

EXPLORE

POLK COUNTY 2024



A SPECIAL PUBLICATION OF THE ITEMIZER-OBSERVER

Join Us For Willamina's Old Fashioned 4th of July Celebrations!

Welcomes you

**To Our 75th Year of Celebrating the Best
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Willamina Historical Museum

Located on NE 'D' St. Open Sat. 1-4 p.m

Fishing Pond

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SUMMER

Kiwanis Fishing Derby on June 1st

Mud Drags June 29th

**Old-Fashioned 4th of July Celebration
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Fall

Trunk or Treat October 31st

Coastal Hills Art tour November 8th & 9th

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Visit our website

City of Willamina: willaminaoregon.gov



Willamina Museum



**4th of July
Car Show**



**Coastal Hill
Art Tour**



Willamina Falls



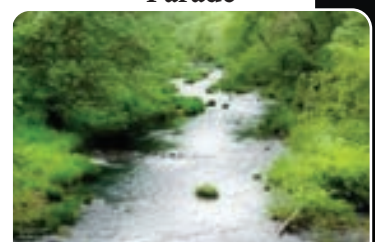
Huddelston Pond



Off-Road Recreation



**Willamina Light
Parade**



Willamina Creek

Willamina
Coastal Hills
Chamber
of commerce

City of Willamina Mayor Ila Skyberg
City Council President Rita Baller, Councilors Barry Wilson,
Craig Johnson, Vickie Hernandez, Jennifer Pederson, Karl Klym

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ECONOMIC
IMPROVEMENT
DISTRICT**







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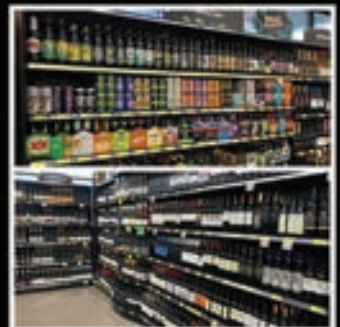
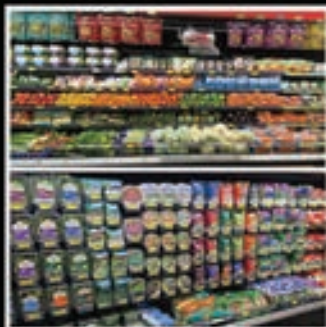
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From the Editor

Let us be your guide to the best of Polk County

Each year, more and more locations within Polk County make their way into the state's regional marketing publications and social media hot spots.

As one of the fastest growing counties in Oregon, Polk County has much to offer visitors and locals who still call it home.

We reached out to the county's biggest cities to enlist their mayors to share why you should include a stop in their municipality on your travel plans, including Dallas, Independence, Monmouth, Falls City and Willamina. Each community boasts activities that swell the population during the summer months. Be sure to make time for each city's celebrations revolving around Independence Day.

Travel Salem compiled the ultimate road trip for foodies on its The Great Oaks Food Trail. We highlight two stops along the route, Dreamies Creamery in Dallas and The River Restaurant in Independence.

New to the culinary circuit are two stops worth tantalizing your taste buds. Gather Food Court in Dallas, featuring four new food trucks that will have you coming back to try everything on their menus. And while you stop in to Independence's Divine Distillers for the fine food and scintillating spirits, stay for their growing comedy scene, featuring the funniest regional talent.

If you're looking for an evening of entertainment, check out the comfy confines of the Moonfall Theatre (but act quickly - their performances are so exclusive, there's only two a year and tickets sell out fast). And be sure to catch a production during Pentacle Theatre's 70th Anniversary season.

If you're looking for a bit of interactive fun, jump in the time machine and rediscover the medieval era at the Shrewsbury Renaissance Fair, featuring jousting knights, jesters and giant turkey legs, to name a few attractions.

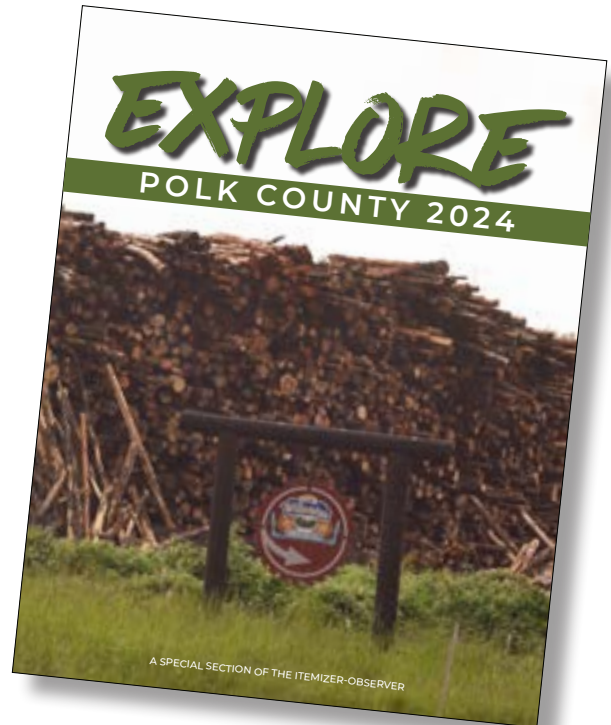
If you're in need of a guide for your exploration, be sure to sign up for the Mystery and Ghost tours in the fall held in Monmouth and Independence. Learn more about the dark history that lies behind the charming façade that even the locals know little about.

And to help facilitate travel between the two towns, be sure to hop aboard the locals' new favorite mode of transportation, the MI Trolley. Discover what thousands of regular riders have embraced in paying homage to a bygone era of railroad travel.

Polk County has plenty of attractions, whether enjoyed with the family and friends or absorbed solo in nature's majesty. Let Explore Polk County be your guide to take it all in.

DAVID HAYES

Editor



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Explore Polk County is an annual publication. For more information about Explore Polk County please visit us online at polkio.com. All photos used in this issue are from contributors or from Polk IO photo file . Stop by or give us a call to advertise in our next issue!

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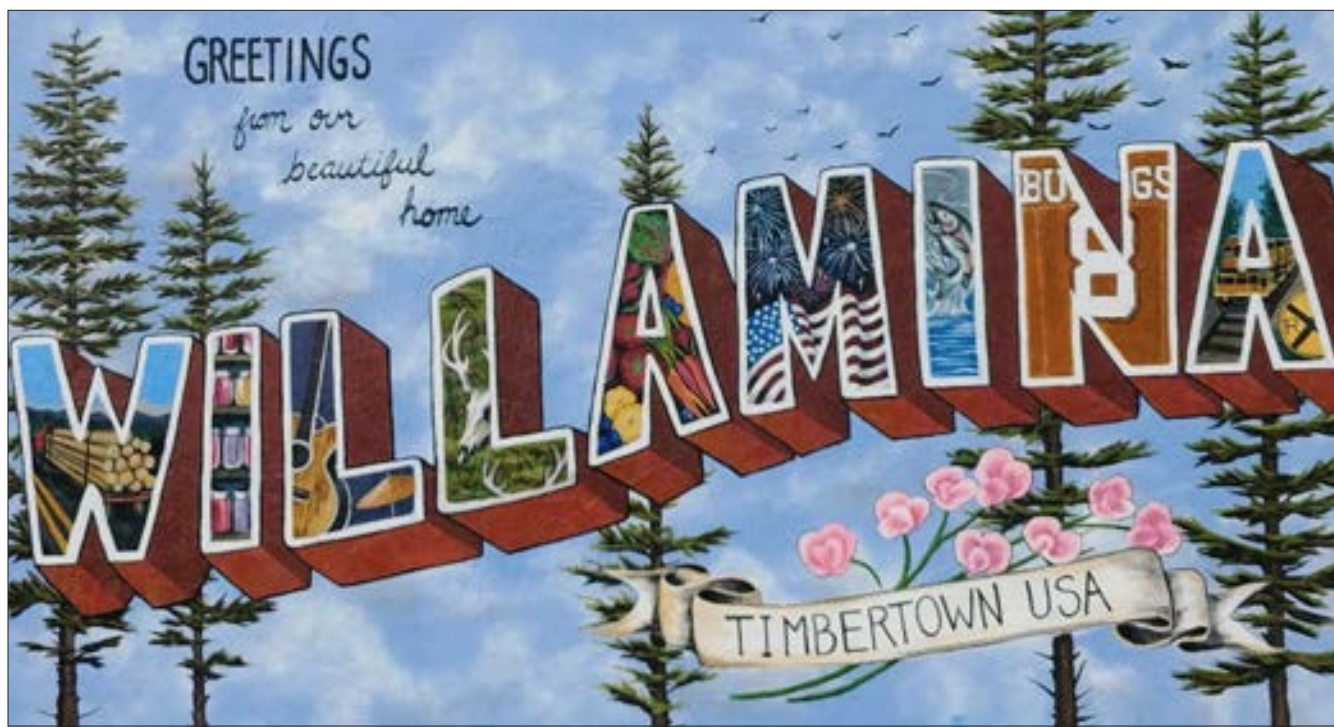
COMMUNITIES





Willamina

'Willamina continues to grow'



MURAL WAS PAINTED BY LOCAL ARTIST NATALIE FLETCHER

ILA SKYBERG

Mayor of Willamina

As summer approaches, I wish to extend greetings from the city of Willamina, Timber Town USA, and invite you stop by on your way to the beautiful Oregon coast or Spirit Mountain Casino.

We extend an invitation to you for Willamina's 75th Fourth of July celebration. Begin the day with a pancake breakfast, then attend a car show, downhill races, a logging show and a parade. Food and craft vendors will also be in town to add to the festivities. As night approaches, the best fireworks in the valley begin. Come to town, bring your family, and make some memories with us.

Willamina continues to grow with the next phase of 24r new homes to be built within the city. Summer will mark the completion of our pump track that is a project partnership with the city

and Hampton Lumber. The Hampton Lumber Mill also works to complete it's new Super Mill on the outskirts of town. As for our schools, the Willamina Middle School addition is near completion, and the Career Technical Education Program continues to soar.

Watch for music venues throughout the summer. The new Swan Hall will offer multi-talented musical groups, as well as Dillions Bar & Grill and The Wildwood. Also, keep your eye on Navarra Gardens for special events such as weddings and parties, both private and corporate.

There's always something good to eat at Coyote Joe's, Dillions Bar & Grill, Odd Fellows Pizza and The Wildwood. Drop by our newest coffee shop and bakery, Skyhorse Coffee, you won't be disappointed.

Stop by and see us — we'd love to meet you!

Incorporated in 1903

Info.

Population: 2,425 people

Elevation: 225 feet

Land area: 0.86 square miles

Population density: 2,609 people per square mile

Hampton Park

Blackwell County Park

Lamson Park

Garden Spot Park

Triangle Park

Playground Park at City Hall

Oaken Hills Memorial Park

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Dallas

Thrives in 2024

KEN L. WOODS, JR.

Mayor City of Dallas

Reflecting on the accomplishments of my second year as mayor in 2024, it fills me with pride for the progress we've achieved in strengthening our community.

The Dallas Farmers Market has resumed thanks to the collaborative efforts of the city of Dallas, the Dallas Downtown Association, the Dallas Area Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center, and the AmeriCorps Resource Assistance for Rural Environments program. Taking place every first and third Saturday of every month until October on the Courthouse Square, you will be able to find locally grown produce, fresh baked goods, and community collaboration.

In February, we celebrated the city's 150th birthday, marking a significant milestone. The festivities will continue throughout the year, with another celebration in July at the Dallas Days event.

Notable renovations have taken place, including the remodeling of Open-Road Global and West Valley Hospital, enhancing the infrastructure and services available to our community.

To eliminate vacant spaces, and showcase our commitment to revitalizing our downtown, we have begun the envisioning process for 791 Main St. (the former Bank of America building), and we will be working with the community to provide feedback on what they would like to see the site transformed into. We will be breaking ground in July 2024.

On May 1, an open house community meeting was held to share and discuss potential redevelopment concepts for the Mill Site in South Dallas. With the area spanning 66 acres, this redevelopment project holds immense potential for transforming and revitalizing a once vibrant part of Dallas.

Local business owners have expanded their investment in Dallas with the opening of a second Dutch Bros location on Ellendale.

I cannot reiterate enough, that our community's support is invaluable as we work together to make Dallas a place we're all proud to call home. Here's to another year of progress, collaboration, and a thriving community.

Info.

Population: 16,979.

Elevation: 325 feet above sea level.

City Hall: 187 SE Court St.,

Visitor Services: Dallas Area Chamber of Commerce/Dallas Area Visitors Center, 119 SW Court St., 503-623-2564.

Dallas City Park — Dallas City Park is the largest park in the city at 35 acres. The "new" entrance is located on Levens Street near Lyle Elementary. The "old" entrance near the Delbert Hunter Arboretum is on Academy Street. The park has facilities for gatherings large and small, including two shelters, two fireplaces, numerous barbecue pits, horseshoe pits, basketball hoops, a disc golf course and paved trails.

Roger Jordan Community Park — Located next to the Dallas Aquatic Center on Southeast LaCreole Drive. It consists of soccer fields, a baseball field, a skate park, two tennis courts and a picnic area.

Birch Park — Intersection of Birch and Stump streets. New playground equipment recently was added, and the park also has two basketball hoops.

Gala Park — Intersection of Uglov Avenue and Hankel Street. It features a basketball court, playground and a grassy area with a gazebo.

Kingsborough Park — 101 SW Wyatt St. It features lots of wide-open spaces as well as two basketball hoops, walking paths and a playground. Restrooms are open during the summer.

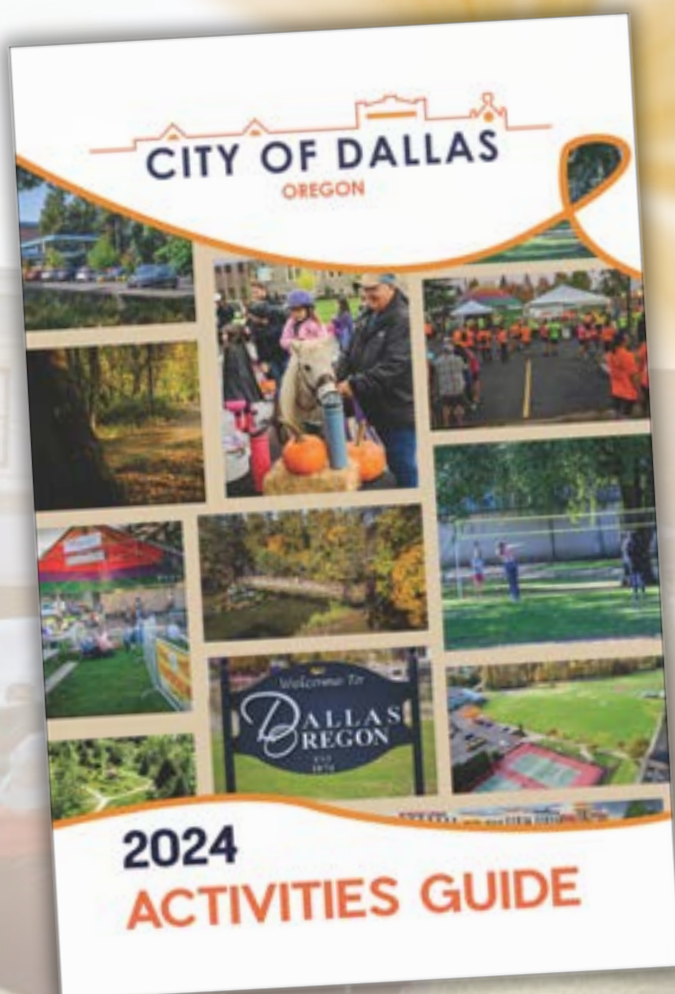
Rotary Park — 300 NE Fern Ave. The city has joined forces with the Dallas Rotary Club to upgrade the park with new playground equipment, walking paths and a basketball court.

Walnut Park — 501 SE Walnut Ave. It is a small wooded area with a shaded creek and a bench.

Central Bark — 920 SE Juniper St. behind the aquatic center. It is the city's newest park and the only off-leash park for dogs. It has an enclosed area with a picnic table, water and mutt-mitt stations.

Rickreall Creek Trail — The Rickreall Creek Trail will eventually run the length of the city east to west following the course of its namesake creek

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Grand Ronde

Grand Ronde offers entertainment, cultural experiences

While traveling Highway 18 on your way to the Oregon Coast, it's hard to miss the Spirit Mountain Casino and be lured by its myriad entertaining opportunities. However, the casino is but one attraction the Grand Ronde tribe would like visitors seek out while in the region.

Grand Ronde has a long and storied history. Tribal ancestors lived throughout the Willamette Valley, southern Oregon and the Oregon coast since time immemorial. They were moved to the Grand Ronde Reservation beginning in the 1850s after ceding most of what is now western Oregon to the federal government in seven ratified treaties. Remnants of the U.S. Army post that controlled access to and from the Grand Ronde Reservation now overlook the Tribe's picturesque Uyxat Powwow Grounds off Highway 22 (Hebo Road) at Fort Yamhill State Park.

Federal recognition was stripped from the Tribe and it was terminated in 1954, but the Grand Ronde Tribe, through the hard work of Tribal members, friends and community allies, saw the Tribe restored to federal recognition on Nov. 22, 1983.

Today, the tribe's reservation and land holdings total more than 12,000 acres and range from Rattlesnake Butte near Junction City to Kilchis Point on Tillamook Bay. However, the main reservation is situated in forestland just north of the Grand Ronde area.

The tribe's story is on display in the Chachalu Tribal Museum & Cultural Center, 8720 Grand Ronde Road, which opened in 2014. The center features an exhibit detailing the Tribe's history and created a place to archive cultural artifacts.

A second phase of construction created

a large, permanent exhibition display space, work rooms for curating public exhibits, artifact processing, long-term storage for cultural archives and work rooms for Tribal research.

The name Chachalu means "the place of burnt timber," in honor of what members of the Tualatin-Kalapuya Tribe named part of the Grand Ronde area that had been destroyed by a wildfire.

The museum's logo features a camas lily, a plant known for regenerating after forest fires — a symbol for the Tribe's restoration after being "burnt" through placement on the reservation and termination.

The Tribe also hosts a number of unforgettable cultural events that are open to the public. Those include the annual powwows, arts and crafts fairs at the casino and more.

In addition, more than 18 miles of



Info.

Population: 2,000 (estimated).

Elevation: 344 feet above sea level.

Government Center:

9615 Grand Ronde Rd

Visitor Services: Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, 9615 Grand Ronde Road, Grand Ronde, 1-800-422-0232. Hiking trail maps are available at the Tribe's Natural Resources Office, 47010 SW Hebo Road. Camping is permitted, but permits are required. Call 1-503-879-2424 for more information.

For more information about the area: Visit www.grandronde.org

Must-do activities

1 — Spirit Mountain Casino: Safety measures are in place, but you can still make a trip to Spirit Mountain for the evening or an overnight stay.

2 — Competition Powwow: Check out some of the best dancers from the Pacific Northwest and across North America in this three-day event hosted by the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

3 — Chachalu Tribal Museum & Cultural Center: Explore the history the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde at the museum's historical exhibit.

public hiking trails open to the public on the Grand Ronde Reservation and the popular Big Buck campground make the area perfect for those looking for an outdoor adventure. To use the campground, members of the public must obtain a pass at (503) 879-2424.

Grand Ronde is also where you can find the aforementioned 108-acre Fort Yamhill State Heritage Area, operated by Oregon State Parks. Fort Yamhill was a military outpost that was in operation from 1856-66 and established to protect and control Native Americans on the Grand Ronde Reservation.

Nearby is achaf-hammi, a traditional Pacific Northwest plankhouse built by the tribe in 2010. It hosts numerous cultural events throughout the year.

Also located in Grand Ronde is the stunning West Valley Veterans Memorial

dedicated to those from the West Valley area who have served their country in the military. The four black granite pillars represent the major branches of the U.S. armed forces and have more than 2,360 names etched into them. The tribe holds an annual ceremony to honor West Valley veterans every Memorial Day.

Whether you're looking for a Las Vegas-style gaming experience, a trip to learn more about the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and Native American history in Oregon, or to check out one of the many colorful cultural events, Grand Ronde offers a compelling mix of history and fun.

And when you're done, you're only 25 miles from the Pacific Ocean or Willamette Valley wine country, depending on which way you head.

Independence

Oregon's story begins here!

Stroll through a vibrant historic downtown and enjoy artisan chocolate, craft beer and wine, an art gallery, a relaxing walk along the majestic Willamette River, and more with the friendly folks in the city of Independence. Nestled on the West bank of the Willamette River, just 12 miles southwest of Salem, our quaint river city was known as the “Hop Capital of the World” from the late 1890s to the 1940s. With family-friendly events and programs happening all year round like summer concerts and heritage festivals, downtown trick-or-treating, and the best 4th of July celebration in Oregon, Independence has a distinct sense of place that is grounded in its history, connected to nature, and filled with community spirit.

With amazing amenities like our beautiful Riverview Park, high-speed fiber network, new museum location, and many more, Independence has its sights set on the future without losing sight of its past.

See the Independence Heritage Museum in downtown

In addition to traditional local history, the Independence Heritage Museum incorporates individuals and areas of our city's history that often go overlooked. Intentional sections include feature stories on our large Latino population and our history with Chinese laborers.

Enjoy the Beauty of the Willamette River

Our riverfront is the centerpiece of our city that houses multi-unit apartments, outdoor movies and concerts in the park, as well as a beautiful hotel. The region, known for its award-winning wineries and historic hopyard and located on the ancestral lands of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community, is ideally suited as a hub to explore wineries, community events, and classic rural communities.

Among Independence's greatest accomplishments is its trust and support of its local businesses. Every year, a Love Local campaign is held to promote local spending in the downtown area. This helps generate financial, cultural, and community support in our city.

Take a Ride on the MI Trolley

A fare-free trolley running every 20 minutes links the excitement of Independence with the amenities of downtown Monmouth. Explore both cities without worrying about where to park or how to get to places. The trolley is also ADA-accessible.

Come and enjoy a classic Oregon small town - Big enough to have horsepower, yet small enough to be nimble, welcoming, and personable.



Info.

Population: 10,272

Elevation: 180 feet above sea level.

City Hall: 555 S. Main St., 503-838-1212,
www.ci.independence.or.us.

Visitor Services: Monmouth-Independence
Chamber of Commerce
355 Pacific Ave. N., Monmouth
503-838-4268.

Library: 175 Monmouth St.,
503-838-1811.

Riverview Park — Riverview Park is located downtown between B and C streets alongside the Willamette River. It is the city's largest park and features the Riverview Park Amphitheater, which hosts a summer movie and concert series. It also has a boat ramp, fountain and a large playground.

John Pfaff Park — John Pfaff Park originally was known as Northgate Park and is located at the intersection of Hoffman and Gun Club roads. It has a playground, basketball court and picnic tables.

Mountain Fir Park — Mountain Fir Park is located off F Street between Seventh and Ninth streets. The land was formerly part of the Mountain Fir Lumber Mill but was donated to the city when the mill downsized in the early 1990s. It has picnic tables and lots of open spaces. The city has partnered with the Luckiamute Watershed Council to restore the South Fork of Ash Creek, home to salmon and trout. Polk County OSU Master Gardeners maintain a demonstration garden here, called Inspiration Garden.

Pioneer Park — Pioneer Park is located at the corner of Seventh and C streets. It has picnic tables, a playground and lots of tall, mature trees.

Dog Park — Located on Grand Street, east of Highway 51, about a quarter mile north of downtown. It is the only off-leash park in Independence, and was built through volunteer efforts.

Bicycle Boater Campground — This basic camping area has five sites, each with a picnic table and bike rack.

To learn more about the city of Independence, visit our website:
www.ci.independence.or.us

Monmouth

Small town charm, world class opportunity!

CECELIA KOONTZ

Mayor of Monmouth

The city of Monmouth has a storied history as the home of the oldest public university in the state. Monmouth University was founded in 1853 by Christian missionaries from Monmouth, Illinois six years before Oregon was granted statehood. Today's Western Oregon University is still the city's largest employer and center of much of the cultural vibrancy of the community.

But, oh, how things have changed! What would the forefathers and foremothers think if they walked away from campus down Main Street? Monmouth's other claim to fame – as Oregon's last town to allow the sale of alcohol – is a distant memory. In a winking nod to the history, Dry Town Tap Station is a former gas station turned pub with fun food trucks and an outdoor entertainment stage. The Sippery is THE gathering spot and Hazel's on Main offers cocktails and local and regional wines to complement its tasty bistro menu. For a personal tour of the wineries located in the Eola/Amity Hills, or VanDuzer Corridor AVAs, all within 15 miles of Monmouth, parties can even rent the Crush Wine Limo!

The food scene includes sushi, a Thai restaurant and several choices for handmade Mexican food, along with long-time favorites. Monmouth remains home to the iconic limited fast-fresh restaurant chain, Burgerville, known for its insistence on locally-sourced food. For treats, Maui Melts offers gourmet caramels along with delicious Hawaiian food!

From banners and city-wide events celebrating diverse peoples, histories and accomplishments, Monmouth is

engaging its residents, visitors, students, and businesses in recognizing its rich culture. Partnering with WOU as it seeks to gain status as a Hispanic Serving Institution will create an even more vibrant future for this once sleepy town. WOU's Gerontology Department is a huge asset and great partner with the city's Senior Community Center – open to residents and visitors alike. From classes and card games (to the best \$10 monthly pancake breakfast you will ever have), the Center is a vibrant part of Monmouth's work on becoming an AARP Age Friendly City, part of the city's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access goal. WOU is also the home of the Smith Fine Arts Series, bringing regional, national, and internationally recognized performers to the stage. One of those acts is Rainbow Dance Theatre, an innovative company that tours the world, but calls Monmouth home!

The music fun continues throughout the summer in the Main Street Park amphitheater. The kickoff is a world-class hometown 4th of July festival, which includes food, vendors, an art show, and a kids' parade and a mini-marathon where runners lead the Rotary Club's annual parade through Monmouth and Independence.

Fall brings college football (WOU offers the only NCCA Division II program in the state), a History and Mystery event, the wine harvest and beautiful colors and weather. Monmouth is a welcoming town with something for everyone - a storied past, a vibrant present and an amazing future!

Population: 11,110.

Elevation: 214 feet above sea level.

Info.

City Hall: 151 Main St. W., 503-838-0722, www.ci.monmouth.or.us.

Visitor Services: Monmouth-Independence Chamber of Commerce,

355 Pacific Ave. N.

503-838-4268.

Library: 168 Ecols St. S., 503-838-1932.

Cherry Lane Park — Cherry Lane Park is at Cherry Lane, Ackerman Street and Whiteman Street. It has a playground with benches.

Gentle Woods Park — Gentle Woods Park is at the intersection of Myrtle Drive, Olive Way and High Street. It is mostly wooded with a large picnic shelter, horseshoe pits, playground equipment and restrooms.

Madrona Park — Madrona Park is located along Madrona Street and Edwards Road. A half-mile paved walking trail was built in 2015, along with a network of graveled trails in the interior. The park has been the recipient of many new trees to create a young arboretum. It has a picnic shelter, basketball court, playground equipment and a large paved gathering area.

Main Street Park — Main Street Park is located in downtown Monmouth. It is one full city block and features a permanent amphitheater, gazebo, playground, picnic tables, pathways and a water fountain.

Monmouth Recreational Park — Monmouth Recreational Park is located off Hogan Road and west of the City Public Works Department headquarters. It has fields for softball and baseball, two tennis courts and restrooms.

Winegar Park — Winegar Park is located at Ecols Street and Suzanna Avenue. It has a basketball court, playground, benches and pathways.

"Pocket Parks" — Monmouth has four mini parks that are .67 acres or smaller. Southgate Park at Southgate Drive and Josephine Street has a basketball court, benches and a playground. La Mesa Park is east of Heffley Street and south of Bentley Street. It has a basketball court, benches and a playground. Whitesell Park is at the western end of Catherine Court. It has a basketball court, benches and a playground. Marr Park is at Jackson Street and Marr Court. It has a playground, horseshoe pits and a small, landscaped garden.

Monmouth

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JULY	4th of July Parade
JULY - AUG	Music in the Park
SEPTEMBER	WOU Welcome Celebration
OCTOBER	History & Mystery
OCTOBER	Halloween Spooktacular
DECEMBER	Making Spirits Bright



SCAN FOR MORE INFO

Falls City

"End of the road, start of your adventure."

TJ BAILY

Mayor of Falls City

Hidden away in the Coast Range forest, Falls City provides many opportunities to those seeking a new adventure. Falls City is famous for its namesake falls on the Little Luckiamute River that provides an opportunity for people to cool off during the hot summer months. People from around the state come to the falls to swim, relax, and even jump off the cliffs into the awaiting chilling, yet refreshing, water below.

Falls City is also the gateway to Valley of the Giants, an old growth forest preserve with multiple hiking paths through towering 450-year-old Douglas fir trees. It is easy to lose track of time admiring this hidden gem, so be sure to bring a hearty supply of food and water. Just a few miles to the west of Falls City is Black Rock Mountain Bike Area. Local mountain bikers have created this world-class network of free-ride trails for beginners to experienced mountain riders using the natural landscape and timber from fallen fir trees. Black Rock Mountain Bike Area provides hand-built berms, gap jumps and other features for those looking for adventure. For the non-mountain bike riders, the logging road loops around the mountain, providing a well-groomed steady uphill hike in the majestic forest. Those who make it to the top will be treated to a breathtaking view of the valley below.

For those looking to extend the July 4th holiday, Falls City residents and owners of The Boondocks - Lori Sickles and Laura Britton - sponsor the

Fourth of July Summer Celebration. Watch our community social media pages for the date, which changes year to year. You will not want to miss the festivities, which have included a local parade, concerts in the local park, free barbecue lunch, and fun fair treats like face painting and cotton candy. There is nothing like the 4th of July party in a small, historic town like Falls City.

August is Pride month in Falls City. Local volunteers work with the city to host an all-inclusive, community weekend event celebrating all members of the LGBTQ+ community, advocates and friends. Falls City Pride is celebrated during the month of August, in part to extend celebrations throughout the summer.

After you have completed your adventures, Falls City provides two establishments for nourishment. The Boondocks is a small town bar and grill with a rustic atmosphere. Their extensive menu includes award winning steaks and nightly specials. The Boondocks is family friendly providing delicious food for all ages. The Bread Board has reopened and is once again serving delicious European style breads baked in a wood-fired oven, pastries, thin crust pizzas, beer and wine. Indoor and outdoor seating is available for friends and families to come and enjoy the amazing menu.

Falls City welcomes all Polk County residents and families to enjoy the many amenities in our amazing town.

Info.

Population: 1,065.

Elevation: 370 feet above sea level.

City Hall: 299 Mill St.,
503-787-3631,
www.fallscityoregon.gov.

Michael Harding Memorial

Park — Michael Harding Memorial Park is on the south side of the Little Luckiamute River falls. It is named for a city clerk who was killed in an accident in 1976.

George Kitchen Memorial

Park — George Kitchen Memorial Park, also known as Upper Park, is located just off Park Street. It has a large gazebo and access to electricity.

Fay Wilson Memorial

Park — Fay Wilson Memorial Park runs alongside the Little Luckiamute River opposite City Hall. It is also known as Riverside Park and Lower Park.

Did you know Falls City puts out a monthly newsletter every month? It is packed with a lot of information regarding the community, events, and all sorts of stuff. Visit <https://www.fallscityoregon.gov/newsletters>.



Western Oregon University

A legacy of higher education excellence lives on in the heart of Polk County

The largest institute of higher education between Portland State University and Oregon State University can be found in Polk County. Western Oregon University in Monmouth had a total enrollment of 3,752 according to the latest figures.

WOU has made great gains since the early 1980s, when it seemed to be in danger of being abolished. The state of Oregon was having rough financial times then, and there were people who thought discontinuing the state's regional colleges would be a necessary step in the financial recovery of the state.

However, the regional colleges (they were not designated as universities then) and the state legislators representing them convinced doubters that the institutions were a necessary investment for Oregon, and the people who prevailed have been found to be right.

Western is the state's oldest public

institution of higher learning. It began as Monmouth University in 1856, soon was acquired by the state, and went through several other names before becoming Western Oregon University.

WOU originally was primarily a teachers' college, and it remains strong in education. As a university, it now has the College of Education and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, as well as a satellite campus for the nursing program of Oregon Health and Science University.

The College of Education consists of the Division of Education and Leadership, the Division of Deaf Studies, and the Division of Health and Exercise Science.

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences offers 30 bachelors' degrees in seven academic divisions: behavioral sciences, business and economics, computer science, creative arts, humanities, natural sciences and mathematics, and social

science.

It offers Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Music, through the College of Education and the College of Liberal Arts, as well as master of science in education and master of arts in teaching degrees.

For those interested in lifelong learning, WOU offers speaker series in a variety of subjects.

Besides academics, Western plays a variety of sports in the Great Northwest Athletic Conference, which is in Division II of the NCAA.

Not to be forgotten are study abroad programs, health and wellness programs, financial aid possibilities, and student clubs.

The 2023 SafeWise report ranked Western at No. 6 in the top 20 safe campuses in Oregon.

THINGS TO DO





WELCOME!

to the Cities of Monmouth & Independence!



Both communities are special, and we welcome all visitors and residents to enjoy the place we love. We are very fortunate to have the Willamette River at one end and Western Oregon University at the other. While in the area, please take advantage of all the outdoor activities, WOU performances, strolling through the shops, taking a MI Trolley ride, and eating at one of the many restaurants or food trucks in the area.

Independence is well known for its 4th of July festivities at Riverview Park with Monmouth celebrating as well at their Main St. Park. Also on the 4th, both towns come together with the Rotary organized parade starting at WOU and making its way down to the end of Main Street in Independence. Summer brings more entertainment with Make Music Day Polk County, the MBA organized Music in the Park on Wednesdays, while the city of Independence organizes Movies in the Park on Thursdays, and the very popular River's Edge Music series at the park on Fridays. New this year will be the Chamber of Commerce Restaurant Tour in August and Turkey Trot 5k on Thanksgiving

Day. The MI Visitor's Center will be finishing the Minet Utility Box Project, the first public art project in both towns, by mid-summer and will be a fun outing for individuals and families to go view.

Our communities take pride in the youth in the area and have celebrated great accomplishments in sports, computer programming, art, and growing CTE programs at Central High School. We are caring communities where we support each other, and families can grow. We are committed to the preservation of parks, riverfront, farmland, and we support our small businesses.

Please enjoy your stay whether it is short term, or you plan on making this area your permanent home.

Sincerely,

NICKI MARAZZANI

President/CEO

Monmouth-Independence Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Center



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We opened Grandma's Attic in 1994 with a few bolts of fabric and a dream to create a Quilt Shop where women would feel comfortable shopping, attending classes, and learning about the history of needle arts and women in America. By 1997, we had added a website, making us one of the first three quilt shops on the world wide web. Twenty-eight years later, Grandma's Attic has grown tremendously. We are a destination store with customers arriving at the brick-and-mortar store from a radius of at least 60 miles regularly, and throughout the United States as people pass through town.

Owner Rachel Greco produces a Scrapbasket Newsletter and Grandma Gazette each month, in addition to writing for the Country Register newspaper. She has produced many different books and patterns filled with quilt blocks and quilt patterns and continues to e-mail "gab sheets" to over 18,000 world-wide customers each week.

We survived the pandemic by giving away elastic to anyone who was making face masks and by adding curbside service to our mail order and in-store shopping. Today, twenty-eight years after opening, Grandma's Attic is a traditional quilt shop with a reputation for high quality fabrics, informative history classes, and tons of fun and laughter.

Chamber reunites with Visitors Center to promote Dallas



Reunited and it feels so good! In 2023, with the support of the city of Dallas, the Dallas area Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center reunited to promote and celebrate the amenities of our local community! Your Chamber of Commerce is here to spark growth in our businesses and community.

As a champion for our community we connect our members to people, entities and issues that are important to business success. Members have access to communications, education and networking opportunities to further promote their business and increase their visibility.

Your Visitors Center is excited to welcome Skyanne Pierson to our team! Sky joined us in 2024 and has hit the ground running. You will see her at the Farmer's Market on the first and third Saturdays of each month May through October. We are working closely with partners like Travel Salem, Travel Oregon and similar organizations, to share the many activities and opportunities offered in the Dallas



TARA TOWNEY

Executive Director & Program Manager

area.

We are super excited to also announce we will be moving to a new location this year that will better help us serve the community and visitors, and we are excited that the Dallas Downtown Association will be joining us in this space with their



SKY PIERSON

Office Support Specialist

new staff member. Please follow us on Facebook for more updates on when we will open, and how we can help promote your business as a member.

Check out and add to our community calendar <https://forms.gle/5nBc-QVEz93Qqe4e6>.

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Take a guided walk

Through history at reopened Brunk House

By **DAVID HAYES**
Itemizer-Observer

As commuters busily go about their day driving along Highway 22, little do they know the bit of history that awaits them just east of Oak Knoll Golf Course.

The centerpiece of the Brunk Farmstead, once a sprawling 1,100 acres now whittled down to 1.12 acres, sits one of Polk County's oldest remaining two-story wooden homes. The Brunk House, now owned by the Polk County Historical Society, was once home to three generations of the Brunk family.

The home reopened May 12 with two of the tour guides who share a piece of the homestead's legacy.

Cathey Harrison, after moving to Dallas in February, couldn't miss the chance to volunteer at the house once owned by the Brunks, her ancestral cousins.

"I'd always wanted to see the Brunk House when I found out it was standing

back when I was a child," she said. "I just find this very fascinating."

Harrison hadn't memorized all the home's history and had to rely on a printed script, detailing everything from the story of Harrison and Emily Waller Brunk having the home built in 1861 to Clara Brunk doubling the size of the kitchen in 1948, which included installing plumbing and electricity.

Having previewed the renovated home before its opening with her daughter and grandchildren, Harrison said she is most amazed by historical significance of the undertaking that brought the Brunks out west from Missouri.

"To me it's just mind-boggling the journey for not just the Brunks, but all of those who came from back east to partake quote 'a better life' in the Willamette Valley," Harrison said after her tour of the house was over. "Because politically too, back then, it was part of the 'Westward Ho,' thinking what a

hardship that must have been. And the work. It was obviously a lot of work to keep this up. They built their reputation here, maintained their faith. To me it was just fascinating. The integrity they had, hard work, and yet they did it. And it's still standing today."

The Brunks had originally journeyed west in 1849 to take up a Donation Land Claim in an area that would eventually become the Basket Slough National Wildlife Refuge. Proving too marshy for farming, Harrison sold the land and purchased the land claim of A.C.R. Shaw. Their growing family lived in a log cabin until the main home was finished Nov. 7, 1961. Daughter Leora Frances Brunk was the only one of 12 children actually born in the home.

The Brunks raised wheat and other grains, flowers, apples, cherries and peaches. The orchard of filbert trees that still stand behind the Brunk House is owned today by the Walker family.

While the upstairs is still off limits to tourists, tour guides like Harrison will lead visitors through the small spaces by today's standards, which contain a sewing room, guest and master bedrooms and a nursery, before ending in the since expanded kitchen. Throughout, the home is stocked with some original items from the Brunks, like their sizable kitchen tables, and recreations, like the rope frame bed shipped out from Missouri.

Self-guided tours of the Brunk house have been on hold for about 3 ½ years. Manager Alan Bittel explained the biggest reason Brunk House closed was the front porch fell off.

"A beam inside the house wasn't flashed properly and it rotted. We were looking to do work to shore it up and it came down," Bittel said. "Then with covid, everything closed, even after porch was rebuilt." They took advantage of the closure to continue work on restoring the inside, changing walls out and replacing peeling wallpaper.

He and his wife Sandi enjoy main-

taining old things, which originate with their own home in Perrydale built in the 1890s.

"That's what drew us to Brunk. Preserving it. Fixing it up. It's always going to need maintenance. We told the board one time, there's like 13 buildings out here it's going to be an ongoing restoration effort long after I'm gone," Bittel said.

One of the other volunteer guides is Grant Olds. He, too, moved to Dallas about three years ago. Emily Brunk was his great, great aunt. He points out her maiden name was Waller and his grandfather was George Townsend Waller.

"I found that out, doing genealogy research about five years ago. When I found out she was my aunt it was kind of exciting," Olds said. "But then when we moved to the area, and discovered we actually just lived a few miles away from the Brunk House, I took advantage of it and wanted to volunteer."

While leading visitors through the outdoor attractions on the farmstead,

Olds gets to point out the Brunk Farm was named a Century Farm in 1958. In addition, in 1978, it was designated as a National Historic Site and recognized as a Polk County landmark.

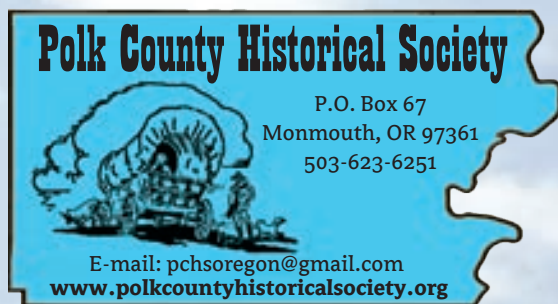
The granary and outhouse are original structures of the farm. The orchard house was relocated nearer the main house and is now used as the visitor center and souvenir shop. The garage was originally a carriage house. And the machine shed, built only to look old Bittel said, houses the blacksmith shop, which is home to monthly classes to create your own railroad spike knife.

"It's kind of neat to walk on the same wood floor, the same house my aunt was in 1881," Olds said. "It's kinda cool."

Located at 5705 Highway 22 W. Brunk House farmstead tours are Fridays and Saturdays, on the hour from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more info:

Visit www.polkcountyhistoricalsociety.org/brunk-house.



Visit the Polk County Museum
560 Pacific Highway, Rickreall

Hours: Tue-Sat 12pm-4pm
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Step Into Polk County's Past

Step into the shoes of Polk County pioneers. Learn about how logging and farming shaped Polk County, and the Native Americans who came before the pioneers.

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Call to schedule a tour or reserve the sites for your event

Walking among giants

Prepare before taking the hike of your life

Some of the largest Douglas firs and Western Hemlocks in the Oregon Coast Range can be found in the Bureau of Land Management's Valley of the Giants. Many of these trees are 20 feet in circumference, 200 feet tall, and 400 to 450 years old. Though a windstorm blew it down in 1981, the tree called "Big Guy," believed to be the second-largest Douglas fir in Oregon, reached a circumference of 35 feet and was approximately 600 years old.

In the 1970s, public concern grew over the increasing rarity of exceptionally large trees. In 1976, the BLM protected the 51-acres known as the Valley of the Giants by designating it an Outstanding Natural Area and an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. To this day, it is still used heavily by researchers and educators. In 2016, the BLM expanded the ACEC to over 1,600 acres in acknowledgment of the entire valley's ecological importance.

The Valley of the Giants contains all the features of an old-growth forest—large standing and fallen trees, logs and stumps, understory plants, fungi, and mosses. This spectacular topography can be seen right alongside the trail.

The forest preserve is located approximately 30 miles west of Falls City by way of logging roads not suitable for passenger cars.

Know before you go:

Visitors are encouraged to call the BLM's Northwest Oregon District Office for directions and road information.

From the trailhead to the Siletz River, the Valley of the Giants Trail is fairly steep and can be slippery when wet.

The bridge across the north fork of the river, and the several steps leading up to it, can also be treacherous when wet or icy. The trail is approximately 1.3 miles long, and many of the huge trees surrounding it are on their last roots. Hikers should watch out for falling limbs and trees and avoid the area during high winds. Visitors are warned to hike these trails at their own risk.

Private lands surround many Valley of the Giants access points and can only be crossed with permission from the landowner. Roads with closed gates are closed to the public. Please do not trespass on private land.

The Valley of the Giants is only 14 miles from Falls City as the crow flies. However, rough narrow, and winding roads make it a slow, 30-mile trip. Visitors should allow at least 90 minutes of travel in each direction. Visitors are encouraged to contact the Northwest Oregon District before heading out to the site.

They also ask you report any vandalism, trash dumping, or other crimes or accidents to the BLM's Northwest Oregon District Office or the BLM's law enforcement reporting number (800) 637-9152. This number is answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Point of interest:

The Valley of the Giants is often used for research and education on old-growth forests. It is therefore important to stay on the trail to avoid impacting the soil, small animals, and plants. The picnic table area is the only point at which visitors are permitted to leave the designated trails.







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Left to Right: Garrett, Mark (Owner), Brennen & Poncho

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Going in style

with Crush Wine Tours



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

A choice of three luxurious rides await those who sign up with Crush Wine Tours. Owner John Bracken said bringing wine and wine lovers together for memorable experiences is a passion of his. The 25-passenger bus-limo (right) is new to the fleet.

By LANCE MASTERSON
For the Itemizer-Observer

With more than 30 vineyards in Polk County and a mind blowing 800 beyond throughout the Willamette Valley, an oenophile would need someone to guide them to local hot spots.

That's where John Bracken comes in.

Bracken no longer owns Crush Wine Bar & Tasting Room, which has only allowed him to amp up his efforts to bring wine and wine lovers together for more moving experiences.

Bracken sold Crush Wine Bar & Tasting Room last year thus freeing him to focus on Wine Crush Tours.

"Whatever it is that you got to do, that you want to do on your own, make

sure that you love it, that you're passionate about it. Because you're going to go through some tough times that will test you to your core," he said. "And if you don't love what you're doing, you won't get through the tough times."

Bracken knows about tough times, especially as it relates to business, given the restaurant was purchased a year before COVID.

In that first year, "we turned (the restaurant) around and then we had COVID immediately after. So what I realized is that I didn't love the restaurant as much as I loved the tours," he said.

Bracken intends to grow the tours now that he has more time to do so. He

added a limocoach to a fleet that already included a 14-passenger limo-bus and 8-passenger limousine.

"The limo-bus is something we've had since 2019. We started the business with that. Later that same year we bought a stretch limo for smaller groups," Bracken said. "And then last year we added the big limocoach."

The limocoach is shorter than a Greyhound bus, but large enough to carry 25 passengers and their luggage.

The limocoach "has grown our capacity... yet is still small enough to get in and out of tight winery parking lots and driveways," Bracken said. "It's also large enough to transport large groups of

people, and their luggage, to and from the Portland airport.”

First-time guests quickly learn these aren't your usual clunky transport vehicles. Bracken describes the tours as “high on style.”

According to the company's website, amenities in the rides include:

Stretch limousine: powerful stereo system, three access doors to prevent scooting across seats, and complimentary water bottles.

Limo-bus: Classy, tall ceilings, handrails, big screen TVs, powerful stereo system, and complimentary water bottles and ice.

Limocoach: Easy step up into vehicle, handrails, three flat screen TVs, powerful stereo system, underneath storage for luggage and coolers, and complimentary water bottles and ice.

Another plus is that parties don't need to appoint a designated driver. So everyone can join in the fun.

There are differences in the kinds of tours offered.

“One tour is the private kind. We come to pick you up wherever you want to get picked up, at home or at a restaurant. The place you want to wind up at the end of the tour, where you can eat, drink some water, and sober up,” Bracken said.

The other option, the joinable-tour, offers the possibility of co-mingling. It's perfect for people who enjoy meeting new people.

“The join-able tour program is public. Anyone can sign up for seats. Three seats. Four seats. However many seats they need, for their tour group,” Bracken said, noting vacant seats are made available to other parties.

According to Bracken, the bus leaves whether there are two people on board for the join-able tour, or if it's at capacity with 14 people.

Each join-able tour generally stops at three wineries. Though with 24 wineries to choose from, rarely does a guest hit the same winery twice if they go on multiple tours.

Bracken decided to focus more on tours than a brick-and-mortar restaurant because it aligns with his idea of experiencing more of the region's offerings.

“Finding out that the tours were in line with my passion is one of the main drivers for me. I want to do well and be successful. I also want to experience as much as I can that this world has to offer,” Bracken stated in an earlier interview.

Then there's the joy that comes with helping others pursue their own desires.

“It dawned on me one day that the tours are in line with that; they are an experience and something that will create memories,” he added in that same interview. “For some people, it may be a once-in-a-lifetime event; for others, it may be something they start doing every birthday because they love it so much.”

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Nature-lover's haven

Luckiamute State Natural Area holds easy nature trails

Luckiamute State Natural Area, nestled on the border of Polk and Benton Counties, is a nature-lover's haven. Enjoy a jog down the largest remaining remnant of bottomland cotton-maple-ash gallery forest. Scout for the several species of birds native to the area. Find a spot to sit and wonder at the majesty of the Willamette River. The Luckiamute State Natural Area's 315 square miles of riparian wilderness has something for every aficionado of the outdoors.

The autumn is especially beautiful, with the leaves changing into bright colors. However, any time of year you visit this quiet, tucked-away slice of nature is a delight. It can get muddy, so make sure to wear proper footwear.

As you meander through the winding trails, you'll be welcomed along your walk or run by native shrubs, flowers and trees. Most have been planted by

volunteers, working to repair the habitat to its natural state. Others, such as purple camas, have growth that predates the settlers who came after.

Birdwatchers come prepared - you'll spot hummingbirds, red-breasted sapsuckers, white-crown sparrows and redtail hawks, depending on the time of year. The eagle eye can also find the less common feathered friends - including nesting wood duck, ruffed grouse, Western screech-owl, five woodpecker species, as well as red-eyed vireos and band-tailed pigeon populations.

Several grassland species of birds can also be seen nesting within the Luckiamute natural area, such as the Oregon vesper sparrow and streaked horn larks, both of which are declining in number.

Another sensitive species here is the Western Pond Turtle, in decline due to habitat loss.

For those who enjoy outdoor activities, be sure to try geocaching — a kind of treasure hunt using a set of clues, a map and/or GPS coordinates. When you find the cache, of which there are a few planted in the Luckiamute State Natural Area, log your name in the cache book. If you take some of the loot, be sure to leave something too, for the next geocacher to find.

The loop from the northern trailhead is about two miles, but additional trails connect with it, taking hikers and joggers to the confluence of three rivers, where the Santiam and the Luckiamute meet the Willamette. Other trails have canoe access or give hikers a chance to explore the forest deeper.

Bring a jacket, a camera, pack a lunch and you'll be prepared for happy exploring.



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Uncovering the Legends and Ghosts of Monmouth and Independence.

By **DEREK BRATTON**
Itemizer-Observer

The concept of ghosts may not be new, but the way they are portrayed in movies and popular culture often revolves around horror and fear. However, in Monmouth and Independence, the intertwined cities told a different tale. The Ghost Walk of Independence and the History and Mystery of Monmouth has taken an approach like no other.

Independence Mayer John McArdle writes in the book *Haunted Independence*: “Human history is about stories and tales of adventure, people and events told person to person over generations. In Independence, our history is wrapped up in the stories told - neighbor to friend, resident to visitor, parent to child, handed down from one generation to another.”

As the legends of Monmouth and the ghosts of Independence intertwined these two towns, it's no surprise that they play a significant role in bringing people together. The concept of the spiritual world is not meant to be frightening but rather a way to honor and remember those who have come before us and those who may still be around.

The Independence Ghost Walk started

in 2002, according to Marilyn Morton, author of “Haunted Independence Oregon.”

“The first night was towards the end of September in 2002. I would have considered it a success if there had been 30 or 40 people. There were 310 guests with three stops. The stops were the Masonic Lodge, The hardware store underneath it and Maxine's which is right up on top of Archers,” said Morton. “I was amazed at how many people came; it has just grown since then. This year we printed 375 maps, and we were trying to hand them out one to every five people or so. So, that's about 2,000 people.”

Unlike traditional ghost walks that focus on scaring and shocking their audience, the Monmouth History and Mystery event was a different take on the traditional ghost walk.

Monmouth, with its quaint streets and friendly residents, may seem like any other small town in America. But beneath its charming façade lies a dark history that few know about.

Historical nonfiction writer Amy Lemco assembled the Monmouth History and Mystery tour and aims to shed light on the town's hidden past. Lemco's exten-

sive research and compelling storytelling brought visitors on a journey through Monmouth's rich history.

One of the most intriguing stories told on the tour is that of a spirit who is said to reside at Western Oregon University. However, instead of focusing solely on paranormal activity, Lemco's tour delves into other aspects of Monmouth's past that are equally fascinating.

The tour uncovers lesser-known facts and events, from the MI railroad - which once ran 2.5 miles from Monmouth to Independence - to soldiers who lied about their age to enlist in the military during World War II. But it doesn't shy away from darker tales either, such as stories of murder read by Storyteller Jon Ho, who shares a chilling legend of a Chinese detective who arrived in Monmouth after a series of gruesome murders in 1887. This haunting story adds an eerie touch to the overall experience, making it an unforgettable adventure going down the rabbit hole of time.

Lemco said she hopes this tradition keeps going and may draw interest in people to research their own family history.



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Wet and wild

Dallas Aquatic Center offers good times on the water



With the pandemic far in the rearview mirror, the Dallas Aquatic Center is fully open to the public where swimmers can enjoy a variety of indoor water activities.

Opened in November of 2000, the Aquatic Center features five pools - a six lane lap pool, a warm therapy pool, a hot and relaxing spa, a multi-use pool, and a wading pool for the children 5 and under to swim in. The Dallas Aquatic Center is also a part of the Roger Jordan park which includes multiple soccer fields, skate park, baseball field, and two tennis courts.

"During rec swim, the slide is open, and the river is on, the rope swing is open ideally once an hour. Staffing impacts the extras, but we try to keep everything open during the recreational swim. We try to offer that," said Gretchen Noll, Dallas Aquatic Center manager.

The DAC's lap pool has a 14-foot-high and 105-foot-long water slide that feeds into one end of the pool, a diving board at the deep end, and roped-off lanes for the lap swimmers. The Aquatic Center

also has a sizable spa that one must be at least 16 years old to enjoy, so if adults want to take a break from the chaos of the kids, they have a relaxing place to get away.

The Aquatic Center also has a therapy pool and kids wading pool.

For birthday parties and other family functions, Noll said a party room is available for rent, which includes a couple of packages.

- The Splash Basic package opens the multi-purpose room during any recreation swim to host your party at just \$65 per hour (admission not included). With this package the center allows a birthday treat, all other food will have a \$20 fee charged for outside food.

- In the Super Splash package, you supply the guests and the cake while aquatic center staff does the rest. The cost of \$27 per child (with a minimum of 8) includes multi-purpose room for one hour, set up, covered tables, plates, napkins, utensils, party bag for each guest, ice cream cup, drink, you get to

choose pizza, soft pretzels, corn dog, or hot dogs with chips for each guest; and room clean up. This package includes admission for paid child and two adults.

For the really big event planner, you can rent the entire facility for \$350 per hour for the first 40 swimmers, where you and your friends can enjoy the entire facility all to yourselves.

Pricing for additional time and swimmer available upon request.

For adults, there's Moonlight Swimming at the Dallas Aquatic Center. The lights are turned down low so you can enjoy a relaxing evening in the pool. The cost is \$4 for non-members while members are free.

More info:

Pool hours and swimming times vary from the different seasons and are available at the DAC's website www.dallasor.gov/aquaticcenter or call (503) 623-9715. The Dallas Aquatic Center is located at 1005 SE LaCreole Dr.



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There's more to Divine Distillers than smooth spirits

By **LANCE MASTERSON**
For the Itemizer-Observer

Fun and laughter is being served at Divine Distillers in Independence.

The north Independence drinking and eating establishment opened in December, and has offered comedy and trivia regularly since.

Comics from throughout the world are finding their way to the Divine Distillers stage.

"We've had comics here from Scotland. We've had Australians. We've had Kiwis," said Jason Greenwood, distillery owner. "We've had really, really big names here. We've had winners from the International Seattle Comedy Competition."

Comics are booked through Stage Flight Comedy out of Salem. Generally these comics are performing elsewhere nearby

and have an open night.

"So they come here," Greenwood said. "We were looking for something to do on Thursdays. We wanted to offer something that entertained people."

Greenwood turned to his friend Leroy Firwood, a Salem-based comic, emcee and entertainer, to bring in the talent.

Each comedy night features one headliner along with up and coming talent.

Shows are 6:30-8:30 p.m., the second and fourth Thursdays of every month.

As for first, third and fifth Thursdays, they're reserved for trivia. It's a double-whammy of fun that is enjoyed by customers.

"People love comedy nights. People love trivia nights. People love us doing things," Greenwood said.

Aaron Padilla is the trivia master. He's well known within the local circuit.

"I don't know how many rounds, but each game is like six or seven rounds of trivia. At the end of the night almost every team gets prizes. But we have one good prize, usually a gift certificate to our restaurant, for the winning team," Greenwood said.

Neither comics nor trivia have brought in "tons of people" so far. He added that numbers are trending upward and will likely continue to grow with warmer months ahead.

"Opening a restaurant in December is basically a death knell. The slowest months are January, February and March. There's just not a whole lot of people that have wanted to come out," Greenwood said. "But we've been lucky enough. We have amazing food. Comics have stayed with us. The trivia people have stayed with us. We have a good following with alcohol,

and I'm expecting us to start getting full to capacity on a regular basis."

The customers that do come appear to be coming from outside of Monmouth-Independence.

"I would say 80 to 90 percent of our crowd comes from Salem or further to see us," Greenwood said.

New to the calendar, patrons can play board and card games on Mondays, also known as Hamburger Night.

"We've bought a whole bunch of board games. We've bought Stratego, a couple of Scrabble boards. We've got a Dungeons and Dragons person that's going to come in and run adventures," Greenwood said. "We're trying to get anyone who plays any kind of board games to come in and bring their own games, or have people just show up and hang out with each other."

Children games, such as Sorry! and Battleship, are also available.

Music and poetry nights are two possibilities also under consideration.

The goal is to encourage people to "come here, stay here. Drink. Eat. Hang out,"

Greenwood said. "People think it's Divine Distillers. But we're actually a restaurant. We're family-friendly. We're dog-friendly. We have one of the most beautiful spaces in the whole area and it's a shame to have this awesome space not being used."

Not everyone comes to Divine Distillers for the fun and games. Many come for its award-winning spirits.

"We distill 70 different products. So we distill a lot," he said. "We distill 26 different brandies, seven different rums, four different agaves, and four different whiskies."

"Everything" also includes a variety of sodas, wines and wine blends, beer and ciders. Each product, from start to finish, is distilled on site.

"We take apples from local farms. We crush the apples. We press the apples. We juice the apples. We ferment the apple juice. We distill the apple juice. We age the apple juice, and we bottle the apple juice. Then we sell it," Greenwood said in offering an example.

The distillery's reputation is growing.

"We have 38 medals from international competitions. We were named Smoothest Spirit at the World Tequila Mezcal Challenge. We've won gold medals, won double gold at San Francisco," Greenwood said. "We're not half bad. I know we make a good product. But if you ask me what the secret is I have no idea."

What Greenwood does know is what drives him.

"I have a passion for the product. I have a passion for making it. But I don't know what the secret is," he said. "We make smoother liquor than almost anybody else out there."

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DISCOVER







Empty lot transformed into lots of potential at Gather Food Park

By **DAVID HAYES**
Itemizer-Observer

Since Dallas City Council member David Shein moved to Dallas in 2002, he recalls that the corner of Main and Washington street has been vacant, an unused parking lot. No longer.

Thanks to the vision of Chris Walls and Jaiden Novasio, the empty lot has been transformed into Gather Food Park. Hundreds of locals attended the grand opening July 1 and witness the ribbon cutting, officially welcoming the outdoor food court to the neighborhood.

Walls and Novasio, owners of Synergize Auto for the past six years, came upon the idea for the food park during the pandemic.

“As 2020-21 was going on, we were driving around. It was a weird time for business and the car industry. And her and I were ready to do something totally different,” Walls recalled. “We were wanting to do something fun and energetic for the city.”

They almost purchased a lot down street from the current location, but the deal didn’t work out. Then they saw the vacant lot at Main and Washington streets and thought, “Hey, let’s get something started here instead,” Walls said.

Initially, they considered starting their own food truck. That plan instead expanded to a lot for food pods so they can get even more people out to join them.

The first two permanent pods to sign up for Gather Food Park are Bobablastic, which specializes in varieties of drinks, rice bowls, hot dogs and desserts, and Joyful Foods, whose menu features all vegan cuisine. That was something people in town told Chris and Jaiden they wanted - more health food options. They’re still searching for two to three more pod owners to join them.

“I really want a barbecue shack and a seafood shack I’d like to have next,” Walls said.

Walls and Novasio want to get 3-5 pods at all times and ones that also do not compete with other businesses in town.

"So, they all have to be different," Walls added.

They first put the word out for vendors last summer, hoping to be in place within six months. Little did they know an unwritten rule of business.

"We learned in businesses that everything takes twice as long as we think it's going to," Walls admitted, smiling. "Take your goals and times them by two."

The grand opening featured attractions they hope to feature throughout the rest of the summer – pop up vendors. This time it was a cupcake confectioner and a kettle corn popper. There was also a handcrafted jeweler, face painter and balloon artist on hand.

"We plan to have continual vendors throughout the summer. Winter will be a little more challenging," Walls said. "We want to get eventually where local bakeries bring bread on the weekend and maybe random

people come in during the week, kind of like a flea market."

Their next set of expansion plans involves moving indoors since they acquired the former Dallas Dry Cleaners building.

"Our next goal is to have that be a full indoor dining ability for people to come get food outside and go to eat inside, like they have at The Yard in Salem," Walls explained.

Then they'll add music and comedy shows "to make it a whole community thing."

His goal is to get it operational before winter. (So, add six months, Walls acknowledged with a wink.)

With nearly standing room only as all the picnic tables were filled with diners and the appreciative listening to live music, Novasio couldn't have imagined a better debut.

"It is so exciting. My heart is just filled with gratitude for the community," she said. "And for all of the people who helped us make this come together, that's my new favorite saying."

Even with much left to do with the property, Novasio was pleased so many were willing to come out in the hot sun to check out the new Gather Food Park.

"This is awesome. I am so happy with the turnout. My trucks both have long lines. We love Dallas, we love this community and we plan on being here a long time," she said.

Shein added that while any kind of retail operation is better than a vacant lot, Gather Food Park is just what Dallas needed.

"And it's exactly the kind of business you want in your downtown core," he said. "Because it's retail, it generates foot traffic. It has all the characteristics you want in the central business district. I think it's an absolute positive." Hours of operation have not been finalized yet.

For updates and more information

Go to <https://gatherfoodpark.com> or their Facebook page www.facebook.com/GatherFoodPark.



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The places to play

Monmouth Parks

Richard Bunse, a Monmouth artist whose disability has put him in a wheelchair, sits in the shade at Marr Park at the west end of Jackson Street, a block from his house.

"This is my favorite park," he said. "It's so quiet."

He points at the accessible ramps and the swing set, which has one molded plastic seat with a safety harness for special needs children.

Bunse is not the only one to enjoy Monmouth's public parks, some of which are known only to the neighbors who live nearby. While the Main Street's splash pad and the dog park and the skate park on Monmouth Avenue get the most visits, according to Russ Cooper, Monmouth's Public Works Director, the paths, monkey bars and climbing structures in its ten neighborhood parks await visitors of all ages and abilities.

In addition to picnicking, playing and just relaxing, four of Monmouth's park facilities — The gazebos and shelters at Main Street Park, Madrona and Gentle Woods parks and the Main Street amphitheater — are also available to rent for weddings, family reunions, plays, concerts and other gatherings. While the rental doesn't allow exclusive access to the entire park, rentals allow folks to celebrate or perform in a facility maintained by Monmouth crews.

The continuing development of Monmouth's park space is no accident. Cooper said Monmouth's parks are guided by a citizen Parks and Recreation Committee and a plan developed with input from Monmouth

citizens. The Monmouth Parks Master Plan's 176 pages lay out future park properties to accommodate the city's growing population. Plans call for more than \$10 million to improve, purchase and maintain Monmouth parks through 2030, depending on resources. Half that amount is designated for new park purchases.

Who pays for the parks? In the past, developers were required to set aside a percentage of land on which the city created and maintained a park. Many of the city's neighborhood parks were created under this process. Today, the process is still supported by developers through System Development Fees, but the city's long-range plan now drives park creation, expansion and maintenance.

At Marr Park, Cooper spreads out the plan that includes fold out maps. One of these maps the distance Monmouth residents might have to walk to their nearest park. Based on data in that map, southwest and northeast Monmouth may be next in line for new parks, although no specific land has been purchased, Cooper said.

Long-range planning also allows the city to work with partners on park projects ranging from interpretive plaques planned for the wetland boardwalk north in the new Monmouth Recreational Park, to the potential pickleball courts nearby in the old skate park. With a clear plan, partners can join in support for those projects. Its most recent Monmouth Recreational Park project, for example, attracted local, state and federal funds to

support the improvements. In addition to the above-mentioned additions, improvements to that park within the next 18 months will include a gazebo, improved parking, pathways to the dog park, the ballfield, and to the adjacent neighborhood, new restrooms, and additional trees.

The plan has been based on wide citizen input collected since 2019. In the latest survey for the parks plan, 85 percent of the 269 respondents said they visit a Monmouth park at least once a month. Rising rentals of the park facilities reflect their popularity. Already in 2023, the number of rentals (158 as of August) promised to exceed last year's 160 rentals.

A few hours before Bunse wheeled over to Marr Park, Cooper pointed to the park's swing set with the accessible seat as a reminder that residents continue to help improving their city parks. The special seat was installed thanks to a donation from a resident, Cooper said. Recently, residents raised thousands of dollars for the new skate park, according to reports. Residents can also help by organizing park activities in 2024. Small grants are available for residents.

Call for information about rentals and grants at 503-838-0722, or visit the City Departments/Parks and Recreation tab on Monmouth's city website, www.ci.monmouth.or.us.



Wallace Marine Park

chock full of activities for outdoor enthusiasts

On the outskirts of downtown Salem, just over the Willamette River lies Wallace Marine Park, a secluded 114 acres that is home to a beautiful open space for myriad outdoor activities.

At the heart of the park, accessed at 200 Glen Creek Road, is the Wallace Marine Softball Complex, which hosts softball and kickball leagues, in addition to local, state, regional and national tournaments in the star complex on 5 natural grass softball fields.

Outside of the softball complex, five soccer fields of various sizes fill the middle of the park to accommodate different levels of play, and has a playground with picnic tables, and portable toilets.

The south end of the park features

restrooms, a boat ramp and floating dock enjoyed by motorboats, kayakers, fishing enthusiasts and the like. The website swimguide.org is happy to report the gravel beach at Wallace Marine Park is extremely popular with the locals and is quite child friendly with a slow-moving current and shallows for wading. This being said, it can be a VERY crowded place on the hot days of summer!

Walkers, runners, and bicyclists enjoy the developed and undeveloped trails circling the park and up the Union Street Railroad Bridge which crosses the Willamette River and leads the public into Riverfront Park.

According to OregonRuns.com, the majority of the trails at Wallace Marine

Park are soft surface trails. A fraction of the trail runs along the Willamette River through a forested area with ivy and blackberries. The trail then loops wide around the parking areas and the softball complex. The trail continues past two spacious green areas. The running here is relatively flat with a few tiny ups and downs.

Overall, OregonRuns.com's review finds Wallace Marine Park a great place to run especially when factoring in combining this run with Riverfront Park. Just run across the Union Street Bridge to get to Riverfront Park and this would add another two miles to your run.



Moonfall - the grandest little stage

Marlene Cox's living room-sized theater packs in the audiences

By **DAVID HAYES**
Itemizer-Observer

It's considered one of the most exclusive venues around. With an intimate seating for just 56, tickets sell out fast. Yet all funds go toward a local nonprofit or charity. And the latest performance is three years in the making.

With the end of the pandemic, host Marlene Cox and her cast are excited to have audiences return to Moonfall Theater.

"We're trying to do everything we can to get people back, to socialize, to show it's okay to support our group again," Cox said.

The core group of actors have been performing essentially in Cox's living room for more than three decades, including Bev Shein, Roger Shenkel, Zachary Brehm and Bill Brown (with accompanist Dobie Long and Leslie Darland on percussion). All within 1,000 square feet. Cox said they used to schedule two shows a year with about nine performances each. Then COVID hit.

"We had this show all done and set three years ago. We thought with COVID

by September it would be over. Then, we thought by the next year it would be okay with COVID restrictions. It was resurrected and we got together," Cox said. "And then it wasn't. Finally, our cast is excited and over the moon being able to do it."

Each of the cast has extensive backgrounds performing – Long on Broadway, Shenkel comes from a music family, and Brown extensively at Albany and Pentacle Theatres. Cox, meanwhile, admits she doesn't really have a theater background. In fact, Moonfall resulted out of failure.

"When I was young, I kept trying out for Pentacle, but never got a part. I finally said nuts to this. I'm just going to start my own theater," Cox said. "Jan Rickert and I were both taking voice lessons from Dobie. We did a recital and just added so much stuff to it and people loved it. So, we kept adding to it, kept going and going. Until we finally built the theater."

The initial setting for Moonfall was in Cox's family home over on Gardner Road out in Bridgeport. Their stage was the living room, emptied of all the furniture that sat just 28 of their closest friends.

"People would sit in with their keens in their teeth, crammed to watch our little theater – Dobie, Jan Rickert, myself and Lane Coland, another voice student. A lot of comedy. Bizarre stuff. I'd dress as Miss Piggy and sing Fiddler on the Roof," Cox recalled. "Then we bought this farm (off Orrs Corner Road) and built this Victorian replica. My husband said, 'You know, why don't you just build yourself a theater.'"

At the time, their prototype just had a sheetrock backdrop, and no stage, but it didn't make a difference. The year was 1993 and people still came to their new living room. The name came from a song Cox said she always wanted to sing featuring a three-octave range. While she still can't sing it to this day, the name Moonfall stuck for her home stage.

Over time they finished the stage, adding lighting, props and space for a piano and percussion instruments. But no sound system.

"That's another rule here. We don't use microphones. No amps. It's pretty organic. Our costumes are organic. If we can make them ourselves out of paper, we try

to do that. Not something we purchase online. We try to make it as old world and very natural. It's raw talent not amplified with a soundboard," Cox said.

Cox describes the show itself as a mix of Carol Burnett Show, which featured a core group of performers doing skits and comedy, and a little Saturday Night Live taking digs at current events. It's more like old television variety shows, she added.

"We kind of branded ourselves with original comedy, a few ballads, a few more popular ones. People really like the old, old standards from the 40s and 50s. We get together in February and throw together ideas of what we want to do. We don't have any egos involved. We all listen and collaborate. Slowly, it grows as we rehearse," Cox said.

They just won't ever do opera or country music. Songs are kept middle of the road, with no extremes, but lots of originals. They feature English comedy, old Broadway, Australian standards, some Poison Pigeon in the Park, and bizarre

stuff audiences haven't heard before.

They perform about 22 songs in the entire show – 12 in the first half, another 11 in the second half. Each act is about 45 minutes, with a 20-minute intermission. It always starts at 7:30 p.m. and is over at 9:20 p.m.

"It's a unique experience for people. Our world is so polished, all the same, because we have computers everything looks alike. They come down a big, long gravel driveway, past field and cattle, to this old house, and get a whole experience. People are able to leave the moment behind, and come experience something unique, upbuilding and fun. We all need that. Especially now. Moonfall is escapism in a healthy way," Cox explained.

Best of all, all proceeds from their \$20 ticket sales goes toward local charities and nonprofits. For example, this season, beneficiaries include the Dallas Food Bank, Friendship Force, the Dallas Downtown Association, Kindness Club, Dallas Artist Co-Op and Cancer Research. She says

it's the easiest \$1,000 an organization can make in one night.

"Often times they get a corporation to match. So, I figure Moonfall has raised well over \$1 million for the community over 32 years. It's been, monetarily, a good value," Cox said. "Plus, there's not a lot of moving parts. All they have to do is buy a ticket and bring a plate of cookies. And here they've made a thousand bucks. Pretty simple. And they had a good time."

After 32 years, Cox and crew are still having fun themselves. She shared, for her, the best part of it all.

"It's the creative process I love. I love performing. I love comedy. That's what I like to do. It's just an outlet. Just my art show, it's my Moonfall," Cox said. "And because I own it, they can't kick me off. I'm always guaranteed to get a role."

For more information or ticket availability, email Cox at latitudeone@hotmail.com.

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The Baskett Slough National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1965 as part of the Willamette Valley NWR Complex primarily to provide wintering habitat for dusky Canada geese.

The refuge also provides wetland and woodland sanctuary for migratory and resident wildlife which range from the prolific black-tailed deer to the rare endangered butterfly Fender's blue, thought to be extinct from 1940 to the late 1980s, when a few populations were found in the Willamette Valley,

Another endangered species is the Willamette daisy, a wildflower usually found on upland prairie and oak savanna

habitats with little or no shrub cover.

Threatened species on the refuge include:

- The streaked horned lark, whose favored habitat is open spaces.
- Kincaid's lupine, a wildflower found in upland prairies and oak savannas.
- Nelson's checkermallow, a wildflower found typically in wet prairies and floodplains of the Willamette Valley and the Coast Range.

Plants that are neither endangered nor threatened include the meadow checkermallow, showy milkweed, and gold paint brush.

For a partial listing of the animals neither threatened nor endangered, are you ready? Fox sparrow, lazuli bunting, band-tailed pigeon, American white pelican, double-crested cormorant, downy woodpecker, white-faced ibis, sora rail, avocet, rufous hummingbird, northern

spotted owl, yellow-headed blackbird, turkey vulture, peregrine falcon, golden eagle, wood duck, black-necked stilt, raven, belted kingfisher, western osprey, trumpeter swan, bat species, mule deer, sharp-tailed snake.

The refuge includes a three-mile trail system and does not allow running, biking, hunting, or fishing.

More than 42,000 people volunteer their time and ideas each year to US-FWS. They work on the land, in the visitor center, and with youth. There are more than 200 nonprofit Refuge Friends organizations.

Visitors are urged to keep their distance from the animal life and other visitors. Cameras, of course, are encouraged, as well as good walking shoes and a jacket for chilly weather.

Roll into The River for good times, good food, good brew

By **LANCE MASTERSON**
For The Itemizer-Observer

Travel Salem promises The Great Oaks Food Trail will take you on a culinary journey through one of the most beautiful and iconic regions of Oregon, the Willamette Valley.

Even though The River in Independence is a featured stop along the Great Oaks Food Trail, managers aren't about to rest on their laurels.

Instead, they're working to make the Gilgamesh Brewing restaurant get even better.

"We've added many more sandwiches to the menu, and are doing lots of specials throughout the week," said Colton Stephens, The River's assistant manager.

Among these specials: Taco Tuesdays, along with a \$2 discount off the listed price of menu items on Wednesdays, Stephens added.

"We've also got a brand new happy hour menu, which is totally different. Ahi rolls. Veggie rolls," he said. "We're trying to amp it up here."

The weekend buffet, which started recently, is undergoing slight revisions.

"We won't be having a chef out there, but we've added to the buffet to make up for that," Stephens said.

Scrambles go nicely with the buffet's more traditional servings.

"Typical, you know, bacon, sausage, biscuits and gravy," Stephens said. "People really love our gravy. We make it with some of our beer, so it has a really nice flavor."

It turns out Gilgamesh beer makes it onto many of the restaurant's ingredient lists.

"Our barbecue sauce is made with Mamba, and then we have our Pacific Crush IPA aioli, which goes on most of our burgers," Stephens added.



Other favorites, such as pizzas, remain as good as ever.

"Our pizza crust is hand-tossed. It comes out thin in the middle and fluffy for the crust. We cook it until it's golden brown," Stephens said. "We haven't updated a ton on the pizza menu. People seem to like the fresh toppings that we already offer."

Fresh veggies come from Aloha Produce.

Each pizza is named after an Oregon river.

Some of the changes have been made with aesthetics and comfort in mind. For example, a new roof makes for a shadier outdoor area. Sides, which are up during winter months to preserve warmth, are taken down during the summer, thus allowing increased ventilation. Fans and heaters are used as needed.

An upstairs dining area is available for

group events and parties.

Gilgamesh Brewing also owns The Campus in Salem, the flagship restaurant and brewery, and The Coast, which recently opened at the Lincoln City Outlets.

The River opens at 11:30 a.m., Monday through Sunday. Closing times vary. It's wise for customers to call ahead if they are coming in after 8 p.m. to make sure the restaurant will be open.

Reservations are taken for parties of eight or more.

Catering services available for parties with more than 20 guests.

The River

370 S. Main St., Independence
503-751-1486

www.travelsalem.com/things-to-do/sub-regions/polk-county/great-oaks-food-trail



Dreamies Creamery expands to ice cream parlor

By **DAVID HAYES**
Itemizer-Observer

When word got out to the rest of region about the delights of ice cream crafted from sheep's milk, Travel Salem had no choice but to add Dreamies Creamery in Dallas to The Great Oaks Food Trail.

Recently, with their popularity growing and the heat index rising, Julie Thackeray picked a challenging day to fill in for a sick employee. As the matriarch owner of Dreamies Creamery, along with daughters Julie, Allison, Maria and daughter-in-law Malena Mitchell, Julie had to serve up

scoops to of their signature ice cream to the deluge of customers alone.

It's been two years since the Dallas family debuted their mobile trailer selling ice cream created from sheep's milk. Thackeray said despite some initial hesitancy, the response from the community has been happy and supportive.

"So far so good. We always get that people are afraid to eat it at first, because it's sheep's milk and so they think it's going to taste yucky. But then they're pleasantly surprised," Thackeray said while hand-crafting the shop's waffle cones.

While Dreamies Creamery has been successful selling the ice cream from a trailer after their debut in the Crystal Creek Dairy parking lot, the plan was always to expand, Thackeray said. First, they took their trailer mobile and served up their treats at fairs and events across the region. Second, they always had their eye on brick-and-mortar location to bring back an actual parlor to Dallas.

"It's nice to have an actual ice cream shop besides Dairy Queen, no offense to Dairy Queen, but something that's just ice cream," said Kim Kirkland, who was

among a dozen adults and children looking for a cool treat last week.

Also amidst that group was Jessica Reber, with her two kids. After some initial trepidation, her family are now regulars to Dreamies Creamery.

"I was hesitant at first, it being sheep's milk," Reber said. "But we really liked it. It is fun to have it in Dallas, a fun little place."

The new shop is in the former Well Within Nutrition location on Court Street. Thackeray said it was fortuitous timing the location opened up for their ice cream parlor just a year after their debut.

"We had hoped, but it was good timing. We just could see we needed to be out of the parking lot. They were so supportive, even in the parking lot, but they were kind of getting tired of eating

in winter in the middle of a parking lot," Thackeray said.

In addition to creating a more comfortable indoor setting, the shop allows Dreamies Creamery to offer up more traditional "ice cream parlor stuff" like banana splits and ice cream sundaes, Thackeray said. It also allows them to rotate in and out more flavors. In fact, they've doubled the offerings from eight in the ice cream trailer to 16 at the shop.

They get their sheep's milk from Fia Fia Farms in Dallas (located en route to Falls City) then pasteurize it at Crystal Creek Dairy.

Their most popular flavor had always been crumble crunch, but peach cobbler has really come in, along with sopapilla, peanut butter crunch and Boston Cream.

"Those have been some heavy hitters just in the last week," Thackeray said.

Dreamies Creamery officially opened June 8. Hours are Tuesday to Thursday from noon to 9 p.m. and Friday to Saturday from noon to 10 p.m.

Thackeray discovered the ice cream parlor has flip-flopped their busiest hours with the travel trailer.

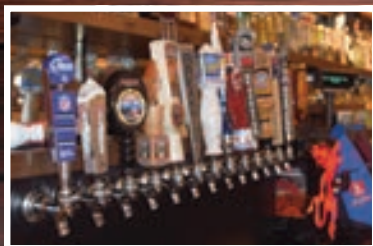
"After dinner is really big. Everybody is ready for dessert," Thackeray said. "That really surprised me. Because it was kinda of opposite of the trailer. Then, it went quiet after dinner. It seems to be (now) everybody's ready for ice cream then."

While Dreamies Creamery ice cream parlor will be the flagship operation now, look for the trailer to continue to make appearances throughout the summer, including at Dallas's Sounds of Summer and Movie Night.

For more information, go to www.dreamiescreamery.com.

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Pentacle Theatre celebrates 70 years in community entertainment

Community theater often showcase's the best in undiscovered regional talent. Willamette Valley's hidden treasure, Pentacle Theatre invites you to discover its well hidden and easily found home in West Salem. Nestled in a forest along a babbling brook, its rustic setting will surprise and enchant.

Pentacle Theatre, still thriving as they celebrate 70 years as a uniquely organized artist collective, started as an idea hatched by a group of Willamette University professors and their friends in 1953 over cards and cocktails.

Sparked by their collective artistic passion, Pentacle's founder's vision soon manifested with early productions presented in an old rustic barn, not unlike a fictional Hollywood tale.

Pentacle has evolved from its humble beginnings in a country barn and expanded to its current location, an idyllic setting in the woods where dreams grow into reality. Pentacle has presented over 600 productions, engaging over 22,000 volunteers and entertaining generations of theater lovers.

In the early 1960s, award-winning architect, Charlie Hawkes, designed a five-pointed theater based on the pentacle star. [The star, originally used to ward

off evil spirits, is used by actors to ensure their good luck.] With design in hand and leaders in place the community of volunteers, young and old came together to raise a theater.

The theater seats 199 and before the COVID pandemic had an attendance of over 20,000 people. With the pandemic closure, attendance dropped to as low as 2,000 in 2021. However, audiences returning, and in 2023 the total topped 13,000. Halfway into the 2024 season, numbers continue to grow back toward pre-pandemic attendance rates.

Pentacle Theatre has since become a destination location with ticket buyers venturing from all across the county, Canada, Mexico and even New Zealand.

Pentacle's mission statement is to provide the community with a collaborative opportunity to create and experience theater in an atmosphere of respect, support, and enjoyment. As a non-profit volunteer-based organization, teams of volunteers come together to choose which directors and productions will be part of each new season. This committee-based structure represents and maintains every area of the theater, from costumes, hospitality, to maintaining the entire 17 acres of the enchanted property. These are

just a few of the ways Pentacle is different from many community theaters which are often led by the vision of a single artistic director. Pentacle is also financially independent and is not underwritten by any municipality but funded by ticket sales, grants, and the generous financial support of our members and donors.

The 2024 anniversary season featured Brighton Beach Memoirs, The Prom, Ripcord, Boy Gets Girl, Clue on Stage, Footloose the Musical, and Miss Bennet, Christmas at Pemberley the sequel to Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice.

In addition, the Pentacle Theatre welcomes new volunteers. If you are interested in helping with upcoming productions, from sewing costumes, painting and building sets, administratively, or joining the hospitality guild there is a place for you at Pentacle on one of their many committees.

Join the Pentacle community and get involved: The theater hosts a 70th anniversary celebration July 13. Join the audience and see the drama, feel the music, and laugh with friends. Tickets can be purchased on Pentacle's website www.pentacletheatre.org or over the phone at (503) 485-4300.

Gaming universe expands in Dallas

Galaxy Won taps into 80's arcade nostalgia

By **DAVID HAYES**

Itemizer-Observer

Long has there been a cry in the Dallas community for there be more for youth to do. Now, at 780 Main Street, next to Domino's Pizza, is a doorway to a business ready to sweep children of all ages away to another universe. Inside awaits Galaxy Won, a time warp to classic arcade games from a bygone era. Wayne Mathis and his wife Scottie Davis hope to resurrect.

"It's designed to look like a space port where you're waiting for your spaceship to arrive," said Mathis, bathed in the neon light glowing from the walls above the coin-operated machines beeping and humming in the background.

"I grew up with arcades. Grew up with a regular Nintendo. I went from there to everywhere there was an arcade, I'd play it," Mathis recalled.

Davis, "head lunch lady" at Oakdale Heights Elementary School, always wanted to open a restaurant. That became scaled back to a food truck. Mathis, a supervisor at Forest River, has experience in manufacturing, carpentry, electrical and final inspections. But neither had ever run a business. Undeterred, he had his dream of operating an arcade, so they naturally combined their visions into one attraction.

They opened Galaxy Won in the middle of Spring Break, perfect timing to attract youth while school was out.

"Spring break is now, and so we were like push, push, push it open, stop trying to add more stuff and said let's go with that and get it open," Davis said.

The idea originated about five years ago with the duo planning to purchase a building and open an arcade featuring a gourmet menu in March of 2020. Those plans went down a black hole when the pandemic hit. But sitting on their idea gave Mathis more time to acquire games and Davis to fine-tune her menu.

Mathis said all the games pretty much came from Portland, one truck at a time.

"It was very hard, but I had a lot of time to do it. I was just looking on Craig-

slist and Facebook every day. Then I'd find one at a price I could afford then find a place for it in my basement," he said.

Whenever he couldn't find a specific game, he made it, as evidenced by the custom cabinet of consuls along one wall and another planned soon along another. His favorites are Galaga and Donkey Kong. While he found pinball got a little old after playing it over and over in his basement, the Street Fighter II pinball game is definitely his favorite.

"It seems to have more of a storyline to it. You gotta defeat all the characters," Mathis explained.

The Starship Troopers pinball game is Davis's favorite.

"I like playing Street Fighter, too, and the shooting games with him. I really wanted an offroad game. Badlands is the closest we came," Davis said. "Driving games, shooting games and pinball are my favorite. We have Cactus Jack down there, he's a lot of fun, too."

Once far enough past the pandemic, the two were ready to move in a space for an arcade. However, costs to open Galaxy Won soon went through the stratosphere.

"To put in a ventilation hood alone, I thought would be 12-15 thousand. Yeah, it's \$42,000. It's not just the cost for the hood. It's the cost for the piping, the cost to bring in the crane to put it on the roof," Davis explained. "We got an encased fryer, with ventilation and fire suppression, it cost more than my first three cars combined."

With ballooning costs, they were forced to scale back their menu launch as well. Jettisoned were the gourmet burgers and salads. But they kept their home crafted chicken strips they make themselves and their sidewinder fries that are "nice and big and fluffy and different," Davis said.

"We're trying to keep stuff as inexpensive as possible while still trying to make a little profit. So, people can come in here and feel like they're getting their money's worth," she added.

So far, wayward visitors to their Galaxy have been impressed.

Dallas parents Stefanie and Ramil Maza brought their four kids, ages 6, 10, 14 and 16 in for the first time. Stefanie said they were all pretty excited about Galaxy Won opening, having a place to come play, for kids and adults.

"I agree 100%," Stefanie said about the community needing more recreation options for youth. "That's why we need more stuff like this. Keep them out of trouble."

For Ramil, Galaxy Won brings back his childhood memories.

"I'm an old-school gamer. I grew up on arcades when I was younger, so it's awesome for my kids to have the same experience," he said. "They've got good variety. I wanted to come down here to support them to make sure they stay open."

Not everyone, however, was happy to see Galaxy Won invade the community. Davis and Mathis were initially met with some pushback on social media when they posted an application for a liquor license with the Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission.

"There are a couple people out there who have their opinions," Mathis said. "They're allowed to have their opinions. If it's not for them, it's not for them. I don't need to engage one way or the other. That's none of my business. People who do come in, I just want them to have a good time."

Galaxy Won started selling canned alcohol options April 1 and Mathis plans to add beer on tap.

"I don't think it's a bad idea to have cans of beer for adults," he added.

Otherwise, they've had good feedback, with stragglers coming in on Spring Break picking up around 12:30 p.m. and the number of explorers blowing up between 5:30-7:30 p.m.

"I just love to stand back and watch 'em have fun," Davis said in between filling another order for chicken strips.

Follow their journey through the inner space of Dallas on their Facebook page or check out their website (still in development) at www.galaxywon.com.

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Shrewsbury Renaissance Faire tra

By **LANCE MASTERSON**
For The Itemizer-Observer

There is something for everybody at the Shrewsbury Renaissance Fair. Provided one doesn't mind dialing the fun meter back to the 16th century.

The annual event, launched in 1996, was first held at the Philomath Frolic & Rodeo Grounds. Then, in 2002, it relocated to its current site, a large field near Grant Road and Highway 223 in south Polk County.

This year, the Shrewsbury Renaissance Faire runs the weekend of Sept. 14-15.

Jousting knights are its rock stars. But comedians and magicians, stage entertainers, craft vendors, and skilled tradesmen draw their own following.

Turkey legs, drink and other nourishment common to a good old-fashioned feast are crowd favorites as well.

One steps back into time as soon as one steps into the village square. Thanks to performers such as Harley LaQuinn.

Last year, it seemed every child wanted a solid bubble, and the man who delivered them via sleight of hand was LaQuinn. He was a hard man to miss.

First, he positioned himself near the faire's entrance. Second, he blew bubbles, lots of them. Third, he costumed himself as a jester complete with a harlequin mask. And

fourth, most importantly perhaps, he stood nine feet tall.

"I tell all the little ones that I'm so tall because I ate all my bean sprouts. I got them from a guy named Jack," LaQuinn said, dropping a name from the Fairy Tale Mount Rushmore.

Older kids are more skeptical of this claim. They want to know why LaQuinn's legs are so long and his arms are so short. He was quick with an answer for this question.

"I tell the older kids I had a run in with the law in Spain. Authorities put me on the rack and stretched me," he said. "My arms would have been just as long, but they only got me on half the charges."

LaQuinn would have killed them in the Catskills. But he wasn't doing too shabby at the faire, either. Kids flocked to him. They followed him. They were bubble crazy. He wasn't the Pied Piper, but he would do until the real thing came along.

LaQuinn said it's all in the approach.

"I get some kids that get scared. I get some kids that are just mesmerized. And the ones that get scared, I try not to push them. I don't want their parents to push them, either," he said. "I jokingly say that my mom always told me not to talk to strangers, and there's no one much stranger than me. So

when I'm alone, I can't talk to myself."

LaQuinn underwent his sudden growth spurt when a friend and fellow performer outgrew his stilts. It was time, the friend added, for someone else to rise to the occasion.

"(My friend) wasn't going to be coming back to the area to do a gig. So I picked up his pair of stilts and started ... stilt walking," LaQuinn said.

He relied on the basics.

"Just like anything else," he said of mastering the technique. "Short steps, and one foot in front of the other."

Brett Baker isn't a performer in the traditional sense. He created his own buzz - thanks to his tailor's craftsmanship - just by walking around the village green. Or as one faire-goer said when he first saw Brett in costume: "Man, that's a dope dragon suit you're wearing. It's so awesome."

The suit is, indeed, 'awesome,' combining technology and art. The wings, for example, raise and lower. The suit is air-conditioned.

"(Brett) is pretty toasty right now. There's actually a fan within the head to keep him cool when it gets too hot," explained his wife, Lynx, last September. "He can only do the costume for about an hour, hour-and-a-half, before we strip him down and put him in a different costume."



PHOTOS BY LANCE MASTERSON

ransports tourists to another time

It takes an entire village to make a good dragon suit.

"All of the pieces have been made by various artisans," said Lynx, "and we collected them and put them together."

But ultimately, theirs is a story that is as old as time. It's a story of a young dragon, Equinox (Brett), and a wood fairy, Mist (Lynx), who dared societal conventions and were married some 29 years ago. Their son, Rane, was born three years later. They have been a faire fixture ever since. Such participation has strengthened their identity as a family.

"You know those things you do as a family that no one else may understand. It's sort of one of those things," said Rane. "It's something that we share, something that connects us on a separate level, other than we are blood."

Shrewsbury featured numerous stalls. Some vendors specialized in bringing whimsy to life. Others were more grounded, more in the now. They chose to demonstrate trades from long ago that are still practiced today.

Blacksmith Tymon Teichroeb is one of those who combines past and present.

"I'm a fabricator," said Teichroeb. "But I also do this on the side with my fabrication. I have my own setup at home."

Teichroeb was joined by fellow blacksmiths Isaac Morain and Hunter Oxley in bringing history to life. In this case, a sword.

"We're just doing demonstrations, showing people how it would have been done back in the Renaissance," said Teichroeb of their area. "Everything we've got out here, tools-wise, is accurate to that time frame."

Even the bellows.

"We have our bellows here that one of our members custom-made for us," Teichroeb said.

He noted the bellows is made from canvas and wood and operates under a two-part system that maintains constant air flow.

Some observers showed a casual interest. Others wanted information. For they, too, want to step back in time.

"We give visitors tips and pointers. Where to go for equipment. What to get first," said Teichroeb "It's something you don't see everyday. So it's definitely something that piques people's interest."

Dance also has the power to pique interest.

"We come from many different cultures and dance is what brings us together," said Sarah Matson of her troupe, Tribal Rising Dance. "Dance is the universal language of love."

Most of the troupe's belly dances are

improvised. On this day, there were three dancers. The leader, with help from her backing musicians, was positioned front left on stage.

"We do a very communal dance in which the others follow the leader and the queuing of the drums," Matson said.

Members of the audience were asked to join the dancers on stage. Those accepting the offer were mostly girls.

"It's next generation, right. It's what we do," said Matson. "Dance is for everyone. Everybody and every age."

Men, however, were reluctant to take the stage. That's not the case in every culture.

"Male belly dance is big in the Middle East. It's very strong and celebratory. So if you get up, it's great. It's different," she said. "But culturally here, not so much."

Shrewsbury Renaissance Fair

- Sept. 14-15, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.
- Grant Road near the Polk County/Benton County line
- shrewsburyrenaissancefair.rsvpify.com



Polk Flea Market

Attracting regional bargain hunters

Deb Thomas likes to slightly exaggerate that the Polk Flea Market for a while there was the only one open between Los Angeles and Canadian border.

As the manager since 2000, she's seen other venues close their doors for good and others that never reopened after the pandemic ended.

"Portland antique expo isn't running, it's shot, shut down, and won't be doing it for the foreseeable future," Thomas said. (The Rose City Vintage Market has since reopened.)

With closures of markets in Salem and Eugene, Thomas said the event at the Polk County Fairgrounds has become a regional destination.

Thomas said the Polk Flea Market has been up and running without fail through the pandemic since July 2020.

The flea market usually attracts up to 150 vendors. Bargain hunters can expect to find jewelry, Avon products, dolls, glassware, hunting and fishing gear, gaming and technology tables, car stuff and guy stuff.

"Basically, everything under the sun," she added.

Thomas said the interesting fallout of the pandemic was the demographic of shoppers changed. Older, regular customers began staying home, while younger bargain hunters were attracted to Polk County's market. Since the end of the

pandemic, the regulars are returning.

Just like the big box stores, the flea market was able to remain open and was able to solidify a solid base of regulars. You'll see them every first Sunday of the month throughout the year, except for August when it gives way for the Polk County Fair.

Polk Flea Market

- Where: Polk County Fairgrounds, 520 South Pacific Highway West
- When: First Sunday of the month, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Admission: \$1; Early Admission \$5: 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday and 6 to 9 a.m. Sunday



Willamina to rumble to Mud Drags June 29

By **DAVID HAYES**
Itemizer-Observer

On June 29, the small town of Willamina becomes the center of the racing universe when it hosts the annual Mud Drags and Side by Side competition.

The off-road event, held on a makeshift track on city property, challenges souped-up rigs designed to power their way through a muddy straightaway course.

Organizer Sherry Dawkins said the event, going on now more than 20 years, draws competitors from as far away as Montana, Northern Washington and California.

Last year's event saw about 100 entries in several categories, including Drag, Side by Side (a specific type of four-wheel off-road vehicle), Powder Puff (for the ladies)

and the Bogg Race, where the track gets "sloppy wet," Dawkins said.

The prize pool has grown to more than \$2,600 this year to spread out among winners in 15 categories.

She said drivers can sign up to compete on the day of the race from 7-9 a.m. Registration is \$40 per driver in the Drags and Side by Side, \$30 for Powder Puff and \$25 for Bogg. A pit pass is \$20 extra.

General admission to watch the races is \$8, youth ages 6-12 get in for \$5 and children under 6 are free. Dawkins warns that the event attracts about 1,000 spectators, so she advises getting there early if you want to set up a canopy. And, as there are no bleachers, she recommends

definitely bringing your own lawn chair. However, no alcohol, dogs, open flames or bikes will be allowed, she added.

Dawkins said vendors will be on site selling wares and she added that she hopes food vendors will also be available.

Funds raised at the Mud Drags go toward paying for Willamina's 4th of July fireworks show.

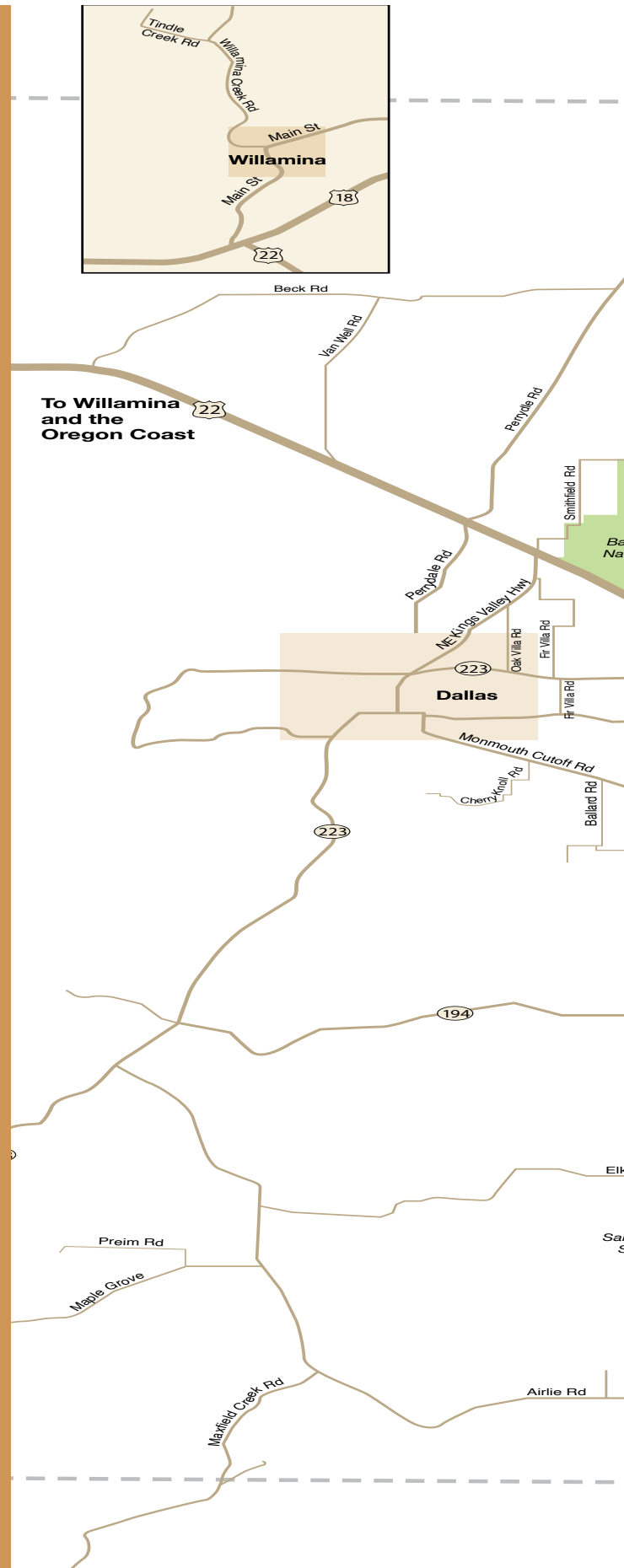
"It will be a full, fun-filled day," Dawkins predicted.

For more information

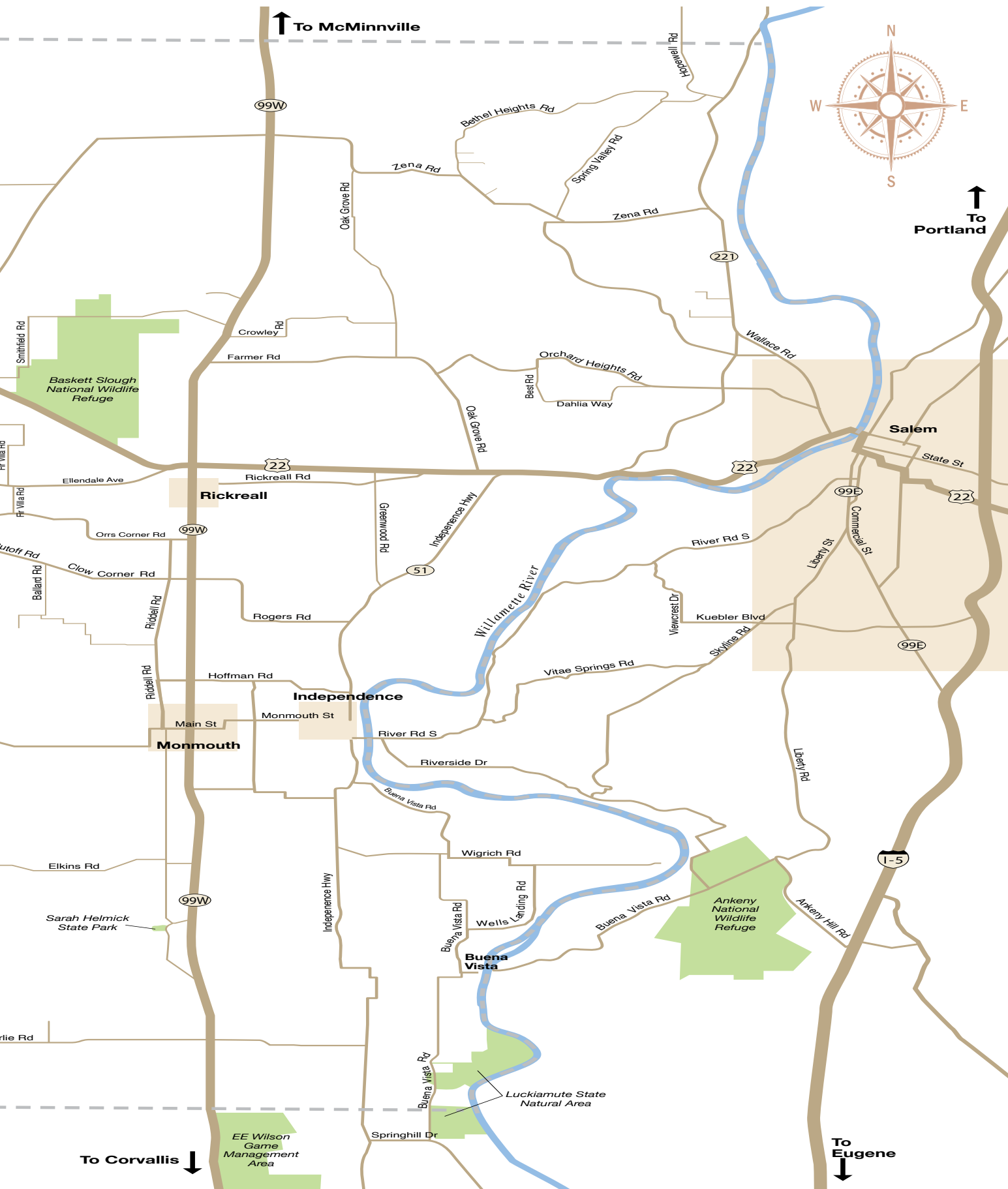
check out their Facebook page
Willamina Mud Drags

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