

BUEHLER

Continued from Page 3A

Crossfield coached basketball, where Buehler became one of his favorite student-athletes, visiting his home and even babysitting his 2-year-old and infant daughters with the help of a teammate. Though a star athlete, Buehler recognized that he shared the court with 14 teammates.

“He was willing to sit on the bench sometimes so that others could also get their glory time,” Crossfield said.

Crossfield helped Buehler fill in the blanks on how to lead a life beyond Roseburg.

“When you are the first generation of your family to graduate from high school, there is a lot of common sense things you don’t know about,” Buehler said.

“Don was among the teachers who have helped me over the years. Oregon’s public schools were my elevator to success.”

Corvallis: On the way up

Though his grades would have given him plenty of options, Buehler chose to apply to only one four-year college: Oregon State University. His older brother Mark was a pre-med student there. Leaving home was a big enough change without going farther away.

“Oregon State was a good choice,” Buehler said. “It has a nurturing, supportive environment where people are judged by their personal character. It’s not an Ivy League school where you know and how much your family gives to the university’s foundation really matters.”

Buehler majored in microbiology with a minor in history, but his passion was for baseball. As a pitcher, Buehler’s slider was good enough to make the Beavers’ team as a walk-on. But the high school star had to be satisfied with being a little-used spare part on the back end of the pitching staff of the nationally ranked Beavers team. The only thing higher than his exemplary 4.0 grade point average was his disappointing 6.75 earned run average.

“I’d be getting hit pretty hard, and the manager would come out to the mound,” Buehler joked. “I’d say, ‘Don’t take me out; I’m not tired.’ He’d say ‘You may not be tired, but our outfielders are.’”

Still, the teamwork that went into playing a supporting role was a lesson for Buehler. And it would soon help open the door to one of the most exciting and prestigious chapters in his life.

Baltimore: A reality test

When Buehler was in grade school, his father suffered a major stroke and only partially recovered. Buehler wanted to help others whose lives were disrupted by illness.

Accepted to five medical schools, Buehler picked Johns Hopkins University. He started in the fall of 1986, moving across the country.

“The biggest head-snapping change in life for me was going from Corvallis to Baltimore,” Buehler said. “I had never seen the abject poverty and struggles of such a tough city.

“You had a crack epidemic creating all kinds of problems,” Buehler said. “There was a breakdown of family life, a lot of violence,” Buehler said. “One night when I was working the emergency room, there was a gunfight in the waiting area. We took the two wounded guys right into the trauma bay.”

During Buehler’s time at Johns Hopkins, a new medical threat was coming to fore.

“We were seeing young healthy men coming in — and dying — of incredibly rare cancers and infections,

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— **Knute Buehler**

and it was hard to figure out the cause,” Buehler said. “We were on the leading edge of a wave of HIV/AIDS. It was a scary time for a lot of people seeking help.”

The time in Baltimore challenged the notions about life Buehler formed in Oregon.

“It creates a lot of questions in your mind. How could there be such poverty, crime and breakdown of society, plus a new disease on top of it,” Buehler said. “I felt I needed to better educate myself on all these matters.”

Fellow Hopkins student Tomasz Beer said what stood out about his roommate and future lifelong friend was a restless mind.

“What was truly extraordinary about him was his relentless curiosity,” said Beer, now a medical school professor at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland. “He asked questions constantly and did not make assumptions.”

Buehler was on his way to becoming an orthopedic surgeon when a chance conversation changed his life.

“One of my classmates had been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University and said he thought I would have a chance if I applied,” Buehler said.

The scholarship, established in 1902, sends Americans to the prestigious British university and had traditionally been given to star academic students who had also been seen as leaders — and taken part in athletics.

“They were looking for people who weren’t just bookworms,” Buehler said.

Buehler’s baseball background was a plus alongside his straight-A record. But he still had to go through a rigorous interview process that included traveling to Seattle to answer questions on a range of topics, including medical ethics, where he was asked about abortion and genetic engineering.

Buehler was accepted at Merton College, established in 1294, whose alumni have included medieval theologians, poet T.S. Eliot, Japanese Crown Prince Naruhito and several Nobel Prize-winning scientists.

Oxford: Another world

“Knute had many friends in Roseburg, at Oregon State, and at Hopkins,” Beer recalled. “He had two brothers. He was not used to solitude. So the relatively monastic life of a Rhodes scholar was tough.”

Unlike American universities with their focus on lectures and tests, students at Oxford are assigned a massive amount of reading material used for papers they must “defend” in oral questioning by faculty. The process sometimes borders on the prosecutorial.

“I was almost brought to tears by the questioning of one professor,” Buehler said. “It was that confrontational.”

But the British system also honed his writing in a way that would help his future political writings.

“They don’t want a long tome,” he said. “They want a crisp, tight argument.”

But the decision to move overseas for two years was not without issues. Buehler had met a fellow medical student at Hopkins named Patricia Owen. They met over an anatomy lesson featuring a cadaver. Both were involved with other people at the time, but both sensed the possible beginnings of something early on.

“One of the things I found most attractive about Knute

was that he was passionate about helping people,” Patricia recalled. “From our first conversation, we both felt that we had found a kindred spirit.”

Ironically, their relationship became closer even as Buehler was taking steps that would separate them for long periods.

“Truth be told, that was probably the biggest problem,” Beer said. “He was miserable in England at first. For the first time (and the last), I wondered if he would make it. But he is Knute. So he buckled down and powered through. And after a while made some new friends, had a visit or two from Patty and it all worked out.”

Buehler continued his medical degree studies at Johns Hopkins even while enrolled in a master’s program in politics and economics at Oxford. He returned home during breaks in Britain to fulfill requirements in Baltimore and see Patricia.

The couple got engaged between Buehler’s first and second year at Oxford.

Buehler’s time at Oxford coincided with the greatest upheaval in Europe since World War II. The Berlin Wall fell the autumn of his second year. The Soviet-controlled Eastern Bloc was rapidly unraveling the Cold War. Buehler crossed the English Channel the following winter to visit Beer, then in Poland, for a first-hand view.

In Gdansk, Beer and Buehler attended a massive rally at the city cathedral where Lech Walesa, the Solidarity labor union chief, spoke. Afterward, the crowd streaming down the streets were stopped by plain-clothed secret police.

“They kind of started pushing us around and my friend is speaking in Polish,” Buehler said. “I took out my passport and held it out. They stopped. That was the golden ticket — an American passport. They just rushed us by and started harassing the next group.”

Splitting time between Baltimore and Britain also made Buehler appreciate the more free-wheeling aspects of American life that were suppressed in Oxford.

“Merton was one of the oldest colleges, and everyone wore a tie, coat and button-down shirt to dinner,” Buehler said. “If you have seen the Harry Potter movies, it was like that — the movie’s school scenes were filmed at Oxford. I started wearing a red plaid shirt from Roseburg. I remember one university bursar seeing me. He was a Scot, and said, ‘I haven’t seen a shirt like that since the Yanks were here in the ’40s — keep it up.’”

While at Oxford, Buehler was introduced by a friend to a visiting celebrity, billionaire businessman Ross Perot, who was considering an independent run for president in 1992. The two hit it off.

Over the five years from the fall of 1986 to the spring of 1991, Buehler earned a master’s degree in politics and economics from Oxford and a medical degree from Johns Hopkins. He was on the road to becoming an orthopedic surgeon.

But Buehler had picked up a new avocation along the way: politics.

It would be more than two decades until his political career would fully bloom. But Buehler knew one thing even then — whatever was going to happen would happen back home, in Oregon.



Lisa Britton / ForThe Baker City Herald

Displayed are the kinds of paper lanterns that will help decorate the Christmas tree at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., this year.

CHRISTMAS

Continued from Page 1A

To celebrate, entities across the state are aiming to create 10,000 ornaments to decorate the tree this Christmas.

The Oregon Trail Interpretive Center east of Baker City has hosted several workshops where volunteers create paper lanterns in the style of the punched tin lanterns of Oregon Trail days.

“Our goal is to make 175 altogether,” said Rachael Nickens, park ranger.

This number commemorates the 175th anniversary of the Oregon Trail emigration, which started in 1843.

The next session to make ornaments is at noon Friday, Sept. 14, during the center’s Genealogy Day events.

Rather than the sharp tin of real lanterns, Nickens provides visitors with silver metallic cardstock. She has several patterns to choose from, which are taped on top of the shiny paper.

Using a darning needle and block of wood (or small hammer), it’s simply a matter of punching holes along the pattern.

For smaller helpers, she can provide thinner paper to punch.

“Little kids can use a push pin,” Nickens said. “The youngest has been 4.”

Once finished, she rolls the paper into a cylinder, staples it together and affixes a handle.

“I’ve had so many nice conversations sitting here, tapping away, talking to visitors,” she said.

The ornaments will be sent to Washington, D.C., in October.

The theme for the Capitol Christmas

Holiday Tradition

The tradition of the Capitol Christmas Tree, or “The People’s Tree,” began in 1964 when Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives John W. McCormack (D-MA) placed a live Christmas tree on the Capitol lawn. This tree lived three years before succumbing to wind and root damage.

In 1970, the Capitol Architect asked the U.S. Forest Service to provide a Christmas tree. Since then, a different national forest has been chosen each year to provide “The People’s Tree.”

The last time Oregon was chosen to provide the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree was in 2002, when a tree was selected from the Umpqua National Forest.

— www.capitolchristmastree.com

Tree is “Find Your Trail” to recognize two 2018 anniversaries: the 50th of the National Trail System Act and the 175th of the Oregon Trail.

According to the website www.capitolchristmastree.com, in November the Christmas Tree will travel east from Oregon on the reverse path of the Oregon Trail. The schedule and special events will be announced soon.

The Interpretive Center is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. Admission is \$8 adults, \$4.50 seniors, and free for children 15 and younger. Federal passes are also accepted. Call 541-523-1843 for updates on programs and events or visit oregontrail.blm.gov.

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