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Bicycling is one aspect the Polk County Rural Tourism board hopes to use to attract people to visit and spend money.

## Tourism hotspots pinpointed

Polk County Rural Tourism Studio continues planning efforts

By Emily Mentzer  
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — The Polk County Rural Tourism Studio kicked off on Jan. 27, but much work remains for the community to implement the vision of attracting tourists — and their money.

Through the series of workshops guided by Travel Oregon, a laundry list of possible tourist attractions were pinpointed, from the Valley of the Giants to wineries and Rogue Farms, from birding to bicycling.

Reina Nelson of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde will lead the cultural heritage action team, which will develop resources for cultural tourism. The first step will be organizing a dinner series, starting with a

"tribe to table" dinner hosted at the Chachalu Museum and Cultural Center.

Other dinners will focus on other aspects that are unique to Polk County: hops, heritage and a pioneer social.

Connecting the reservation with bike trails is just one of the possibilities for the bicycling team, led by Shawn Irvine, Independence economic development director.

"What we're lacking (in Polk County) is defined routes and places to go," he said. "We need to get down and identify where the best routes are."

Irvine noted that gravel cycling is a "big deal," and said many opportunities for gravel bike trails exist in the county. Efforts have already

started to create an alternate route through Polk County as part of Oregon Scenic Bikeways.

Ivy Hover, marketing manager at Left Coast Cellars, noted that wine is "a huge piece of the puzzle in Polk County," but all other aspects of agriculture needs to be included to make a complete tourist package.

"We have a very good asset list," she said. "We need to build upon that and make sure there's no gaps."

Part of her goals include developing agriculture trails and restaurant tours, taking people out to farms and wineries to see where food and wine comes from.

Ben Roberts and the marketing team will work on how to put it all together to attract tourists from around

the state, nation and world. Roberts, from Lavender Lake Farms along Highway 99W, said he wants to develop an original brand and help businesses get involved to promote Polk County.

"We want to see Polk County be popular," he said.

Projects will be paid for in part through a \$10,000 grant from Travel Oregon, but most of the money will have to be paid for by other grants and the cities, Irvine said.

"A lot of it will have to be driven by the local tourism industry," he said. "They will have to see value in the projects and be willing to contribute to their success."

For more information or to get involved in these projects: Shawn Irvine, 503-837-1191; Irvine.shawn@ci.independence.or.us.

## Online stalking a growing concern

By Emily Mentzer  
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH — It would be considered inappropriate and creepy to look through a peep hole at somebody, spying on them while they are at home.

But sitting at a computer and going through photo albums on Facebook is socially acceptable, said Charisse Loughery, student conduct coordinator at Western Oregon University.

Both of these situations can be considered stalking, and it's dangerous and harmful, she said last week at a workshop about cyberharassment and cyberstalking, hosted by Abby's House.

"Using technology, it's easier to track individuals as we move through our day-to-day life," Loughery said.

In the age of social media and smartphones, information about someone is easier than ever to obtain, whether it is willingly shared online or not, said Kjerstin Stanavige, social media specialist for WOU's Teaching Research Institute.

Smartphone applications exist just to stalk someone, said Samantha Hughes, Abby's House advocate.

"People can go into the app store, buy the app, put it on your phone and get all sorts of information about what you've been doing," she said.

That includes tracking movements via the phone's global positioning system, turning on the camera on the phone to visually see what the user is doing at that moment, and accessing text messages and phone calls.

"They can check what apps you've been using, what you've been browsing on the Internet on your phone, and it's all really creepy," Hughes said.

Some clues that someone

### Stay Safe Online

Tips for staying safe while online and using social media:

- Lock down Facebook and other social media sites by changing "privacy settings."

- Password protect access to smartphones and keep it secure by not sharing that password with friends. Apps also may be protected.

- Disable global positioning system programs in a smartphone — under "settings" — when not using an app that requires them, such as maps. If GPS locations are enabled, even photos taken from a smartphone will have coordinates that could give away your location to a stalker.

- Remember the bottom line: Nothing is ever truly secure online. If you don't want your grandmother to see it, don't post it.

has installed a stalking app on your smartphone include the battery draining really fast, Hughes noted.

Because these apps don't show up on the app screen and are completely hidden, they cannot be simply uninstalled. But calling your phone carrier might provide simple solutions, such as doing a factory reset.

Some ways to protect yourself online and when using your smartphone is to turn off location settings unless you're using an app that requires it, such as maps, Hughes said.

Lockdown social media through privacy settings, which makes it harder for strangers to find you, Stanavige noted.

For more information about staying safe from stalkers: [www.wou.edu/student/club/abbysshouse](http://www.wou.edu/student/club/abbysshouse).

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