

Creative employment benefits employers, people with disabilities

Mike Poling and Travis Harmon are exceptional Columbia County residents. While different in many ways, it is not their disability that sets them apart from their co-workers, but their unwavering dedication and loyalty to Wal-Mart where they are both currently employed. What makes this situation so exceptional is that nearly 75 percent of all people with disabilities in Columbia County are unemployed.

A newly formed group, the Creative Employment Opportunities Network (CEON) plans on helping Columbia County turn the unemployment rate around. "We know that many people are unaware that individuals with disabilities are an untapped resource," said Pat Meredith, Riverside Training Center Community Support Coordinator.

"When unemployment is high," Meredith continued, "hiring a person with a disability may seem to be a risk they cannot afford to take. We hope to educate the community as to why the opposite is true."

Chorale will start season with Handel and Mozart

Handel's "Messiah," Mozart's "Requiem" and a selection of great sacred choral music will be among the works offered when the Columbia Chorale of Oregon (CCO) begins its second season this fall. Ryan Heller will return as Conductor and Artistic Director for Columbia County's only classically oriented vocal music group.

The Chorale will present its first performance of the 2002-03 season in December. Handel's "Messiah," with its well-known Hallelujah Chorus, will comprise the majority of that program. The "Messiah" has been a favorite of performers and audiences alike for over 250 years.

April will bring the performance of Mozart's "Requiem." His Requiem soars; it is music to celebrate a full and rich life and to ponder the afterlife, invoking the ecstasies of Paradise and the agonies of hell. Efforts are being made to present the work in collaboration with a professional chamber orchestra.

The Chorale will conclude its second season in early June with a selection of great sacred choral works spanning several hundred years in their composition.

The Columbia Chorale of

Like Wal-Mart, other local businesses, including the Dockside Restaurant, Burgerville, Avamere, Taylormade and McDonald's can attest to the belief that, given the oppor-



Employees at Wal-Mart's St. Helens store include, l-r, Personnel Manager Pearl Bays, Assistant Manager Tina Tourville, and exceptional employees Travis Harmon and Mike Poling.

Oregon will also celebrate the return of its Chamber Choir, a group of 16-20 mixed voices that will focus on historic and modern ensemble pieces, sections of the larger Chorale works, and independent performances. The CCO Chamber Choir will perform at the January fundraiser for Columbia County Citizens for Human Dignity, and at other venues throughout the season. Chamber Choir members are selected based on Chorale members' auditions; those auditions are

scheduled for late September.

The Columbia Chorale of Oregon welcomes new members at the beginning of each season. No auditions are required, however basic knowledge of music and music theory are helpful.

Regular rehearsals are held each Monday night, 7:00-9:30 p.m. in the St. Helens High School choir room, 2375 Gable Road, St. Helens. For more information, contact CCO Board Chairperson Nancy Federici, in St. Helens at (503) 397-2098.

tunity, individuals with disabilities can be successfully employed and compete with traditional job seekers.

Pat Meredith of Riverside Training Center and Barbara Schifano, formerly of Columbia Community Mental Health, teamed up to write a proposal to form CEON, competing with communities from four states to work with Western Washington University for a full year to make their vision a reality.

The CEON Project was one of two selected for Support in 2002. Western Washington University works with rehabilitation professionals and communities in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

"We chose the CEON project because the team it assembled was first rate and the goal of helping the community rethink employment for disabled people seemed very achievable," said Western Washington's John Dineen, who will assist the CEON team in their efforts.

The group brings together a plethora of experience including high school vocational staff

Wendy Herrington from Scappoose, Bonnie Parypa, with the State of Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Services, plus advocates and individuals with disabilities. Their partnership of public employees and private individuals has a common goal of promoting employment for disabled individuals in Columbia County. The team includes representatives from five area high schools, four state agencies, and private rehabilitation agencies.

By sharing information and coordinating services, the CEON team has already reached out to the parents of disabled high school students at a job fair and has created a brochure that outlines their mission and goals in hopes that by educating the community about people with disabilities, they can bridge the gap between traditional and non-traditional job seekers.

"We will be increasingly visible in Columbia County," Meredith said, "and we will share success stories and help business people overcome their concerns of the unknown."

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