



SUZANNAH MOORE-HEMANN
CHAMBER CHAT

Leaving it better than you found it

Three years ago, almost down to the day, I was in the extensive process of interviewing for the executive director position with the Union County Chamber of Commerce.

I remember the thrill and honor it was to be selected to join the leadership of the chamber. I had so many project ideas and goals to accomplish upon starting my first day. Every day was a new, wonderfully exhausting adventure — and, truly, it has not really stopped feeling as such. Which made the decision to move on so much more difficult.

Looking back, I feel like so many others — robbed of a true experience thanks to having to navigate “chamber life” through a global pandemic, where so much of the chamber’s mission is to connect people to people. But it also provided the opportunity to pivot and shift our focus to do what we do best: connect people — only this time, to resources and to larger promotional opportunities, rather than face-to-face. At the end of the day, coming into the chamber, my main goal was to make the organization better than how it was when I started. Of course, there was already momentum and a wonderful team in place, so my whole objective was to build on it.

The final report I provided at the most recent board meeting was an overview of the things the organization accomplished over the last three years. I will admit, even I was surprised how much we have achieved. Maybe it is because we tend to get so focused on the day-to-day or project-to-project, and you forget to look back and say, “Hey, excellent job, team! Look how far we’ve come.”

It’s crazy to think, despite COVID-19, the chamber has grown its membership base — from 220 when I started to 275. It’s crazy to think, despite COVID-19 and not having the ability to host our usual banquets and events, the chamber has grown into a position of strong financial stability. It’s also crazy to think, despite temporarily reducing staff hours, we accomplished so much. Our bylaws and policies manuals have been entirely overhauled into beautiful, professional works (not a super enticing project, but one the Governance Committee and myself sure are proud of). We developed a long-term strategic plan with performance metrics so the chamber has a direction and long-range goals to work toward, to keep the organization focused on its mission. And not only that — we grew the Holiday Decorating Competition, we have grown and reengaged with our partners on the Grande Ronde Farm Trail and we launched the “Gift-UC” (say it aloud and the name is way cooler) eGift card to help support our local businesses. We built out our quarterly Shop Hops, a tangible way to connect residents and shoppers by exploring local businesses. And of course the rebranding project (look how impressive and modern our new logos are) and launch of a gorgeous website.

The neat thing is the list continues. Our ambassadors have been highly prominent (and amazing) in their outreach to our community. We have increased our partnerships with other organizations to build on true community-spirit momentum. We launched the Support Local video campaign (the first of many, hopefully) to highlight the benefits of supporting local businesses throughout our community — plus, this is a regional project with our neighboring chambers.

I cannot believe with the end of the calendar year comes the end of my tenure. As the ball drops over downtown La Grande on New Year’s Eve, I will look back with such fondness at my time with the chamber. The opportunity to meet such wonderful people and learn so much about our county. How much personal and professional growth this position has afforded my own career trajectory. The people I have worked alongside on numerous projects and activities. The people I have had the opportunity from which to gain experience. If you can’t already tell, it’s the people in Union County and the Eastern Oregon region who have made this such a special position to have held.

So, no matter what it is — always strive to leave it better than you found it.

Suzannah Moore-Hemann is the executive director of the Union County Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Information Center.



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Enterprise Animal Hospital’s newest veterinarian, Christie Younggren, sits with her dog, River, at the clinic Thursday, Dec. 23, 2021.

The doctor is in

La Grande product Christie Younggren hangs out her shingle in Wallowa County

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — There’s a new doctor in town — for animals, that is.

Dr. Christie Younggren, a veterinarian, joined the practice at the Enterprise Animal Hospital about four months ago after working 2-1/2 years in Baker City.

But it was the way she got the job that proved to be interesting.

She and her then-fiance, Taylor Murray, were rafting on the Grande Ronde River.

“My dog got injured while we were out shed (antler) hunting. He got cut open in his chest,” she said. “We got up early the next morning, rafted out

and drove to Flora. I called (Enterprise Animal Hospital owner) Severin (Knudsen) and explained to him that I was a vet and my dog was hurt and I needed to get him into the clinic. So we brought him here and (Knudsen) asked if I wanted to do everything since I’m a vet, or if I wanted him to do it. I said I’d kind of like to do it for my own dog, so he let me sew him up. We woke him up and I said, ‘I’d like to pay (Knudsen) for his time for coming in on a day off because it was a Sunday.’ He said, ‘I won’t charge you anything if you take a job here and let me show you around.’ So we ended up moving.”

Always wanted to be a vet

After growing up in La Grande, Younggren worked for a vet there who told her about Ross University on Saint Kitts — officially Saint Christopher Island — formerly a part of the British West Indies but now independent. She graduated in January 2019 and has worked as a veterinarian ever since.

It turns out another of Enterprise Animal Hospital’s vets, Kala Grover, also attended Ross.

Younggren said she’s always wanted to be an animal doctor.

“I can’t remember wanting to do anything else,” she said. “In fifth grade, you do that thing about spending a day at the place you want to work and I went to a vet clinic.”

She often finds animals easier to relate to than people.

“I find it’s a lot easier for me to get along with animals than it is with people. I’ve always loved them,” she said. “My first pet that was my very own was a rabbit, then cats and then I got a dog when I was working over in Baker. I’ve had all of them.”

Her dog — the one that introduced her to Knudsen — is River, appropriately named given her and Murray’s love for the river life. River is a 3-year-old, mixed-breed cowdog.

Unlike many who choose veterinary medicine, Younggren didn’t grow up on a farm or ranch.

“We had rabbits and chickens, but we lived in town,” she said.

Prefers smaller animals

She said she prefers the smaller pets — cats and dogs — to work with, but also likes working with the larger animals.

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Survey shows broad support for keeping Snake River dams

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

SALEM — A new survey commissioned by Northwest RiverPartners indicates broad public support for keeping the Snake River dams.

Less than 30% of respondents favor removing the four dams.

The survey, conducted by DHM Research, an independent and nonpartisan research firm in Portland, reached a total of 1,200 Northwest residents — 400 each in Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

According to the survey, 60% of respondents indicate support for “the use of hydroelectric dams on the lower Snake River to produce electricity” while 17% oppose it, and 23% don’t know.

Only 29% of respondents agreed that the dams should be removed to protect wild animals and their habitats. The rest opposed removal or didn’t know, according to the survey, which did not indicate the percentages for other answers.

Asked to rank their top concerns about removing the dams, respondents most often highlighted higher electricity costs, losing a source of carbon-free energy and impacts on agriculture.

About 14% said they had



The Associated Press, File

Ice Harbor Dam, one of four dams on the lower Snake River. A new survey commissioned by Northwest RiverPartners indicates broad public support for keeping the Snake River dams.

no concerns about the potential removal of the dams.

Kurt Miller, executive director of Northwest RiverPartners, told the Capital Press he wasn’t sure what to expect prior to commissioning the survey.

“I was definitely pleased with the results,” Miller said of the survey. “I was heartened, gratified to see that.”

He pointed to messaging from advocacy groups and media attention surrounding Idaho Rep. Mike Simpson’s proposed plan for dam breaching and Washington Gov. Jay Inslee and Sen. Patty Murray’s federal-state assessment of salmon recovery,

including dam breaching, as reasons for his uncertainty.

“People are being told that their neighbors essentially support dam breaching, and I don’t think that’s the case,” he said. “It’s important for the public to know it’s only a smaller minority that believes this would be good policy for the Pacific Northwest.”

Miller hopes policy makers such as Inslee and Murray pay attention to the survey’s findings.

“We want to find the most productive ways of helping salmon without harming society,” he said. “If we’re

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NEOEDD

Business planning classes start Jan. 19

The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Northeast Oregon Economic Development District is scheduling free, in-person business planning classes in La Grande starting in January, and potentially in Baker City and Enterprise as well.

The “Business Foundations” classes starting Jan. 19 in La Grande are the first in-person workshops scheduled by NEOEDD in two years, Lisa Dawson, the district’s executive director and class instructor, announced in a press release.

The classes, at the IGNITE Center, 104 Depot St., are free thanks to a Community Development Block Grant through the city of La Grande.

Preference is made to people with low to moderate incomes, and income verification is required.

The six-week workshop is designed to help entrepreneurs and small business owners build the foundation for a successful operation.

The classes in La Grande will take place Wednesdays

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