

# Flag bearer hangs up spurs

Man serves 36 years in search & rescue

By Angel Carpenter  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Kelly Collins of Canyon City is retiring his spurs after 36 years as a member of the Grant County Search and Rescue.

A former ranch hand cowboy, Collins mostly operated by horseback during his years of volunteer service.

Collins was a familiar face at county parades, leading out with the U.S. flag as color guard.

Atop his Tennessee Walker named Lippy, he held Old Glory in parades for the Mt. Vernon Cinnabar Mountain Rendezvous in May, the Canyon City '62 Days in June, the Dayville Fourth of July Parade and the Kids Day Parade and Grant County Fair Parade in August.

He also carried the flag for parades that are no longer running, including the Christmas Parade and the Mule Days Parade in John Day. He hasn't tracked how many parades he's ridden in, but it could be well over 100.

He said, when he joined search and rescue in the mid-1980s, he was looking for a way to serve in the organization.



Eagle file photo

**Kelly Collins rides color guard for the 2014 Fourth of July Parade in Dayville.**

"I got their permission to take over as color guard, and I've always tried to do my best and was very proud of leading the parades all these years — I wanted to be a benefit to the community," he said.

Collins said someone chal-

lenged him to join search and rescue.

"He thought I would be a good member," he said. "I have kept that in the back of my mind over all these years, to be a good member and a responsible citizen of the county."

He held various positions in the organization, including president, vice president, treasurer and board member.

The most difficult search and rescue operations, Collins said, included responding to plane crashes and recovering the deceased.

"It's a great load off your heart when they do find somebody alive," he said.

Trying to put himself in the lost or injured person's shoes has helped him in his duty.

"For the lost person, you put yourself in their mindset to figure out where they might be at a particular time of day and use your training and knowledge to find them," he said. "You do your very best to help locate and bring that person home ... because it could be one of yours. I've taken great pride in that. That's why I've extended myself so long."

He said he was trying for 40 years, but decided 36 would have to be it. Collins sold his horse and said he might move to Prineville in the spring.

"I just feel now is the time to step away and let some younger people take over," he said. "I want to thank the Sheriff's Department for allowing me to be a volunteer member all these years. I want to thank all the great people of the county for allowing me to be of service to them over the past 36 years."



The Eagle/Rylan Boggs

**Michelle Wiederman, 24, moved from New York to Grant County to be the youngest attorney at the Law Office of Robert Raschio.**

# From New York to Grant County

New public defender surprised by genuinely friendly community

By Rylan Boggs  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Michelle Wiederman traded skyscrapers for mountains when she moved from New York to Grant County to be the youngest attorney at the Law Office of Robert Raschio.

Wiederman, 24, is used to spending time stuck in traffic rather than on empty, open roads or four wheeling on rutted trails, but it's a change of pace she has enjoyed.

Wiederman began work as an attorney in October at the firm representing those who cannot afford lawyers in Grant, Harney and Baker counties. She said beginning her career in Grant County, as opposed to New York, allows her to spend plenty of time in the courtroom and experience on-the-job training. She described the experience as "invaluable."

Wiederman began working in law at 17 as an intern at a firm in New York and has wanted to be a public defender for a long time.

She entered the University of Wisconsin Madison

knowing she wanted to pursue law and earned a bachelor's degree in legal studies and sociology and a certificate in criminal justice in three years. From there, she received a full-ride scholarship to St. John's University in New York.

In college, one of her professors brought in someone from the Wisconsin Innocence Project. They talked about the great need for criminal defense attorneys, and what Wiederman heard resonated with her.

She moved to John Day in June to join her fiancé, Jonathan Bartov, who also works at the Law Office of Robert Raschio. Outside of the courtroom, Wiederman enjoys hiking, exploring the area and sci-fi TV shows.

She said she and her fiancée are content here in Grant County and have no plans to leave.

Wiederman says one of the biggest surprises was how genuinely kind and interested people in the area were. Growing up in New York, she said people are friendly, but in a superficial way. She said she was surprised by people's willingness to go out of their way to help.

"The people here have been so welcoming," she said. "Even when I visited they were so exceptionally friendly to me and went above and beyond to make me feel welcome here. The community has been just great."

# Political exposure: 2 local students share Girls State experience

By Angel Carpenter  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Two Grant Union High School Girls State delegates were honored with a dinner at the Nov. 14 meeting of the Ellis Tracy No. 77 American Legion and Auxiliary, which sponsors the program.

Seniors Natalie Stearns and Reitta Wyllie reported on their time at Willamette University in Salem, where they gained hands-on political experience for one week in June.

While at the Girls State session, they learned the political ropes while helping operate a mock 51st state.

"We learned more about how many offices there are and what each position does and how they get elected," Stearns said. "I really enjoyed how we met with a lot of different girls from a lot of different backgrounds and they basically became family for a week. It was nice to learn everyone's views."

Both girls participated in a mock trial, where Stearns was an attorney and Wyllie was part of a jury.

Wyllie said, although she plans to pursue a career in the medical field, she found value in the experience.

"I'm really glad I got to go," Wyllie said. "We learned



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter

**Girls State representatives Natalie Stearns, left, and Reitta Wyllie stand with American Legion Auxiliary Girls State Chairman Tammy Bremner, right, with Auxiliary president Ruth Harris seated in front.**

so many different things about how government works."

The girls recalled cheers they learned and skits their groups presented.

Wyllie said one girl brought a muscular Thor costume for their skit, which showed the superhero unable to lift his big hammer, but a little girl waltzed along and picked it up.

"Our skit for the follies showed how girls are powerful," Wyllie said.

Their other activities included a visit to the Capitol building, climbing the stairs to the top of the rotunda where they had a view of

the golden pioneer man. They also learned how bills are passed.

"They went through the Senate and House of Representatives," Wyllie said. "Some did pass, then were presented to the governor of Girls State. If she passed it, then it went to Gov. Kate Brown."

Local Girls State Chairman Tammy Bremner said the program offers girls exposure to how government operates.

"They get to learn and participate in the process," she said. "It's good for them because they can see that they have value. They realize that what they think and feel are important, and they can make a difference if they want."

Carl Lino was the sole Girls State sponsor this year. His late wife, Sondra, was the Oregon Girls State chairman for many years.

Bremner said they welcome more sponsors to help girls go to the sessions. Boys can also attend Boys State, which is chaired by Art Pereira.

Registration takes place in April 2017 for the June session. For more information, call Bremner at 541-620-1125.

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