalks that have fallen into disrepair “and

to fairly apportion the cost of such improvements to the abutting properties.”

Before the SRTS program’s revitalization, plans had been in motion to execute this ordinance on the targeted roads, meaning adjacent landowners would have had to pay for all sidewalk improvements. When the grant entered their radar, city officials jumped on the opportunity.

“Because of the success of getting this grant from the State of Oregon for this project, it drastically reduces the amount that each adjoining property owner is going to have to pay,” Stewart said. “I really can’t give numbers, but there’s an overall general hope that ... it’ll be

reduced to virtually nothing, that the grant will cover the majority of it.”

These number won’t become apparent, however, until after the project goes out to bid. If proposals come back higher than current estimates, homeowners can expect some costs for the project.

“And if it comes in less, then that would be great,” said Stewart. “There would be no cost.”

The city is working on giving contractors a broad window in which to choose construction times, increasing the chances of more proposals at less costly estimates.

Weather permitting, sidewalk work along streets such as Fillmore and Grant that don’t require pipe work could conceivably begin as early as this winter, though the details will have to be negotiated in consideration of traffic flow and access.

“We would try to have work times that don’t conflict with the release times of school or the beginning of school,” Stewart said. “We’re going to have to work with the school district and the contractor to minimize impact.”

According to the grant agreement, the project must be completed within three years, giving the project a deadline of Jan. 2022.

“I’m really optimistic it’s going to be done by September 2020,” said Stewart, “so it should be a year and half before the deadline.”