

# Lunch Buddy program helps givers and receivers

Older students are role models for younger kids

By Angel Carpenter  
Blue Mountain Eagle

High schoolers taking part in the Lunch Buddy Program at Prairie City School were each paired with a younger friend Oct. 3 at the school cafeteria.

Jojari Field, a junior, learned his lunch buddy, second-grader Seth Gehrke, likes art.

"Jojari likes basketball," Gehrke said.

Field said he's looking forward to being a positive person in his lunch buddy's life.

"I just want to be there for them and be their friend and someone they can feel comfortable around," he said.

After a lunch of chicken sandwiches and chocolate milk, Field was throwing a junior-sized football to Gehrke and a couple of his classmates.

The high school students received training the previous day from Debi Hueckman, who works as a community development coordinator through the Department of Human Services in John Day.

She explained that caring volunteers in the Lunch Buddy Program are matched with students who would benefit from individual and positive attention.

"The program brings another caring person into the life of a child and offers the opportunity for a positive



Prairie City second-grader Lauralei Thomas visits with her lunch buddy Aleah Johns, a senior, during lunch Oct. 3 at the cafeteria.

role model and friend," said Hueckman, who has been recruiting volunteer mentors since the fall of 1993, the program launching in January of 1994 at Humbolt Elementary School in Canyon City.

She said she and Mike Cosgrove, a former school counselor, worked together in the early years of the program, which expanded to Prairie City two years ago and Monument School this year.

The buddies share lunch each week throughout the school year.

"Kids benefit in a lot of ways," Hueckman said. "They have a special relationship with someone who listens, talks and laughs with them. Mentors gain the satisfaction of knowing they

have made a difference for a child."

Maxine Day, a counselor at the school, said the program has grown each year since it started at Prairie City School.

"The first year we had around 10 lunch buddy partners," she said. "Last year we had 14 lunch buddy partners, and this year we have the possibility of having 21 lunch buddy partners."

In addition to the high school students, they had one adult male involved in the program last year, and this year they will have one adult female.

Day said she's seen younger lunch buddies benefit by learning skills such as overcoming shyness, standing up for themselves in positive ways and supporting

others who may be having a rough day.

She's also found the positive aspects of the program buddies go both ways.

"I see confidence rising on both sides," she said. "I see lifelong friendships."

She lauded Hueckman for her work training the older buddies, and topping it off with an end of the school year party.

Senior Shaine Madden and junior Katie Hire were looking forward to learning who their lunch buddies would be the following week.

Hire, who was a lunch buddy last year, said, "It's really fun, and being able to bond with the kids is really important, because it gives them someone to look up to."

It's Madden's first time



For the Eagle/Emily Ennis  
From left, fourth-grader Wyatt Davis and Jake McHatton, a Prairie City senior, enjoy time on the playground as lunch buddies. Mahayla Moss, also a fourth-grader, joins in on the fun.

being a lunch buddy, and she was looking forward to hanging out with the kids and being a role model.

On the playground after lunch, senior Aleah Johns was playing with her lunch buddy, second-grader Lauralei Thomas, on the monkey bars and pull-up bars.

Thomas said she was happy to learn that Johns would be her lunch buddy again this year.

Senior Jake McHatton looked like he was having just as much fun as the children he was pushing on the swings on the playground.

He paused from playing tag with his lunch buddy, fourth-grader Wyatt Davis, and Mahayla Moss, also a fourth-grader, and others.

"I'm just trying to keep up," McHatton said. "I did it last year, and this year is going to be even more fun."



For the Eagle/Emily Ennis  
Lunch buddies Aleah Johns, a senior, and Lauralei Thomas, a second-grader, share time together on Prairie City School playground.

# Ten-year-old catches bass with a surprise inside

ODFW: Parasite not harmful but samples wanted for research

By Rudy Diaz  
Blue Mountain Eagle

While fishing at the North Fork of the John Day River, 10-year-old Trevor Sasser caught more than he bargained for.

After reeling in a small-mouth bass, everything appeared normal. But when his mom, Tami Sasser, cut the fish open, they found an unknown organism inside the bass.

"It looked like an alien," Trevor said. "It was really disgusting."

Tami described the parasite with multiple tentacles as "spongy" and said it was located under the lung, near the liver. When she pulled



Contributed photo  
Trevor Sasser and his mother, Tami, begin cleaning the smallmouth bass that contained a parasite.

the parasite off out of the fish, the suction was comparable to that of a lamprey, she said.

"I didn't think it was that much of an oddity," Tami said. "I have seen external parasites before, but this was the first time seeing

something like this."

Not knowing what it was, they tossed the fish away.

Richard W. Stocking, a fish pathologist for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, said the parasite was not harmful.

"While unsightly, there is no reason to be alarmed as it's a very normal life cycle," Stocking said. "These parasites usually do little or no harm to the fish hosts. The fish are also perfectly safe to eat (as usual, cook all fish thoroughly)."

Stocking said he could not identify the parasite from the picture, but white grubs and bass tapeworms are most often associated with intestinal tissues.

He said ODFW would like to collect samples for more research, if anyone encounters a fresh specimen, which can be taken to the ODFW office at 305 N. Canyon City Blvd., Canyon City.



Contributed photo  
Trevor Sasser caught this smallmouth bass with a parasite inside on the North Fork of the John Day River.

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