



Attendees at the Oregon State Snowmobile Association conference, held in John Day Jan. 10-13, ride at Huddleston Sno-Park.

# Snowmobile convention ‘a great success’

Snowpack levels at record low

By Richard Hanners  
Blue Mountain Eagle

The recent Oregon State Snowmobile Association convention in John Day was a great success, Grant County Snowballers President Tim Holly said. The convention drew a good crowd to John Day on Jan. 10-13, with about 140 people attending the dinner event at the Grant County Fairgrounds on Saturday, he said. Drought-like conditions have impacted snow levels in Grant County this year, Holly noted, but visitors commented on how much more snow was in Grant County than other parts of Oregon. That was expected to change, based on the latest weather forecasts, Holly said. According to Snotel records online, the snow-water equivalent for snowpack at Blue Mountain Summit, on Highway 26 east of Austin Junction, is at its lowest in four years, Holly said. “We had a lot of snow early, in November, but not much since then,” Holly said. The Grant County area has about 500 miles of groomed snowmobile trails and four Sno-Parks, including Huddleston Sno-Park, south of Prairie City on County Road 62; Starr Sno-Park, south of Canyon City at the Starr Ridge Summit on Highway 395; and Idlewild Campground, north of Burns off Highway 395. A Sno-Park has been under development at Blue Mountain

Summit for the past two years, Holly said. A large area has been cleared for parking, but grant money is needed to pay for paving and restroom facilities, he said. Snowmobile trails groomed by the Snowballers, the Burnt River Snowmobile Club and the Sumpter Valley Snowmobile Club converge in the Blue Mountain Summit area, Holly said. Sno-Park lots are plowed using state crews or funds, and a Sno-Park permit is required by all winter recreationists using the lots. The permits cost \$25 per year and are available from the Department of Motor Vehicles and some local stores. Two avalanche training seminars were provided during the two-day convention, but avalanches are rare in this area, Holly said. Many members of the Snowballers club respond to Grant County Search and Rescue calls. “We can get 25 machines on site right away,” he said. Communication in the mountains can be difficult, he noted, but riders can sometimes gain cell service at high points in the terrain. Groomers, who work at night when the snow has hardened, carry satellite phones or a SPOT satellite messenger in case they have trouble miles from the trailhead. Three trail-groomer manufacturers attended the convention. Grooming machines are owned by the Oregon State Snowmobile Association and provided to local clubs with certified operators, Holly said. OSSA also pays for the fuel, but the operators are generally volunteers, he said.

# The heart to help: Couple retires from years of service at food bank

Halls have served at food bank since 1997

By Angel Carpenter  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Walt and Agnes Hall began serving at the Grant County Food Bank in John Day in 1997, when it was a small cement building with a leaky roof. Since that time, the couple have handed out tens of thousands of food boxes, alongside many other volunteers, for residents needing an extra hand. After twisting his knee a couple years ago, Walt had to scale back after 18 years of volunteering. Agnes, who’s served for 20 years and was food bank board chairwoman since the spring of 2015, stepped down as of Jan. 2. “There is a time for everything, and this is our time to pull back,” Agnes said, adding they will still help out at the food bank from time to time. It was Wilbur and Carole Ashby who first introduced the couple to serving at the food bank in the 90s. “They were both board members,” Walt said. “The food bank manager at that time was Jerry Beil.” Back then, the food bank was about 30 feet by 15 feet, located behind what is now the Outpost Restaurant. “It was a mess getting people in and out,” Walt said. The food bank is now located at 530 E. Main St. and has enough space to operate smoothly, and has a sturdy roof. Agnes said the number of people served has increased over the years, but recently the numbers have held steady, with between 100-150 households — between 280 to 300 individuals — served each month. “We might have hit 400 (individuals), but that was a rare situation,” Walt said. A household might include a single person or sometimes five or six — up to eight, Agnes said. Many times people line up early at the food bank the morning of the fourth Wednesday of the month, before volunteers arrive, in order to receive the best selection. Items given out usually



Dave Turner, left, and Walt Hall load a truck with food collected at the Eagle office for the Grant County Food Bank in 2013.



Agnes and Walt Hall of John Day recently retired from 20 years of volunteer service at the Grant County Food Bank.

include meat, peanut butter, tuna, juices, canned and frozen fruit and vegetables, pasta, rice and more. “It depends on what we get,” Walt said. “We don’t always know.” Although December was a good month for donations, Agnes said food prices have gone up, and the cost of the food they buy from the Oregon Food Bank and mileage reimbursement (to pick up the food in La Grande) have also increased. To make up the difference, they’ve had to dip into reserves, she said. “Everything is done through volunteers and donations,” Agnes said, adding that extra volunteers are always needed. Walt said when he retired from his job as a hospital security officer in Salem, he and Agnes moved to John Day with the idea of spending their

time volunteering. Agnes said serving at the food bank has been rewarding. “It’s very satisfying to know that you’re helping people,” she said. “If it wasn’t for the generosity of the people of Grant County, we would not be able to do what we do.” “It’s been a fun thing,” Walt added. “We both enjoy what we did, and we’re not really quitting, just backing off.” The Halls also assist during the John Day Senior Center luncheons once a month, along with other members of the Catholic Church. A new food bank chairperson is expected to be elected in February. Some of the current volunteers include secretary Ann Huffman, treasurer Sandra Sutton, transportation



Walt Hall, left, and Dave Turner from the Grant County Food Bank gather food collected at the Eagle office.

coordinator Cliff Marsh and food committee members Tom Sutton, George Sintay, Marsh and Jim Maple. Maple said it was Walt who introduced him to serving at the food bank, about 15 years ago. “There wouldn’t be a food bank without them,” Maple said. “Walter was the head of the food bank when he introduced me to (it).” “Agnes has been most faithful, and without both of them, the food bank would not be what it is,” he said. People who would like to sign up for assistance can apply at the food bank on distribution day. Those wishing to volunteer, and people who need an emergency food box, can call the food bank at 541-575-0299.

50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

Jim and Jean Miller

will be celebrating their special occasion


January 28<sup>th</sup> from 2-6 p.m.

at the Mt. Vernon Grange Hall.

They welcome all their friends to join them.


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Hours: M-F 10-4

Katee Hoffman

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Thank You

On December 25th, Tanner was seriously injured in a snowmobile accident. He had to be flown to Portland to OHSU where he underwent surgery and care for other injuries. It is truly by the grace of God that Tanner’s life was spared and we thank God every day.

During Tanner’s recovery and healing the outpour of love, kindness, and compassion has been beyond amazing. We have found that there truly are angels among us and we would like to take this opportunity to thank these angels.

First of all we would like to thank the Long Creek EMTs and first responders for their expertise and quick response. They are a very efficient and wonderful team. Thank you to the Blue Mountain Hospital paramedics for quickly and efficiently transporting Tanner to the BMH. We deeply appreciate your expertise also. Thank you for also making it possible for the plane to land so that Tanner could be flown to Portland. Thank you to the trauma team that was waiting for Tanner to arrive at the hospital, for all that each and every one of you did to save his life. EMTs, paramedics, doctors and staff, you are all wonderful. We so deeply appreciate everyone and will always be grateful.

We would like to thank everyone for their prayers, calls, cards, visits, food and monetary gifts. Thank you for your support and help during this difficult time. We will never forget the kindness and love that has been given to our family. Grant County is a wonderful place to live; it is full of giving and caring people and may God bless each and every one. May the kindness and love that was given to our family come back to all of you.

Sincerely,  
The Moodenbaugh Family, Nancy Morgan, Pearl Shearer

The Grant County Snowballers Snowmobile Club

would like to thank our state convention sponsors and donors

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