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NEWS from BENTON COUNTY

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County transit alliance wins national award

A group of counties and public transit agencies – which includes Benton County – has been awarded a National Association of Counties Achievement Award this year in the transportation category for the North by Northwest Connector.

Columbia County is the lead agency on the project, and Benton County as well as other partners joined them as they received the award on July 21 at the NACo Awards Luncheon as part of the annual conference in Tarrant County, Texas. Public transportation leaders in Benton, Lincoln, Clatsop, Tillamook and Columbia counties teamed up in 2012 to improve the public transit connections between all counties. Under the new schedule the already operational Coast to Valley Express – which is jointly run by Benton County Rural Transit and Lincoln County Transit – now has multiple stops each service day at the Amtrak station in Albany and South Beach in Lincoln County.

"This has been one of our goals for a long time," Benton County Public Works Director Roger Irvin said. "These stop locations allow Benton and Lincoln county residents access to the Amtrak station seven days a week."

From Newport, Benton County transit customers can hop onto other buses connecting them to communities in the other participating counties. All buses are equipped with bicycle racks for those who wish to "bike and ride." The project is funded with a $3.5 million United States Department of Energy grant aimed at increasing transit use by commuters and visitors in rural northwestern Oregon. Successful strategies piloted by the five-county transit alliance will serve as a national model for other transit providers across the country. Green shelters with the North by Northwest Connector logo are being constructed at stops around the county.

Started in 1970, the annual NACo Achievement Award Program recognizes innovative county government programs. Each application is judged on its own merits and awards are given in 21 different categories.

North by Northwest Connector brochures and schedules are available at Benton County Public Works, 360 SW Avery Ave., in Corvallis, and at City of Corvallis Public Works, 1245 NE Third St., in Corvallis and Benton County Board of Commissioners Office, 205 NW Fifth St., in Corvallis. Information is available online at *http://nworegontransit.org/*.

County takes lead on handling HP refund financing

Benton County is taking a proactive approach in responding to a state judge's decision regarding a tax dispute with Hewlett-Packard – and helping other local government agencies do the same.

Last spring, a State Tax Court judge ruled that property on Hewlett-Packard's campus in Corvallis was over-valued by Oregon Department of Revenue appraisers, beginning in 2008, and is requiring the tech giant to be refunded approximately $7.7 million in property taxes along with $1.7 million in interest, totaling $9.5 million.

Because of the way the tax formula works in Oregon – as defined in state statutes – money collected from HP during those years was distributed to local government agencies throughout the county. When money comes in, it is distributed automatically to all taxing entities in the county - such as cities, school districts, community colleges, road districts, fire districts and many others, based on a formula so that each entity receives a pro-rata share based on their tax rate. So even agencies that don't include the property in question within their taxing districts share in the reimbursement. The appeal impacts more than 50 local government entities.

"Due to required distributions everyone is involved," Benton County Finance Manager Mary Otley said.

Since 2008 Benton County has been awaiting resolution of the HP appeal and local government officials will be waiting even longer for a final outcome. The Department of Revenue and Benton County have appealed the judge's ruling to the Oregon Supreme Court. That process is anticipated to take around 2 years. In the meantime, Benton County took immediate action to stop the bleeding, to the tune of 12 percent annually of interest accruing.

Benton County, through its role as tax collector, had reserved money from past tax collections in anticipation of a ruling somewhere in the middle of the disputed value. The ruling, however, went far beyond those expectations. The reserved amount of $1 million was well short of the required refund, and interest was racking up. 12 percent, as designated by state statute.

The county, with the help of some other governments, paid the $7.7 million principal. Benton County's contribution included a $5 million loan from its General Fund.

"We paid the principal refund to stop the interest so it doesn't continue to accrue," Otley said, adding that the county is not allowed to pay any of the interest until the final verdict is reached.

The county loan paid on behalf of the taxing districts will be repaid from tax collections before distributions to those agencies this November when property owners pay their taxes. The county is charging a nominal interest rate of half a percent, which is in line with the statewide local government investment pool rate. Some agencies are hit harder than others by the refund.

The county will begin collecting for a pool to cover any interest that is paid to HP, based on the final ruling by the Supreme Court regarding valuation. Until a final decision, Benton County won't be able to collect approximately $3 million from HP for each year's collections for all districts for the next couple of years. Any ruling that supports the lower value will equate to lower revenue going forward.

Taking a bite out of the oral health gap

Oregon has a dental problem. Benton County families are not immune; many simply cannot afford dental care, sometimes choosing between buying food, gas or paying rent and seeking dental treatment for pain. As a result, people put their dental problems on the back burner.

Through community efforts, collaborations and partnerships such as the Benton County Oral Health Coalition, people now have options to receive dental care.

Not everyone has access to dentists. Emergency room physicians can provide temporary treatment such as pain killers and antibiotics, but generally can't treat dental problems. Emergency rooms are often the source of health care for people without insurance. This has been changing, thanks to funding from Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center.

A "one size fits all" approach is not going to meet the needs of the diverse populations who need service.

A grant from Good Samaritan provides 11 Medical Teams International (MTI) dental van days in rural communities and continuation of the BCOHC Emergency Adult Dental Voucher Program for uninsured, low-income, Benton County residents with dental pain and/or infection treated in local dental offices. Through partnership with Love INC of Benton County's 12 MTI dental van days for Corvallis and Philomath and the Boys and Girls Club of Corvallis parent dental days, residents are able to access urgent dental care treatment in a timely manner and avoid using the emergency room.

Local dentists have agreed to treat patients in their offices and accept $100 reimbursement for services provided. These are "hero" dentists, and they typically give far more than the $100 value. Since November 2012, 142 individuals have been screened at the Benton Health Center and 120 of them were appointed to local dentists.

Participating dentists include Dr. Curtis Clark, Dr. Kevin Baldwin, Dr. Steve Long, Dr. Gregory Mann, Dr. Scott Travelstead, Dr. Keith Frome, Dr. Kurt Black, Dr. Glenn Balkins, Dr. Mark Swensen, Dr. Michael Bliss, Dr. Drew Webster and Dr. Christopher Butler.

Dental vans take the dentist and dental team members to the community. They remove transportation barriers for many. Some dentists take patients into their offices and volunteer on the dental vans. Additional dentists participating in the dental vans include Dr. Bruce Austin, Dr. Janet Peterson, Dr. Curt Baumgartner, Dr. Benny Damien, Dr. Lenore Hata, Dr. Ken Johnson, Dr. Cam Little and Dr. Daniel Poelman.

To be eligible for the adult dental emergency programs individuals must be Benton County residents; 19 years and older; low-income, dentally uninsured or not be eligible for Oregon Health Plan; and in pain or with infection. Screening times are from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the first and third Tuesdays of the month at the Benton Health Center, 530 NW 27th Street, in Corvallis.

Although services are no-cost, clients are asked to make a $10 donation if possible. To learn more about the voucher program, those interested can call 541-766-6361.

Unable to locate a dentist for Friday, the schedule was opened to provide dental cleanings to low-income, uninsured diabetics. Having diabetes increases the risk of periodontal disease. High blood glucose levels help germs build up on teeth and gums, making these problems worse, which could eventually lead to tooth loss. Clarence Tate was glad to get a dental cleaning, since it had been more than 2 years.

"I was well taken care of," Tate said. "The people were cordial and very efficient. I enjoyed the experience."

Keeping the river safe

Benton County Sheriff's Office Marine Deputies spent the day on July 21 patrolling the Willamette River with a goal of ensuring DaVinci Days participants and spectators enjoyed a safe recreational activity. On at least two occasions, deputies took action to assist community members who found themselves in trouble.

The first incident occurred at around noon, when deputies observed a family putting a canoe and a kayak in the water. The kayak occupied by a 9-year-old child capsized as it drifted into the fast-running water. Deputies were able to quickly retrieve the child from the water and reunited him with his family on the other side of the channel.

The second incident occurred as a woman flagged down the Marine Patrol deputies near the Crystal Lake landing. She told the deputies she was experiencing a medical issue and requested a ride down the river so she could retrieve much-needed medications.

Deputies loaded her onto the boat and transported her down the river near Michaels Landing, where they had arranged a patrol deputy to be waiting. The young woman then was transported by car to retrieve her medications.

Volunteers learn skills to keep Benton County residents safe

More than a dozen volunteer members of Corvallis Mountain Rescue Unit – one of the primary teams of Benton County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue – spent four days in mid-August at Crater Lake National Park conducting rope rescue training.

The training builds on 4 years of combined activity for rescues and training, and this year consisted of several mock rescues at probable locations around the park. In addition to Corvallis Mountain Rescue and National Parks Service staff and volunteers, Search and Rescue members from Deschutes County, Jackson County and Josephine County also participated.

More information about Search and Rescue activities – including how to volunteer – can be found at *http://www.co.benton.or.us/sheriff/ems/sar/units.php.*

County crews maintain 460 miles of roads

Benton County road crews were busy this summer with chip-sealing and bridge projects around the county. In all, the county maintains 460 miles of roads, mostly in the rural areas.

Chip seal is a treatment of the surface of a paved road. It is designed to seal and protect the pavement, extending the life of the road. Chip seal paving improves road quality, protects road surfaces from water damage and improves vehicle traction.

This summer Benton County road crews completed chip seal projects on seven Benton County roads, including the following:

- Salmonberry Road from state Highway 34 to Salmonberry Park;
- Seeley Creek Road from state Highway 34 to Clemens Park;
- Fish Hatchery Road in its entirety;
- Decker Road from Beaver Creek to Bellfountain;
- Kiger Island Road from state Highway 99W to Powell Road;
- West Ingram Island Road from Old River Road to state Highway 99W; and
- Hulbert Lake Road from state Highway 99W to the county line.

Approximately 25 more chip sealing projects are scheduled for the next two summers throughout the county.

News from Benton County

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Board of Commissioners	766-6800	Human Resources	766-6081
Chief Operating Officer	766-6800	Community Health Centers	766-6835
Public Information Officer	766-6082	Juvenile Department	766-6810
Assessment Department	766-6855	Natural Areas and Parks	766-6871
Commission on Children and Families	766-6751	OSU Extension Service	766-6750
Development Department	766-6819	Public Works	766-6821
District Attorney	766-6815	County Clerk/Records	766-6831
Elections	766-6756/766-6277	Sheriff's Office	766-6858
Fairgrounds	766-6521	Tax Collection	766-6808
Health Department	766-6835		

Public Health employee earns prestigious award

Rocío Muñoz

Benton County Community Health Navigator Rocío Muñoz was honored with the 2013 Outstanding Practice Award in May at the 8th-Annual Living Well Forum in Portland.

As Community Health Navigator for Benton County Health Department, she works to build bridges reaching vulnerable communities within Benton County, promoting health inside and out of the home. She serves as a link between health care consumers and providers to promote health among groups that have traditionally lacked access to adequate health care.

The award from the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) Public Health Division honors professionals for their commitment in assisting those with chronic conditions take back control of their lives. She has championed the self-management program, Tomando Control de su Salud, across Linn and Benton counties.

Muñoz is one of 122 across Oregon who leads a Stanford Chronic Disease Self-Management Program called Tomando Control de su Salud (which is the Spanish title for Living Well with Chronic Conditions program). This evidence-based health promotion program is for individuals who speak Spanish and live with chronic conditions. As a devoted advocate, Muñoz has worked tirelessly to make sure the program was implemented in Linn and Benton counties. She continues to guide new workshop leaders through various learning opportunities, co-teaching and encouraging volunteer leaders.

Muñoz has not only promoted this program at the County level; she also has been supporting and publicizing this program actively at the state level. Her passion and knowledge of the program has spread to Lincoln County, as it implemented the Tomando Control program last year. Muñoz was instrumental in training six new leaders and providing technical assistance for the program at this site.

As a Tomando Control de su Salud Coordinator and Leader, Muñoz works with the regions' lay leaders to facilitate workshops in once-a-week, six-week sessions. These workshops are 2 ½ hours long and set in community locations such as senior centers, churches, libraries, community neighborhood centers and hospitals. Classes are highly participative, where mutual support and success build the participants' confidence in their ability to manage their health and maintain active and fulfilling lives.

Muñoz was born in Hood River to a seasonal farm-working family and became a first-generation college graduate from Portland State University. She received her bachelor's degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice and Spanish, and a minor in Chicano/Latino Studies. Since 2008, Muñoz has worked as a Health Navigator at Benton County conducting community level outreach and engagement services. Muñoz has life experience in being a Promotora (or health navigator), growing up in a community that lacked services for her family. Muñoz naturally became the health navigator of her family at a very young age and has carried this accomplished ability to her current career.

County partners with Corvallis in economic development efforts

The City of Corvallis-Benton County Economic Development Office has launched a new brand identity and website portal.

The beta website went live in July and is the culmination of a collaborative effort that included contributions from multiple public and private entities committed to supporting business development in the region.

The project also incorporated public support through a photo contest – "Say Cheese, Benton County!" – in which individuals submitted photos to be used in promotional efforts. The website can be found at *www.YesCorvallis.org*.

The website portal premiers a brand identity which includes a new logo and tagline – "Innovate. Grow. Thrive." – meant to capture the spirit and vitality of the Benton County region. Five key messages were developed to capture the spirit of the region: Entrepreneurial Spirit; Culture of Innovation and Research; Smart Competent Workforce; Extraordinary Quality of Life; and Great Place for Business.

The portal also includes a "crowd-sourced" Community Business Calendar that local businesses can use to communicate business events and trainings as well as an online Job Board that provides a collective resource for matching the business community with local talent.

"We are thrilled to be launching our new identity combined with a very comprehensive business portal," Economic Development Manager Tom Nelson said. "This Web portal is designed to provide resources for entrepreneurs to start a new business locally, provide a forum for current businesses to connect, innovate and grow and provide site selectors with appropriate resources. The goal is to create an environment where businesses can thrive in a sustainable and rich, local economy."

Communities including Corvallis, Philomath, Alsea, Monroe, Adair Village and North Albany are highlighted on the Web portal. The Benton County area has comparatively more industrially designated property than anywhere between the Portland Metro area and California, creating potential. The City of Corvallis has three enterprise zones: South Corvallis, Sunset Research Park and the Hewlett-Packard campus.

The project was led by Cleland Marketing and Boost Brand Solutions. Web development was completed by Network Enterprises.

For more information, those interested can contact Economic Development Manager Tom Nelson at 541-766-6339 or email *tom.nelson@corvallisoregon.gov*. Feedback regarding the new website can be submitted to *webmaster@yescorvallis.org*.

Palestine Church considered for national historic listing

A Benton County landmark – long regarded as the oldest standing church in Benton County – has cleared a hurdle toward becoming a nationally recognized historic place.

In June, Benton County officials received formal notice from the Oregon Historic Preservation Office that the Oregon State Advisory Committee on Historic Preservation reviewed and approved the North Palestine Baptist Church for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Final action will be taken in Washington, D.C., in the coming months. Benton County acquired the structure in 2010 at no cost to preserve the building and also allow the Palestine Cemetery, where the church previously was located, to proceed with expansion plans. The 130-year-old structure was rolled out of the cemetery in northeastern Benton County and relocated to a grassy patch of Benton County property in Adair Village south of the Clubhouse and north of the Santiam Christian School football field.

In the hearing, the Advisory Committee noted that Benton County has become known for preserving important rural resources and praised the county for these efforts.

There are several options for the future of the structure, which could remain in county hands or be used as a venue for another community group offering a permanent location and ability to maintain this historic resource. The Palestine Church structure is cared for by Benton County staff until a permanent site is selected for the historic building.

Drive Less Connect: Save money and win prizes

What if you could win a gift card to your favorite coffee shop just for riding your bike? A free Oregon Department of Transportation program called Drive Less Connect lets you do just that.

Great prizes are available for participants by tracking trips taken by bike, walking, bus, teleworking or carpool/vanpool. During the upcoming Fall Campaign – scheduled Oct. 21 through Nov. 1 – participants can win dozens of prizes including vacation packages throughout the state.

Drive Less Connect can be used to find a carpool commuting to work, to school or for one-time trips. It's free and easy and participants control their personal information. Here's how to get started:

- Register now at *www.DriveLessConnect.com;*
- Complete a profile, then click on "Ride-match" in the top blue bar of the page to create a trip. Click on "Find Matches" to view potential carpool matches. Click on "Calendar" to track trips on a private personal calendar; and
- If there are questions, contact Tarah Campi at Cascades West Rideshare at 541-924-8480.

Benton County staff members have reduced 47,298 pounds of carbon dioxide in the past year through non-drive-alone trips and saved $16,311. More information can be found at *www.DriveLessConnect.com*. Join them today!

Giving back to their community, year after year

Barb and Bruce Ashenbrenner

Often, when people volunteer in youth activities it's because they have a child involved. But husband and wife duo Bruce and Barb Ashenbrenner, of Monroe, were volunteering long before their own kids began 4-H, and they've continued long since.

The two have held volunteer 4-H leadership roles for more than 20 years. Now, Bruce leads Country Critters Sheep and Barb oversees Country Critters Beef. It's volunteer work that suits them nicely. Bruce is a regional manager for a pharmaceutical company and Barb operates their farm near Monroe where they "run sheep, calves and grapes," according to a smirking Bruce.

They got into volunteering originally because of a lifelong love and appreciation for 4-H. As a child, Bruce raised sheep, hogs and cattle when he was growing up in Eastern Washington. Barb is from British Columbia.

"It's really for the good of the kids," Bruce said during the Benton County Fair and Rodeo in August, perhaps the busiest week of the year for any 4-H participant. "It's the best program to produce great citizens and future leaders."

"(Bruce) is really, really fun and he's nice to be around," said 13-year-old Rebekah Ballard, of Monroe, who is part of the Country Critters Sheep group. "He knows a lot about 4-H and sheep, so he's really helpful."

Ballard has been raising sheep for only a couple of years, but her two older brothers also did, so she feels like she's been around the program a lot longer. Blake Hull-Pitcher is another long-time 4-H participant. The 18-year-old from Monroe has been doing 4-H since fourth grade. He's known of the Ashenbrenners for years and a couple of years ago began participating in Barb's group.

"I've seen them around all my life but I didn't join their club until sophomore year of high school," he said. "It's been nice. They are really helpful and teach you a lot of stuff. That's pretty cool."

Gavin Marschall, 11, of Monroe, is in his second year of 4-H and only his first in Benton County. He is part of Barb's group and has found her assistance to be extremely helpful both as someone new to the community and relatively new to 4-H.

"We had practice the other day," he said, "and she and Bruce were showing me different things that really helped me."

The couple's own two children participated in 4-H during their youth. They graduated from high school in 2005 and 2008 and one is in radio communications; the other is a lawyer. Both gained a taste for their current careers through opportunities afforded them through 4-H.

"I enjoy watching good kids get better, helping them learn leadership roles," Bruce said, "and frankly watching kids build careers based on their 4-H experiences."

Monroe has a strong 4-H contingent among its youth and the Ashenbrenners estimate approximately 30 percent of the eligible children in town are involved in some way – that's approximately 70 kids. Of those, six are in the beef group led by Barb and 42 are raising sheep under Bruce's tutelage.

"For me it's about getting to know the kids, seeing them grow from little kids into big kids and then they are able to help all the other little kids," Barb said. "We're teaching them how to give back."

4-H teaches youth many skills such as community service, leadership and life skills. They learn responsibility financially and workwise. When it comes to all of those attributes, the Ashenbrenners walk the talk in terms of community involvement.

They volunteer their time with the Dragon Pride program that supports high school sports in Monroe, where the couple has lived for 23 years. Barb is a Benton Hospice volunteer and heads a youth scouting group through their church. Bruce serves on the Benton County Fair Board. Both are involved in the Benton County Livestock Association.

"Between Barb and me it's a partnership," Bruce said. "Without her I wouldn't be able to do everything and vice versa."

The two are looking to play a different role with 4-H in the future, stepping back from their group leadership roles into other volunteer work with the organization in which they believe so strongly.

"We are just a small part of a big group that makes all of this happen," Barb pointed out. "We're just a small part of a great program."

Why we volunteer: Thoughts from a 4-H leader

By Michelle Perino

We all have heard at some time in our lives that volunteering is important. Without volunteers, many valuable programs, including OSU Extension 4-H, wouldn't exist. But have you ever thought about why people volunteer? What compels someone to take their personal time and work for free? Is it just altruism? I don't think so.

There are so many reasons why people volunteer. These are just a few:

- To share a skill or passion. They say true mastery of a skill is found when you are able to teach that skill to someone else. So by volunteering and teaching your skill the person being taught has learned something new, but you have achieved a level of mastery of that skill.
- To learn from others. If you volunteer doing something new you will learn new skills, at no cost.
- Building self-esteem. Have you noticed how grateful people are to you when you volunteer? It is an incredible self-esteem booster.
- Community building. When you help build a community, that community will be there if and when you need it. It's like a built-in parachute that deploys when necessary.
- Networking. If you want to meet new and interesting people, volunteer. It can lead to jobs, friendships, help when you need it and so much more!

If you look closely at the list, you will notice that although a volunteer is the one giving, they are also the one receiving. Volunteering really does make your community stronger, which makes our world a better place. If you're not sure where or how to volunteer, don't worry. 4-H has ample opportunities.

Remember the African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child." Consider volunteering for 4-H and be a part of the 4-H Village. It's an incredible experience that will stay with you for a lifetime.

We would love to have new participants join the Benton County 4-H community of more than 200 volunteers who are helping Benton County youth master new skills and become competent, confident young people who feel part of their community. To learn more about becoming an OSU Extension Service 4-H volunteer, those interested can call 541-766-6750 or e-mail *Kelly.Cotter@oregonstate.edu*. For more information about 4-H and other OSU Extension Service Programs, those interested can go online to *http://extension.oregonstate.edu/benton/*.

It's about community health

Co-sponsored by Benton County Health Services and the Corvallis Parks and Recreation Department, this year's 8th-Annual Campeones de Salud (Champions for Health) Soccer Tournament and Family Weekend again was a resounding success.

The tobacco- and alcohol-free community event – which occurred Aug. 23 through 25 at Willamette Park in Corvallis – attracted an estimated 1,500 participants over the three-day weekend while promoting healthy living and local services available to the Benton County community.

Starting early Friday morning and continuing through Saturday, Benton County Health Services provided dental exams, X-rays, fillings and extractions to 48 people, many of whom had never had dental care prior to this event. As Friday progressed and the aroma of hamburger patties sizzling on the grill filled the air, Lincoln Elementary School and Corvallis Parks and Recreation's Escuelita de Fútbol youth soccer program and the community barbeque commenced.

On Saturday and Sunday, The Mobile Screening Unit, sponsored by the Corvallis Mid-Valley Lions Club, screened 135 community members for diabetes, high blood pressure, glaucoma and hearing and vision issues. In particular, one young man was found to have undiagnosed diabetes. With a blood glucose level of 488, he was sent to the emergency room, as well as connected to a primary care provider and community resources. Using iPads and wireless technology, Benton County staff members scheduled appointments at the Community Health Centers for those needing further medical care. In addition to the health screenings, OSU College of Pharmacy students and staff administered 39 vaccinations.

Other event activities included team soccer competitions, Zumba, DJ entertainment and an awards ceremony. A Resource Fair on Saturday provided health-related information from organizations such as First Alternative Co-op, CARDV, OSU Extension Service and College of Forestry and Cover Oregon, to name a few. The grassroots community organization Organización de Latinas Unidas and the Parks and Recreation Youth Volunteer Core led family activities on Saturday and Sunday.

Behind every smile, screening and activity, a sense of community solidified the very foundation of this year's Soccer Tournament and Family Weekend's success. Whether one was competing in the Soccer Tournament or dancing the day away with Zumba, all were Campeones de Salud.