

Rheas, Elguezabal awarded yards of the month for June

County transit



Steve and Molly Rhea. -Photo by Kay Proctor



Steve and Molly's front yard. -Photo by Kay Proctor



Rhea's birdhouse. -Photo by Kay Proctor

By Kay Proctor

Heppner's Yard of the Month recognition for June was shared equally between neighbors Mary Ann Elguezabal at 70 Canyon Drive and Steve and Molly Rhea next door at 60 Canyon Drive.

Mary Ann purchased her home from the Bob Kahl family in 2001 after renting a home on Gilmore Street. Retired now from teaching at Heppner Elementary School, where she was known as Mrs. E, Mary Ann keeps busy with family, church and volunteering, but does take time to enjoy the hillside yard of her home.

The Elguezabals moved here in 1997 from their hometown of Nyssa. There, Mary Ann had met Juan Elguezabal while cooking pancakes at a breakfast where they were both volunteers. Nicknamed Mr. E, the beloved schoolteacher and coach sadly passed away a few years after moving to Heppner. The couple's children are Petra, Blas, San Juanita, Chuy, Nacho and Tomas.

Nine grandchildren have plenty to do in the well-tended yard, which has a swing set, playhouse, an old boat just for play, a trampoline, and an area where the second generation competes now in Home Run Derbies. The multiple terracing creates lots of areas to explore, also.

Mowing, weeding and yard work are shared by multiple family members.

Bordered beds surround the yard and are filled with vegetables, annuals, perennials and shrubs. A raised bed of rhubarb and varieties of raspberries has been closed off with hog panel wire to keep out deer. Many of the plantings have been given to and shared with Mary Ann by friends and family. Her favorites are the French lilacs, marigolds and alyssum.

In 2014, 20 trees were destroyed by fire and the house was threatened, saved only by a sudden change of wind, although an outbuilding was burned down. A bird landing on a nearby transformer caused the fire, which spread rapidly across the town's southwest hills and was heroically stopped by local fire departments and helpful citizens. Mary Ann mentions the patient and thorough work done by John Healy in cleaning up the fire damage at her place.

For now, Mary Ann can enjoy her yard while watching quail and other cheerful birds from her favorite spot, the back patio. Graced with a huge, sturdy wood table built by Mr. E and recently refurbished by son, Tomas, the table is a central gathering place for Familia Elguezabal.

Steve and Molly Rhea purchased their home in 1986 after the bank had to take it back from a previous owner. Even knowing there were projects to do, it was still a bit of a surprise to discover nasturtium flowers had made their way inside



Mary Ann Elguezabal with grandson Juan David Payne. -Photo by Kay Proctor



Mary Ann Elguezabal front yard -Photo by Kay Proctor



Memory Stone in Elguezabal's yard. -Photo by Kay Proctor

to bloom in the utility room.

Molly recalls daughter Macy bringing home starts of trees that were actually small sticks given to students at school on Arbor Day, which they graciously planted in the backyard. Those sticks now tower over the house, giving deep shade. The new family pup, Boots, discovered a few spots under the trees where the grass thinned out, giving Boots some mud to enjoy and share. Steve has plans to rototill and re-do the back lawn with shade-friendly grass.

Terraces have been carved out of the hillside to maximize use. Steve removed old railroad ties used in bed borders, replacing them with large landscape blocks. Another part of this project was replacing an older, shorter terrace in the back with 33 feet of terracing standing six feet high on top of a gravel base.

Other projects in the backyard are adding access stairs and a large deck looking over the draw.

Steve does the yard maintenance and recommends using a good quality fertilizer during spring and fall time. He pulls out by hand any dandelions or other weeds that try to show up. Molly takes care of the many plants and flowers and, also, a few vegetables are grown. She mentions that many of the plantings came from the garden of her mother, Fay Pierce. Planted pots are used throughout and some overwinter in

Steve's favorite part of the

yard—his heated shop.

The front yard is Molly's favorite place outdoors. Steve's favorite flowers are the colorful tulips that grow there, and Molly's favorites are the large, bright-orange poppies. A shady hazel tree makes a privacy screen. Lots of birds visit and certain ones use the feeder, a gift from Howard and Beth Bryant.

Working as a dedicated registered nurse since 1979, Molly is nearing retirement as Pioneer Memorial Home Health and Hospice Director. Steve grew up on the Grieb Ranch where his dad was employed, and has been a member of the Heppner Fire Department for 36-plus years, the last three and a half as fire chief. Son Trevor is a volunteer there, too. Grandsons are Pierce and Maverick.

Both neighboring families mention that to start a landscaped yard does not have to cost a lot; established plants need to be divided or trimmed and people doing that are usually more than happy to share with others. Steve mentions that when starting out, they did not have a plan or vision; he "just likes a green yard." With the 2014 fire starting right behind their homes and with Steve's years of fighting fires, he reminds us that a green lawn can be a fire barrier, too.

Yard of the Month is co-sponsored by the Heppner Volunteers, MCGG Green Feed & Seed Store, and the City of Heppner.

-Continued from PAGE TWO well as enhancing the reliability of the services. So far, the study has uncovered a lack of awareness about existing services, which could also be connected to low utilization of those services.

"But there's a strong desire for more consistency and reliability of services to be able to use them," Donovan added, "as well as a desire for more information."

She also said that a significant number of respondents walk, especially compared to most rural areas, where people tend to walk less than in urban areas.

"And we see a lot of unique approaches on behalf of private employers or nonprofit organizations to solve transportation needs for their communities," she said.

Dr. Daniel Costie of EOU was the lead researcher on the project. He presented REV's findings, which indicated that there were a lot of people unaware of existing services like Kayak, CareVan Medical and Dial-a-Ride. Of those who were, even fewer actually used the services. Most drove or carpoled.

"What was interesting, to us at least, was that folks are much more keen to walk than they are to bike, bus or use Dial-a-Ride," Costie said.

Work, shopping and church were the three most common destinations listed by respondents. Most people listed reliability as their greatest travel challenge.

When asked about how a Hermiston/Boardman connector could be more valuable, most people responded that they needed more information about the services, such as bus schedules. Consistency was also a key factor. Response regarding a Boardman/Port of Morrow connector was similar.

The recommendations that came out of the study were to work with employers regarding the dissemination of information on transit options, invest in more full-time drivers and more buses on the roads, and to encourage collaboration with employers to promote coordination of transportation options to work.

The REV researchers also recommended working with employers to offer incentives to use new service routes, fostering ridership through "travel training,"

investing more in promotional information in Spanish, broadening the scope of Dial-A-Ride services, and investing in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure to facilitate connectivity with transit routes.

"People are—both when you're behind the wheel and you're the ones walking—people are seeing the need for more safety built into the infrastructure, with more opportunities to leverage the walking and biking," said Costie.

"When I go through the new section of east beach and the Port, we have a fairly nice walking path with LED lighting, which obviously helps in safety, and then we have some crosswalks that have the flashing safety lights," Morrow County Commissioner Roy Drago commented. "Is that the kind of stuff we need to incorporate more of for this to be better access for pedestrians and bicycles, or are we actually talking about new paths?"

"I think it's connecting some of those good portions of infrastructure that we have," Donovan replied. She added that a separate study had looked at proposed bus stops and rated them good, fair or poor for pedestrian and bicycle accessibility. "There are portions where things are fairly accessible and good within the Port of Morrow, but generally speaking, previous research has found that infrastructure to be fair or poor."

"As the transit service comes online," added Phillips, "there are ways to make hubs more accessible to folks so that they're more likely to use that service as a park-and-ride, or even as an access point for using these other pedestrian or bike facilities."

"And I'd add that there is likely funding for those opportunities as well," she said.

Mabbott added that the new transportation plan the county adopted last year added a whole new section on transit, and that this study did indeed set the stage for future funding. She said she also gained other valuable insights from the study.

"I learned so much about how to engage certain populations," she added. "Having interpreters at a meeting. Having people in the room that they understand. Additional outreach. Those were all things that I've already put to use."

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