



Eagle file photo

Elizabeth Kulick from Salem felted her own slippers during a workshop at the Prairie City Fiber Fest in 2020.

Prairie City Fiber Fest overcomes COVID-19

July event looks to grow from last year

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Organizers of the Prairie City Fiber Fest look forward to this year's festival after seeing continued growth despite the pandemic.

COVID-19's impact on events remains ever-present since the first shutdowns last March, but the Prairie City Fiber Fest's success last year has organizers hoping to grow this year.

Taci Philbrook, a director in charge of vendors, advertising and the scholarship program, said they were the only fiber festival — showcasing producers and vendors of fibers such as wool — available in Oregon last year, and they worked to make sure the event was safe for participants.

"We fenced off the entire park, and people were at both entrances keeping track of the number of people and provided masks and hand sanitizer," said Ginger Shive, the festival director. "This year the (Grant County Chamber of Commerce) is going to provide us with masks, and we have the sanitizer ready, and we're going to set up like we did last year."

Philbrook said the amount of space available for the event also made it easier to accommodate for distancing, which



Eagle file photo

Organizers of the Prairie City Fiber Fest in 2020 worked hard to assure the safety of the community and participants of the event.

is unique to this festival.

"Our fiber fest covers more real estate — because we use the Teen Center, the community center and the park — than any other festival in Oregon," Philbrook said. "Most of them are just in one building, but our event covers a lot of the city."

Shive said, if they were able to pull off the event last year, they're confident they can make it happen again this year.

Even with unexpected changes that might come from COVID-19 mandates, Shive said organizers are prepared to make the changes necessary to keep the event going. Last year's event saw changes up to the week prior to the event, but Philbrook said the team

adjusted. They are prepared to make last-minute adjustments again if it happens this year.

"When the state says you can have X number of people per square feet, we know how many square feet are in each location so we'll make changes along with the regulation," Shive said. "People seem to understand that, and they are just so kind and thoughtful. They don't get uptight, and they roll with the punches."

Philbrook said it's important to note that many visitors at the event are travelers that are aware of the restrictions and guidelines.

The festival currently has 23 vendors signed with one lady bringing fiber from valais blacknose sheep crossed with Leicester longwool, a rare fiber to find, according to Shive.

"I said to my husband when I saw that application, 'I know where I'm spending some money,'" Shive said. "To get your hands on a fleece that is rarely available in the U.S. and have it land in Prairie City is like two thumbs up."

Philbrook said a big part of planning for this year has been communicating with vendors through calls or their newsletter to make sure everyone is on the same page.

A new \$1,000 scholarship is also being awarded, thanks to the growth seen from last year's festival. The scholarship is available to a stu-

dent that is graduating and has attended school or home school in the county for 12 months, and the money will go to a student's institute of higher learning. The money can be used for books, tuition and living expenses.

"The applicants are to be judged on the basis of their FFA involvement, scholastic achievement, essays and a letter of recommendation from an FFA advisor," Philbrook said. The application process will be open Jan. 1, 2022, to April 15, 2022.

The two-day festival is scheduled for July 24-25 with workshops starting on July 23. Workshops will cover a variety of classes: felted vessels, needle-felted gnomes, hand-felted slippers, pine needle basketry, punch needle rug hooking and more.

Volunteers are also needed to monitor traffic at the venues, provide masks, hand out materials, answer questions and set up and take down tables and chairs.

Jim Kelly named new chairperson for Oregon Board of Forestry

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle



Jim Kelly

Jim Kelly of Monument continues his work on the Oregon Board of Forestry as the new chairperson.

Oregon Department of Forestry announced on April 16 that they welcomed new board members and Kelly as the chairperson for the board. Kelly joined the board in 2018.

Kelly told the Eagle in an interview on April 28 that it's pretty intimidating to be the new chair because of the numerous challenges in the Oregon forests on both the east and west sides, but he is ready to make sure the board fulfills its obligation to the people of Oregon.

"We've always had a lot of challenges, but with climate change and the prevalence and risk of fires, there's a whole lot on our plate," Kelly said.

There are three main responsibilities that ODF operates: fire suppression, managing the state forests and overseeing the rules that affect private landowners and timber companies related to harvest and forest management, according to Kelly.

A goal for Kelly as the chairperson is to make sure the board provides the state forester with both the direction and support the department needs to be successful.

Kelly said the Board of Forestry has been one of the most contentious of any state boards for a while due to past members representing the industry, landowners or conservation groups. Moving forward, he wants to build a board that is trusting of each other and is high functioning.

"That's my first goal to get a group of people working well together," Kelly

said. "None of us are there with a job of representing a constituency. Our job by statute is

to represent the people of Oregon."

He said the board is currently overseeing the completion of a long process to institute a conservation plan on the state forests. He said a habitat conservation plan is an agreement with the federal government that can last 50 or more years. He said the agreement is a way to give landowners certainty going forward, which is big in the world of forestry.

He said they are also going to update the forestry program for Oregon.

"It's all policy work that we do here, and the big change in the last 10 years has been climate change and the prevalence of fires," Kelly said. "The priorities have shifted somewhat, so we're going to try and update with all of that in mind."

Kelly and his wife have lived in Grant County for almost 22 years, and he wanted to assure residents in the county and Eastern Oregon that they are not forgotten.

"Often times people in Eastern Oregon think they are forgotten, and I want to assure them that they're not," Kelly said. "Rest assured that I am super aware of the need for thinning projects and prescribed fires to make our drier forests healthier and protect our community and hopefully provide jobs. Grant County residents should know that they've got people on the board paying attention to the important issues here."

REPORTER

The Blue Mountain Eagle, a family-owned weekly newspaper in a stunningly beautiful Oregon community, seeks an energetic, dedicated reporter.

The Eagle is located in John Day, where seeing deer in front yards is normal and traffic is unheard of, just three hours from Bend and Pendleton. Surrounded by scenic forests and dissected by mountain streams, the location offers year-round recreational opportunities, including fishing, hunting, backpacking, camping, snowmobiling and horseback riding.

Despite the picturesque environment, the community is at the center of an evolving natural resource restoration economy, which gains statewide and even national attention.

Despite the small-town charm, the residents are engaged and politically active in local and national debates, and hard-hitting stories are never hard to find. Ongoing topics include state and federal policies, forest health, logging, public lands grazing, water supply, wildlife habitat improvements and wildfire resilience, in addition to coverage of small-town life and local government. The position offers a wealth of breaking news and enterprise opportunities.

Serving the community for more than 150 years, the Eagle is the oldest weekly newspaper in Oregon and is part of EO Media Group, an award-winning and innovative news organization with an active family of owners. This position offers excellent advancement opportunities in a company that prefers to hire from within. EO Media Group owns 13 newspapers and journals that provide accurate, fair and timely reporting about the people and issues impacting the communities we serve in the Pacific Northwest, reflecting the responsibility and spirit of a free press.

We seek a journalist who is passionate about local news and excited about the opportunity to publish in print, online and through social media. Candidates must be able to develop story ideas, take photographs, develop sources, prepare website and social media updates and work in a cooperative team environment. Journalistic integrity is a must.

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Wellness kits delivered to local students

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County delivered wellness kits last month.

Over 400 local students in April received kits that included yoga mats, exercise cards and sunglasses from Families First and several other community organizations.

Katrina Randleas, a family support specialist with Families First, said Community Counseling Solutions hosts the Grant County Teen Health Fair every spring. However, Randleas told the Eagle, due to COVID-19, the organization could not host a traditional, in-person teen fair.

Instead, she said, CCS and the community organizations

sent wellness kits to the students in waves, the first going out in December before winter break and then another before spring break.

Randleas said along with Grant Union High School, schools in Prairie City, Long Creek and Dayville received the kits.

Randleas said that Lisa Weigum, a substance abuse coordinator with CCS, stepped up and "put forth the effort" to get the kits out to the students.


She said Weigum worked "tirelessly" to put the kits together and ensure they got out to the students. Randleas said the teens were grateful for the kits and had fun with a scavenger hunt where they tried their luck at winning a

FitBit.

Randleas said, with gatherings in the community canceled due to the pandemic, the students know the community values them.

"Your community cares about you," she said. "We want to make sure you take care of yourself. Your mental and physical health matters."


Participating groups included Oregon State University Open Campus, John Day/Canyon City Parks and Recreation District, Grant County 4-H Snap-ED, Advantage Dental, Grant County Health Department, Blue Mountain Hospital, Heart of Grant County and Grant/Harney Court Appointed Special Advocates.




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