

Touring Grant County through virtual reality

OTEC looking to help drive tourism and improve economic development in Grant County

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Technology has provided opportunities to work from home and finish classes remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, and now it will help promote tourism in Grant County.

Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative worked with Golden Shovel, a company that specializes in using virtual reality for economic development, to develop VR experiences focused on several counties in Eastern Oregon.

The virtual tour of Grant County consist of an eight minute video, narrated by a woman, which takes participants through parts of John



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative Communications Coordinator Joe Hathaway, left, gives Steven Mitchell a demonstration of the co-op's new virtual reality tour of Grant County.

Day, Prairie City, Canyon City and more.

With the VR headset, the video becomes immersive as people can

view 360 degrees and observe their surroundings as if they were physically at the location — from bike rides to scenic viewpoints.

“All of these videos were shot in 2019 and it’s a coincidence that the pandemic hit and we’re seeing the local economy struggling,” OTEC Communications Coordinator Joe Hathaway said. “We were thinking it was a good time to roll these out now to try and drive economic recovery and do anything we can do to help the communities we serve.”

Hathaway said the plan is to have the videos available at visitor centers throughout the counties, the state and possibly the nation. Another goal is to drive tourism, so when the pandemic ends, people will have an idea of where they can travel.

“It’s not like seeing a still photo from a magazine,” Hathaway said. “You’re actually immersed into what the counties have to offer.”

Hathaway said this has been a collaborative effort between OTEC and many economic development partners from around the counties and at the local level. He said the team is focusing on tourism and agricul-

tural tourism with other possibilities in the future.

Each video cost about \$6,000 to produce. OTEC received financial assistance from the counties they serve and Travel Oregon, an agency working to enhance Oregon’s economy through tourism.

“We feel this is an investment into the community to help drive economic development in the communities we serve,” Hathaway said. “We’re owned by the members... We want to do our part to help the community out, and this is just one way to do our part and help out because they give so much to us.”

He said, while OTEC’s priority is to deliver safe and reliable power, they want to make sure the communities are also doing well.

Videos are available at economicdevelopment.otec.coop. A VR headset is not necessary to view the videos, and spectators can still use their computer’s mouse to view the surroundings.



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

The Stagecoach food cart parks in front of the Dayville Merc. Co-owner Scott Knapp took over the Dayville Merc last year.

Stagecoach food cart adapting to pandemic

Truck features frontier-style menu

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

A Dayville food truck is making its way around the county.

Like other food trucks in the country, the Stagecoach finds ways to adapt to the pandemic and make it through tumultuous times while bringing people together through food.

Scott Knapp, co-owner of the food truck, said he and his partners Janet Garlin and Melody McGregor planned to have the Stagecoach at the Thomas Condon Paleontology Center at the John Day Fossil Beds.

However, the coronavirus outbreak upended their plans.

But, with social distancing and take-out built into the food truck business model, Knapp said the Stagecoach is ready to help the community.

“It is COVID-19-friendly,” he said. “I mean, we can literally make it a drive-up, drive-to or walk-up, set the standards and keep the community safe.”

Knapp said the Stagecoach will prepare grab-and-go lunches for the firefighters this season, and he said they plan to work with the Grant County Chamber of Commerce on nonprofit projects to help raise money in the community.

Knapp, who took over the Dayville Merc in December, said the Stagecoach’s grand opening over the Fourth of July weekend was a success.



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

The frontier-style menu at the Stagecoach hangs on the cart July 11 in front of the Dayville Merc. Co-owner Scott Knapp said the Stagecoach plans to offer new items in the future.

“It was about reaching out to the community and introducing ourselves to the community,” he said. “We want to add value to the community and the people.”

The Stagecoach features a frontier-style menu, with authentic cowboy beans, rattlesnake sausage and alligator kabobs, along with beef ribs slathered in barbecue sauce made with local ingredients.

“WITH ALL THE DIVISION AND THE THINGS THAT ARE HAPPENING IN SOCIETY, WE FEEL LIKE WE CAN REALLY REACH OUT AND BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER WITH FOOD.”

— Scott Knapp, co-owner of Stagecoach food cart

Knapp said the barbecue sauce is made with honey from Kimberly and vinegar out of Dayville.

“We like using local products, and we believe in the ranchers,” he said. “Ranchers are the heartbeat of America.”

Garlin and McGregor said that everybody is welcome at the Stagecoach, and the guiding value of the business is to bring people together through food.

Food is what brought Knapp, McGregor and Garlin together. Knapp said the three foodies met at a pizza parlor in Mackenzie River and became instant friends after connecting over a love of food.

Knapp said the their goal is continue to build on that foundation.

“With all the division and the things that are happening in society,” he said, “we feel like we can really reach out and bring people together with food.”



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

Darla Fletcher, left, and Ernie Slavey of Central Oregon play a game of Jenga at the North Fork RV and Camping Park on the North Fork of the John Day River July 4 on the deck owner Steve Mills recently built. Mills said next year he hopes to host live music on the property.

Mills adds on to North Fork RV and Camping Park

From Central Oregon, the new proprietor prefers the small-town atmosphere

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

With vacationers avoiding airlines and hotels in the era of COVID-19, camping has become more popular than ever.

Steve Mills, co-owner of North Fork RV and Camping Park, can attest to the shift. He said this year has been much better than last year.

Mills, who purchased the property along the North Fork of the John Day River in March with his wife, said the park has nine full hook-ups and roughly a dozen tent camping sites.

Mills, who is from Central Oregon, said he recently built a stage, and next year he hopes to host live music, weddings and graduation parties on the property.

Additionally, he said there would be showers, laundry facilities and fire pits for campers.

Mills said the hustle and bustle of Central Oregon became too much for him, and the small-town feel of Eastern Oregon drew him in.

“The explosion of the population, and just the different attitudes of people that moved in there,” he said. “It’s just all different now.”

He said not all of the change is necessarily bad, but it’s vastly different than before, and Monument’s small-town life suits him much better.

He said if he and his wife can get more people — both locals and travelers — they would like to open the bar again, but that will take people being aware of what is going on in Monument.

Mills said his main goal is to help bring business into the town.

“I try and do as much as I can for the little town,” he said. “Once (small towns) are gone, they’re kind of gone.”

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