

Highlights of 2016

Reporter Jolene Guzman shares a few of her favorite stories

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

1. "Lost ring finds its way home" — Dec. 21

David Bailey, the man who lost his wedding ring in a roadside parking area in Eastern Oregon and had it returned two years later, said it best: "How often does that happen?"

"Amazing" may be an overused word, but the number of coincidences that lead to Bailey getting his ring back in this story is simply that.

As Bailey said, the more likely outcomes to a story like this is that the ring is either never found or sold by the person who found it.

That the two men who spotted it glittering on the ground were so determined to return it is incredible on its own. That Bailey's friend, who knew he lost his ring in that very area, happened to see the sign the men left looking for the owner gives you goosebumps

This was a heartwarming story in a year that sorely needed a few happy endings, and it was an honor for the *I-O* to share it.

2. "Falls City's do-all mayor" — Nov. 23

Falls City Mayor Terry Ungricht is a true public servant, volunteering to take on the role of city manager.

Most people in that position attend college to train for it and earn a salary — justifiably so, by the way.

Polk County has plenty of examples of people who



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Gus and company helped deliver Illahe Vineyard's 1899 wine last summer.

have gone above and beyond — Falls City's previous mayor Amy Houghtaling filled in the job of mayor/city manager for eight months during her first term — but Ungricht has diligently done the work since April 2015 and ran for re-election, no less.

He can be found writing grants, crafting the city's budget or helping fix a busted water main on any given day.

Ungricht does all this without seeking recognition — which is why we made him one of our 2016 Community Champions.

3. "Stagecoach Delivery" — July 27

You've got to love the creative minds and the fun-loving nature of the crew at Illa-

he Vineyards. A stagecoach ferrying the vineyard's truly old-fashioned pinot noir 1899 from Dallas to Independence? Who does that and how can I join the fun?

The point of 1899, as the name implies, is to make it with methods commonly used at the time. Since introducing the wine after the 2011 harvest year, Illahe has incorporated old-timey distribution methods, too.

Deliveries of 1899 to its Portland distributor have happened via bike and canoe in the past. This year, mule team Hank, Gus, Jesse and Ywa lent a hand — or hooves — to the cause.

The stagecoach journey was yet another one-of-a-kind experience we were happy to share.



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David Bailey's wedding ring was returned after being missing for two years.



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