

# THE COMEBACK

ISSUE

## **ON THE COVER**

Megan Smith, a swimmer from Eugene, Oregon, is training for the 2024 Paralympics in Paris. She has been blind since birth. Smith was photographed exclusively for *Flux* by Ian Enger at the University of Oregon's pool. To read Smith's story, turn to page 14.

In recognition of Smith's story and our desire to make the magazine accessible to a wider audience, we decided to use Braille for our nameplate and cover line. (The Comeback Issue.) Kendall Porter, our assistant art director, executed the design after consulting with Smith and the university's Accessible Education Center. We are further increasing the accessibility of our content by including audio listening on our website, [fluxoregon.com](http://fluxoregon.com).



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# letter from **THE** **EDITOR**

I remember first picking up a copy of *Flux* during my freshman year at the University of Oregon. The elegant design and evocative photos immediately caught my attention. But what pulled me in was the writing. The stories captured something beyond Oregon's scenic rivers, unabating downpours and viridescent beauty — they spoke to the human experience.

This magazine has tackled the relevant issues facing the Pacific Northwest for the past 31 years, and each edition reflects something unique. When I took on the role of editor-in-chief, I knew that I wanted to carry on the legacy of *Flux*, but I was determined to push the envelope with the stories we told and how we told them.

Through compelling storytelling elevated by creative design, this volume of *Flux* blends narrative and aesthetics in a way that strives to engage readers and illuminates the many incredible stories in our backyard.

Among the various issues our team took on this year, one thread binds them: recovery. Featuring stories of overcoming substance abuse, restoring the environment and reigniting a Paralympic dream, this *Flux* edition speaks to the passion and tenacity at the heart of where we live.

If I've learned anything over these past four years, it's that it takes time to recover. From overcoming a global pandemic to facing the relentless violence of racial injustice, we've had to accept that the healing process isn't easy. So many of these stories showcase the remarkable resilience of communities in times of tribulation. Our amazing team of editors, writers, photographers and designers put their hearts and souls into capturing these experiences.

Each member of our staff has taught me so much throughout this journey, and I appreciate the countless hours they all spent to help tell these stories. I would like to especially thank my fellow editors John Adair, Olivia Bennett, Ian Colgan, Kate Denhart, Mia Fast, Chandlor Henderson and Kendall Porter for their dedication to this magazine; it would be nothing without their contributions. I am also grateful for the guidance from Steven Asbury, Charlie Butler and Chris Pietsch.

If you can take anything away from this year's *Flux*, please take the chance to listen, learn and reflect on the issues of the Pacific Northwest. Underlying these stories of struggle is the hope that it takes to move forward — and come back stronger.



*EDITOR-IN-CHIEF*  
Nick LaMora

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*Flux is the capstone publication produced annually by students at the University of Oregon  
School of Journalism and Communication. We hope you enjoy this edition.*





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# TREND ALERT

## OREGON SUSTAINABLE FASHION

### DESIGNING *a greener* FUTURE

*How an aspiring designer used a dress to shed light on the fashion industry's lack of sustainable practices.*

**C**ara Huato wanted to craft a dress for an upcoming art exhibit. Rather than using traditional fabrics such as velvet or silk, she used chia seeds. Yes, chia seeds.

Huato's dress was inspired by four particular words: sustainability,

greenwashing, recycling and reusing. So, as she experimented with a variety of materials, she placed a handful of chia seeds on a paper towel in her bathroom cabinet. She misted them lightly, closed the drawer and waited five days for the seeds to sprout in the dark. She then used the chia seeds, along

with fake grass, to construct an off-the-shoulder dress meant to look like the mossy forest floor.

The dress, titled "The Industry," was far from sustainable. It required the purchase of new material and experimentation, and the final product wilted in the trash. But Huato, a University of Oregon student, used it to comment on the fashion industry's overproduction, overconsumption and lack of sustainable practices.

"It looks super sustainable because it's literally made out of grass," she said. "But the whole underside of it is made of plastic."

Huato sees sustainability as a conscious effort to be as environmentally friendly as one can be considering one's current position.

"I don't think I'll be the person who solves a lot of the big issues that I care about," Huato said. "But I think I'll hopefully be able to, as an artist and designer, make things that start those conversations for other people who have more direct impact."

*"I'll hopefully be able to, as an artist and designer, make things that start those conversations for other people who have more direct impact."*

— Cara Huato

*cara*



*Written by Romie Avivi Stuhl; Photographed by Clara Ferrer-Perry*



# RE-WORK *your wardrobe*

*Two fashion enthusiasts explore the world of sustainability and what it really means to dress green.*



*tammy* \*

*“I became more aware that my actions before were unsustainable and that I didn’t want to contribute to that behavior anymore.”*

— Tammy Corpuz

## TAMMY CORPUZ

Tammy Corpuz runs Biggest Little Thrifts in Eugene, Oregon, with her business partner, Dylan Harloff. One of Corpuz’s favorite parts of the reselling business is helping “someone feel good about what they’re wearing and express themselves in their own way.” She and Harloff learned much of what they know about sustainability in fashion from Corpuz’s sister. “Everything I do is inspired by my sister,” said Corpuz. “She inspired me to become more sustainable with clothing because we didn’t have a lot of money growing up. [She] taught me that thrifting is better for the environment because lots of clothes go to the landfill if they don’t resell.”

*amyah*



## AMYAH MILLNER

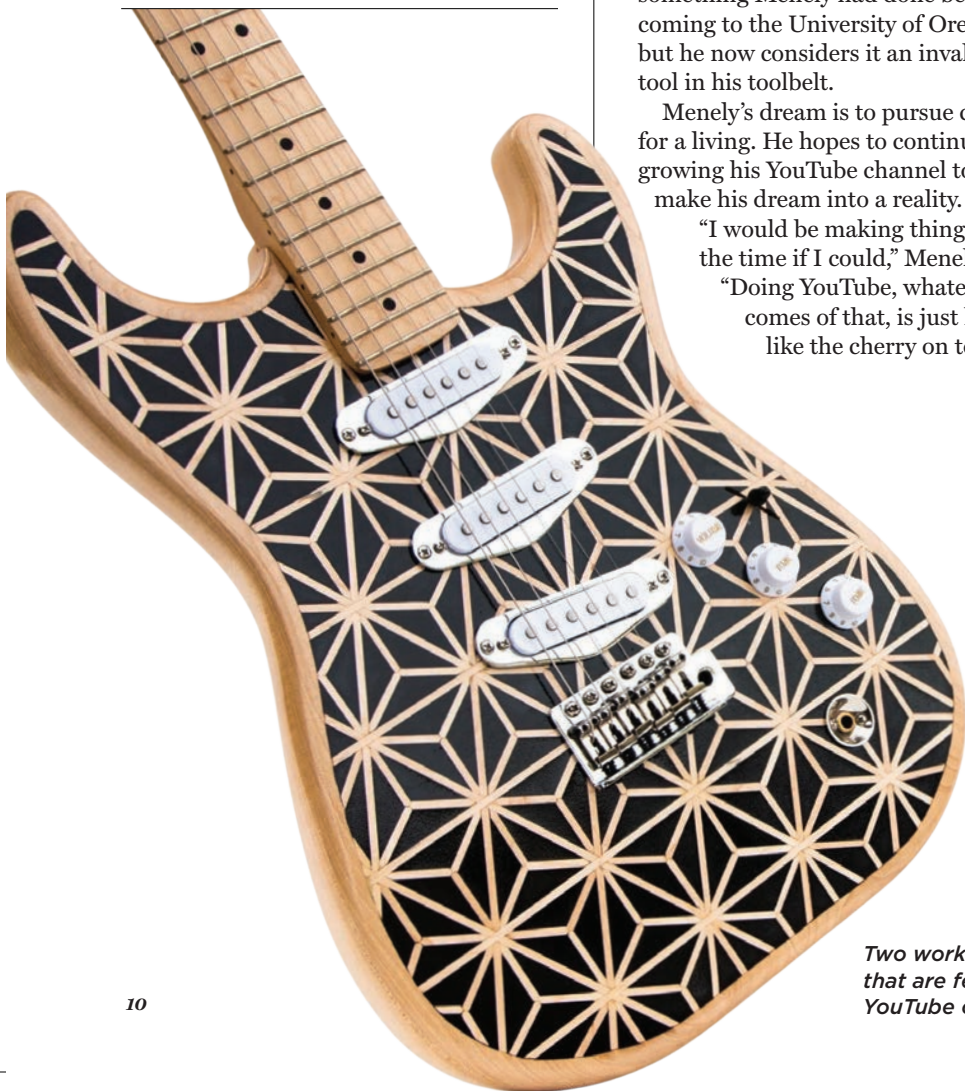
Amyah Millner, founder of Stellar Studio Co., explores a variety of arts, including crochet, jewelry making and block printing for her business and personal fulfillment. “When you know where the product is coming from,” said Millner, “being able to see what I can make with my own hands is fulfilling.” Millner describes herself as creative, and says it’s inspiring when she sees other people in clothing and accessories she made. For Millner, “Just to know that it comes from a good place instead of having children work in sweatshops.”

# BUILDING *a brand*

*Not only is Miles Menely producing his own woodworking designs, but he is becoming a YouTube sensation because of it.*

**M**iles Menely may only be 19 and a college freshman, but the design major at the University of Oregon has built a worldwide following for his woodworking process. As of mid-May, Menely, who goes by the YouTube handle Make With Miles, has more than 100,000 subscribers. His videos provide viewers with a glimpse into his creative woodworking process.

The secret to his social media popularity? “The idea of combining two completely unrelated things really is interesting to me,” he said, “especially if it’s two common things that people are familiar with.”



In a recent video, Menely shows how he built an electric guitar using epoxy and Kumiko, a Japanese woodworking technique where complex patterns are created by thin, wooden pieces connected by pressure alone. The use of old and new techniques caught the attention of over one million viewers, many of whom were left amazed by Menely’s skills.

“I’m 64, and I’ve seen master woodworkers create wonderful things,” one comment read, “but this is something even they would be impressed with.”

Menely, who is originally from Portland, Oregon, produces videos while pursuing a degree in product design. Through the program, he says, he hopes to improve his sketching skills and immerse himself in a variety of mediums. Planning projects isn’t something Menely had done before coming to the University of Oregon, but he now considers it an invaluable tool in his toolbox.

Menely’s dream is to pursue crafting for a living. He hopes to continue growing his YouTube channel to help make his dream into a reality.

“I would be making things all the time if I could,” Menely said. “Doing YouTube, whatever comes of that, is just kind of like the cherry on top.”



*Scan the Spotify code above to check out the FLUX '23 playlist!*



*@makewithmiles*



*Two works of Miles Menely that are featured on his YouTube channel.*

*Written by Romie Avivi Stuhl*



# CLIMBING ESSENTIALS

Your guide for getting started!

## 1 *chalk* BAG

## *climbing* SHOES 2

## 3 *sturdy* HARNESS

## *ATC* BELAY DEVICE 4

## 5 *boulder* BRO BEANIE



# climbing THROUGH OREGON

While Eugene may be known as Track Town USA, the city has rapidly become a hub for another sport: rock climbing. The city boasts a wide range of terrain and a vibrant sense of community, and rock climbing has college students hitting both the gyms and outdoors. Kade Wilson and Talia Simon, two University of Oregon students, share how this hobby has impacted their lives and what newcomers need to know to get started.

### Talia Simon, 21

Simon has been climbing since she was 7 years old. “My dad used to take my sister and me to the gym to just mess around on the wall,” said Simon. Now, she is a more serious climber and has even started teaching climbing lessons at Elevation Bouldering Gym, in Eugene. Simon has found the sport a great way to make friends, get outside, and develop a new skill. “If I didn’t start climbing in a gym,” she said, “I probably wouldn’t have started going outside more and pushing myself to go out and try new things.”

### Kade Wilson, 22

Wilson was first introduced to climbing when he visited Joshua Tree, California, with his buddies two years ago. He immediately fell in love with the sport and bought climbing shoes the next day. Currently, Wilson works at the University of Oregon Rock District and enjoys the community it provides. “It is a very supportive and interconnected group of people,” he said. Something he wishes he knew before getting started is avoiding “T-rex arms.” Instead, he says keeping your arms straight allows for your larger back and leg muscles to do more work. “Learn how to fall, first of all, and keep your arms straight.”



## WHERE to get started

### UO ROCK DISTRICT

Inside the UO Rec Center, this is best for your first day; offers free gear for first-timers.

### ELEVATION BOULDERING GYM

Best for beginners looking to experience a variety of doable routes.

### COLUMNS

Best for beginners who have their own gear and are ready for the next challenge.



# OREGON AUTHORS

*Add their books to  
your reading list!*

## 1 PUTASTA REANG

### *Ma and Me*

University of Oregon alum Putsata Reang explores familial relationships, generational trauma and cultural expectations in her debut memoir. When Reang was 11 months old, she and her family fled Cambodia in a harrowing journey to the United States. The book examines Reang's relationship with her mother, especially after coming out as bisexual.

## 2 OMAR EL AKKAD

### *What Strange Paradise*

Akkad's second novel follows 9-year-old Amir as he survives a refugee passage and washes up on the shore of a small island. He meets Vanna, a teenage girl who is native to the island yet lacks a sense of belonging. The book offers a unique perspective on the migrant crisis and dares readers to redefine hope.

## 3 CALLUM ANGUS

### *A Natural History of Transition*

This Oregon Book Awards finalist is a collection of short stories that uncover the beauty and pitfalls of transitioning. Though each tale is distinct, Angus interweaves them to illuminate the magic of transformation.

## a Q&A WITH OMAR EL AKKAD



Omar El Akkad is a Portland-based author and journalist. Akkad was born in Egypt, raised in Qatar and studied in Canada. Since moving to Portland in 2013, Akkad has published two novels. His first, *American War*, won the Pacific Northwest Booksellers' Award and the Oregon Book Award for fiction. His most recent novel, *What Strange Paradise*, received similar accolades and was chosen as a best book of the year by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and NPR.

### ***How has your cultural experiences affected your perspective and experiences within the literary industry?***

"I don't have a very good answer to the question, 'Where are you from?' I've moved around and I've

been a guest on someone else's land since I was 5 years old. That affects the kind of writing I do. My characters are almost universally people who are similarly unanchored."

### ***Do you have any advice for young writers?***

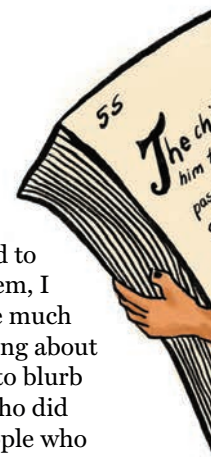
"The canonical pieces of writing advice are always the same: read as much as you can and write as much as you can. And the reason those two pieces of advice work is because they're essentially a writing education in and of themselves ... To that I will only add: be kind to yourself."

### ***How has living and working in Oregon affected your experiences in the publishing industry?***

"I didn't know anything about Oregon when I moved here, and I certainly didn't know how vibrant the literary scene is here.

So many writers in this state have been incredibly kind to me, and without them, I really wouldn't have much of a career. I'm talking about people who agreed to blurb my books, people who did events with me, people who showed me the ropes.

In addition, we have Literary Arts, which is an incredible organization that does all kinds of events. I've been fortunate enough to be part of the Oregon Book Awards in multiple years and just to see that community is really good for the soul. Plus, we have Powell's, you know?"



**4** **LEE**  
VAN DER VOO

**As the World Burns**

In 2015, 21 young adults filed a lawsuit against the United States. They asserted that their constitutional rights to life, liberty and property were violated by the government's inaction towards climate change. *As the World Burns* recounts the year leading up to the trial, reporting on climate justice through the eyes of the youth.

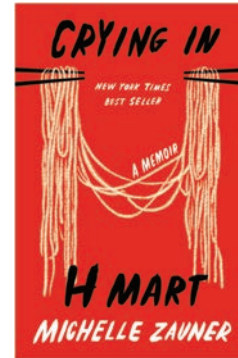
**5** **RENÉE**  
WATSON

**Piecing Me Together**

The young adult novel dives into issues of race, class and self-acceptance through the lens of 16-year-old Jade, an African American student attending a majority white private school in Portland, Oregon. The novel defies stereotypes and provides a rare, coming-of-age perspective on social dynamics and identity.



what are **students**  
**READING?**



**Crying in H Mart**

"It really makes you think a lot about life and mother-daughter relationships. It was so meaningful that it made me cry."

Gabrielle Soto, 20

**Convenience Store Woman**

"Convenience Store Woman offers an uncommon yet helpful perspective. It emphasizes simplicity while encouraging readers to consider their true calling, no matter how big or small."

Maddy Rose, 19



**Daisy Jones & The Six**

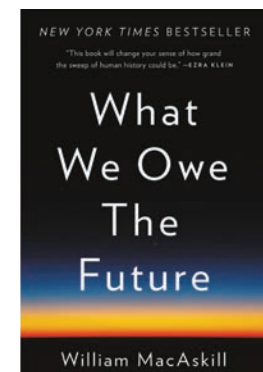
"The storytelling was so impressive. I felt really engrossed in the story and the time period."

Kate Houston, 18

**What We Owe The Future**

"It changed my own perspective on the future and how we come together as a society. It dealt a lot with climate change and gave me a different way to look at the world."

Cash Kowalski, 18





“**HOW CAN I  
to see  
HOW THIS  
STOPPV  
ends.**”

**Megan Smith's dream went unfulfilled once. She's determined not to let it happen again.**

*Written by* ELLIOTT DEINS *Photographed by* JOHN ADAIR, IAN ENGER & ANDREA SECCHI









***“Cherry Bomb,” by The Runaways, echoes off the pool’s chlorinated water.***

It seems too early — 6:15 a.m. — for the rock classic, but the few swimmers heading to get workouts in before the sun rises don’t seem to mind.

Among the swimmers is Megan Smith. On this morning, like most mornings, Smith is led by her seeing-eye dog, Suri, from the locker room to the bleachers beside the University of Oregon’s pool. She’s with her coach, Taylor Cole. Guided by his hand, Smith sets down her water bottle, snorkel and kickboard at one end of the pool before entering the water from the poolside stairs.

Before her workout can begin, Smith swims to the opposite end of the pool and attaches a purple pool noodle to the lane line 3 feet from the wall. What some would consider a children’s toy, the noodle plays a vital role; it will warn Smith of the approaching cement wall.

“All right, my dude,” Cole, 33, says, giving the warm-up set. “The hard work doesn’t start until 30 minutes in.” Smith nods, pushing off the wall, hands in a tight streamline overhead like a torpedo slicing through the water.

Over the next hour, while Smith swims the equivalent of 30 football fields, 13-year-old Suri snoozes next to the bleachers. Smith’s jacket separates her from the cool tile.

“Twenty-four six! Come on, kiddo!” Cole urges Smith, calling out splits to the tenth of a second during the final sets of hard backstroke sprints. “There’s another gear in there. Show me that 22.9. Prove me wrong! Three, two, one and go.”

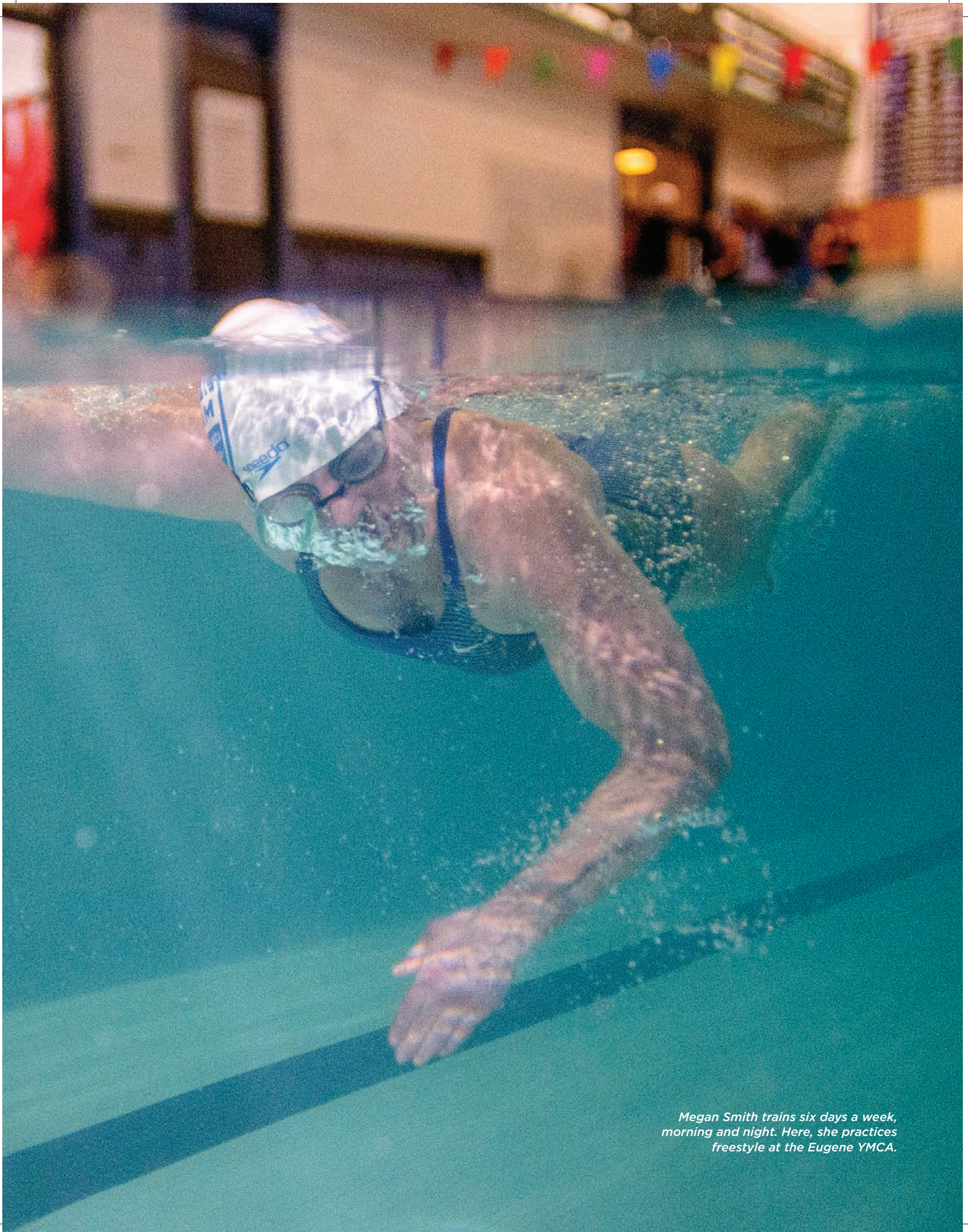
She gulps air, launches backward and completes submerged dolphin kicks



***“The tough love is to get younger athletes to commit. [Smith’s] been committed for 15 years. She always shows up. Now, we just have to put in the work.”***

— Taylor Cole





*Megan Smith trains six days a week, morning and night. Here, she practices freestyle at the Eugene YMCA.*





*Smith's morning workouts get her in shape while Suri gets some time to snooze.*

before breaking the surface and attacking the water. She swims better pissed off, Cole will later say.

**Megan Smith, 33, was born** with bilateral microphthalmia, a birth defect in which both her eyes did not develop fully. She doesn't let being blind define her.

"It's not even the most interesting thing about me," she says. Being consistently underestimated made her extra competitive. "When people are impressed that you can go out and get yourself a cup of coffee, it's really a hit to your self-esteem."

What no one can doubt is Smith's prowess and her persistence in

the pool. The before-sunrise swims are nothing new to her. Many mornings as a teen she was working out while high school classmates were sleeping in. At 17 she left her family and her hometown of Eugene, Oregon, and moved 1,300 miles away to train with some of the nation's most elite swimmers. At one point she was ranked third in the world in multiple events. Her goal: to make the 2008 U.S. Paralympic team. But just when it looked like she would fulfill that dream, it came crashing down.

Now, over a decade since that unfulfilled quest, followed by a self-imposed sabbatical from the sport, Smith is back in the pool swimming twice a day, six days a week with a ticket to the 2024 Paralympics in Paris on her mind.

Smith may have taken time off from swimming but not from dreaming.

"The world's gotten a lot faster, significantly faster," Cole says on the evolution of swimming during the years when Smith was away from the sport. "Now, she's like third in the U.S. She's not in the top 20 in the world right now, but we're getting there."

**Growing up in Eugene,** Smith says she was never treated differently by her family. She had chores like her other siblings. "Blind infants tend to withdraw if you don't push them," Smith's mother, Beth Smith, says. "I just always thought that she's going to be like everyone else. She's just going to learn it in her own way." That included swimming.

Smith always enjoyed the water but never contemplated competing until 2004 when she was 15. She wanted to find a group of people to hang out with at Sheldon High School. A friend recommended she join the swim team. She admits to not being good at first.

"I had no idea how to do it efficiently," Smith says. "I was in the back of lane one for a long time. I loved the team aspect of it. I was challenged by swimming — I loved that about it."

Her mother remembers that with no visual cues, she would zig-zag down the 25-meter pool, bouncing from lane line to lane line. "It was like a contact sport when she first started," Beth says. "She went boink, boink, boink, boink, boink all the way down the lane until she figured out how to swim straight."

Smith says she initially wanted to be a sprinter because that's what everyone wants to do when they start. But she found a groove in the middle distances, and her times started dropping. She was featured in a newspaper article in which a coach from the Paralympics, a competition she never heard of, said she was slow now, but with hard work, she could possibly compete on the international stage. She committed to the dream and joined a local club team. In 2007, at 17, she was invited to train with Team USA at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

“It was definitely hard,” Beth says about having her daughter leave home for the first time. “I remember crying a lot when we dropped her off at the airport.”

From 15 to 18 years old, Smith went from novice to international competitor, moving up the world rankings to third in the 400-meter freestyle. But travel and competition began to take a toll. Prerace jitters would start a week out, she says. Constantly yawning, shaking and vomiting before races, she’d become sleepy and dissociate from reality. The nerves would burn her body’s adrenaline before she even got on the diving blocks.

Nerves aside, Smith enjoyed success. She won a bronze medal at the 2007 Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which boosted her confidence heading into 2008 when the next Paralympic Games would be held. But six months before the trials in Minneapolis, the event she was ranked third in the world in, the 400-meter freestyle, was cut from the program. The 50- and 100-meter freestyle were still options for her, but they were distances she had not spent the last two years training for. She tried to adapt by scrambling to put on muscle and learning to sprint properly.

“I did pretty well,” Smith says. “It just wasn’t enough time for me to make the team that year. You make it or you don’t. It’s not an excuse.”

Smith moved back in with her parents in Eugene. Her family was supportive, but the transition to normal life was difficult.



*Even though Smith is blind, she still uses swim goggles. She dangles a pair and shows off her tattoo, which reads Morningstar, her middle name, in Braille.*

“It’s hard to convey that disappointment to someone who hasn’t done anything like that,” Smith says. She was burnt out. Her times weren’t improving enough to justify spending all those hours in the pool or paying for four more years of club swimming and the constant travel.

Around the time her swim career was ending, Smith got approved for a seeing-eye dog. She had to attend a two-week course to train Suri and herself.

“We went up for graduation,” Beth recalls. “It’s a real tearjerker, of course, because the puppy raisers hand over the dog to the person. There’s all these beautiful labs. They’re calm and just great. Then up comes Suri and Megan. People are applauding and Suri thinks it’s all for her. She’s bouncing around and we were like, ‘We got the one guide dog that’s crazy.’ They’re a good match, honestly.”

Suri’s always been there for Smith. She filled the void left by swimming — and at times stopped Smith from walking into traffic. “She’s saved my

***“I was in the back of lane one for a long time. I loved the team aspect of it. I was challenged by swimming and I loved that about it.”***

**— Megan Smith**





*In order to compete in the 2024 Paralympics, Smith must compete in the trials next summer. She says she is most confident in the 400-meter freestyle.*

life physically and mentally,” Smith says.

Smith also learned what it was like to be a typical 20-year-old whose life didn’t revolve around a pool.

She got her own apartment, went out with friends, and got a job as an accessibility analyst for a tech company. She also pursued her other passion: music. In 2021, Smith recorded a nine-song album, *Sight*. She grew up singing with her family while her father played the piano. She still performs at any opportunity, including karaoke at a local bar in Springfield, Oregon.

“She was fearless,” Beth recalls about times when her daughter first performed as a child. “She’d just get up on these stages and not be afraid. It’s amazing because she couldn’t see anybody. She thought she was as big as everyone else.”

Normal life was fine for a decade, but Smith started feeling the competitive itch again in 2020. As if by kismet, she ran into a high school friend who at the time was dating Cole. Smith mentioned wanting to swim again, got Cole’s number, and restarted the journey.

Practices were casual at first, Cole says. Smith had spent much of the past six years working from a chair at a tech company. Still, her intent was clear: to qualify for the 2024 Paralympics in Paris.

Although he’s been coaching for 15 years, Cole didn’t comprehend how much work it would take: picking Smith up for morning practice, spending extra time in the weight room with her, and balancing her coaching needs with those of the swimmers in his master’s swim program. It took six months to bust the rust formed from the 12-year layoff.





"I'm not a shoo-in," Smith said, "but I have to see how this story ends."

Smith is committed, coachable and a little stubborn, Cole says. She doesn't need much besides tweaking her technique. "The tough love is to get younger athletes to commit," he says. "She's been committed for 15 years. She always shows up. Now, we just have to put in the work."

Cole has learned how to teach proper technique to his visually impaired swimmer. Sometimes, he'll simply explain to her from the pool deck the way to position her arm for an efficient

breaststroke; Smith usually picks up on the correction. Other times, she'll get out of the pool and Cole will physically move her arms to show the correct form.

**The morning workout is almost over.** Smith has gone up and back the 25-yard pool more than 100 times. "She's tired today," Cole says as Smith touches the wall one last time. He checks his stopwatch. She did that last 25-yards in just over 23 seconds. "We started to really kick her ass in the gym on Monday."

Smith hangs on the wall for a few

seconds and drinks from her bottle. "You look tired," he tells her. "It's good."

"Thanks, I guess," Smith says before starting another lung-scorching sprint.

Cole speedwalks down the pool deck, keeping up with his athlete. As she touches the far wall, he checks his stopwatch and raises his arms in victory. "22.7! 'Bout time, dammit. It's always been in there. We just had to find it." ☆





# The ROYAL SLUG QUEENS

They don outrageous costumes. They bribe their way to victory. What motivates this unusual group of royalty?

*Written by* **BRIANNA MURSHEL** *Photographed by* **MADDIE STELLINGWERF**



One summer night in 1993, Sarah Ulerick prepared for a night in front of a lively crowd in downtown Eugene, Oregon. As the warm air and spirited energy filled the area, Ulerick found herself at the center of attention.

Dressed in a giant country western outfit, vibrant red cowboy boots and a 10-gallon cowboy hat, Ulerick took to a stage to perform the song “Friends in Low Places” by Garth Brooks. Ulerick was determined to wow the crowd, so she changed the lyrics to be about slugs.

Why slugs? Ulerick was pulling out all the stops in hopes of earning the title of SLUG Queen. That’s right, SLUG Queen.

Since 1983, Eugene has hosted an annual summer SLUG Queen competition and coronation. It’s a competition that fits with Eugene’s quirky,

countercultural reputation. Instead of crowning a beauty queen as many pageants typically do, this competition crowns someone who isn’t afraid to be themselves and represent the town as a SLUG Queen. The Society for the Legitimization of the Ubiquitous Gastropod (SLUG) Queen competition acknowledges Eugene’s soggy climate. That’s why a current queen is referred to as the “raining” queen and all those who have been crowned are referred to as Old Queens. The Old Queens and a local celebrity judge the annual event, selecting the newest queen based on costume creativity, a three-minute performance and their answer to an on-the-spot question.

And with no official rules, bribes are welcomed, so Ulerick decided she wanted to use one to make an impression. The night she sought the crown, Ulerick had two large pizzas topped with green rubber slugs delivered in hopes that the meal would sway the judges to select her. “The pizza was definitely a hit,” Ulerick said, “and a great sight gag.”









Her bribe worked. That night Ulerick, also known as Queen Bananita Sluginisky, became the 11th SLUG Queen.

**T**he annual competition creates an energy when contestants and Old Queens dress in all sorts of colors, fabrics and accessories. Take the 2010 SLUG Queen, Jerril Nilson. Graphic designer by day, Queen Slugasana by night, she meandered through the competition in a weighted wig consisting of curled multicolor telephone wire she had

collected as a child. To complete her look, she wore a slimy green, pink and teal outfit with many reveals, including fans that opened at her arms and hips. Her big bustle had an 8-foot train with helium balloons that could hover from 3 to 5 feet. Each time she strutted in the outfit, balloons had to be attached by tiny clips and velcro lining.

“Sometimes the [balloons] would suffer fates including becoming untethered to the train — sometimes a misstep might cause a burst,” Nilson said.

Nilson is just one of the many queens with crafty costumes. Maiya Becker took her knitting fingers and strutted the stage in 2012 as Queen Sadie Slimy Stitches. Inspired





*Jenette Kime, the 2019 & 2020 SLUG Queen winner, is surrounded by her slimy green outfits and her extravagant shoe collection. They give a taste of her SLUG Queen alter ego, Queen SluGoddess Slime Shine.*

# LONG MAY THEY RAIN

by the musical *Wicked*, which she had once worked on as a stagehand, Becker made a costume out of monochromatic green yarn scraps similar to the musical’s eccentric emerald-colored dresses.

One idea led to another, and it was mentioned that the SLUG Queens would love the gowns. “It gave me the idea of knitting an entire gown inspired by the dresses,” Becker said. She didn’t have any friends competing, so she decided to take on the challenge herself.

Becker knitted 30 slugs, each one representing the Old Queens, with

silver organza ribbon made from thin, sheer fabric. She also crafted her accessories — a parasol and a pet slug — from yarn. All her knitting paid off. Becker became the 30th SLUG Queen.

Known for their fashion statements, SLUG Queens each have a staple that sets them apart from other queens. Full of colorful and extravagant footwear, Jenette Kime’s walk-in closet is like a portal into Queen SluGoddess Slime Shine’s lair. Even after her win in 2019, Kime became known for her boots.

“My thing was boots,” Kime said. “For every time I had to come out, I had a different pair of boots on.”

Not just any regular boots, but tall, vibrant, platform boots with a lime green and hot pink leopard print set.



The costumes are just the first step to winning the judges over. Creativity goes a long way in this competition, especially when it comes to artful incentives.

For example, Debbie Williamson-Smith went to lengths during the 2011 competition. One early summer day,



Williamson-Smith went to a restaurant in Eugene an hour before a secret meeting of Old Queens. She instructed the bartender to pour bubbly drinks when the queens arrived. She also placed a cake shaped like a slimy, shell-less terrestrial gastropod on their table.

Williamson-Smith's other bribes went right along with her SLUG Queen character. Her alter ego, Queen Holly GoSlugly, came from the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. "Since I was based on Holly Golightly, I delivered my bribes in jewelry boxes. But instead of Tiffany Blue, they were GoSlugly green," Williamson-Smith said. Cartoon-like SLUG Queen magnets and handmade

ceramic slugs complete with different colored glazes sat in all the boxes. "Then I had my helpers pass them out during the competition," she said. Her first bribe led to her 2011 win.

When it comes to the performance section, the contestants have three minutes to sway the judges. Emily Semple, also known as Queen Marigold Gastropodia the Magnificent, created a memorable stage presence in 1991.

Semple, who today is a Eugene City councilor, took on vacuum cleaner tricks as her talent. While chatting with people about what to do about her talent, someone suggested she do tricks with a

vacuum cleaner. She took the suggestion and made it into a reality.

At the start of her performance, she introduced the vacuum as her friend and associate. Throughout her performance, she utilized all the vacuum's features. She turned on the exhaust option and balanced a blow-up beach ball in the air. Queen Marigold Gastropodia the Magnificent slithered the vibrating vacuum all over her back. For the finale, she blew air into a round Quaker Oats container wrapped in green fabric to match her gown. Seconds later, confetti filled the surrounding area.

Semple said she "defied the law of gravity and broke the speed of slime."







**ABOVE** “Old Queen” is the title given to queens who have reigned over a decade. Maiya Becker, who wears this pin, was crowned in 2012.

**LEFT** Debbie Williamson-Smith, aka Queen Holly GoSlugly (left), and Maiya Becker, aka Queen Sadie Slimy Stitches, walk through the Eugene Saturday Market. These Old Queens’ long-lasting friendship is representative of the community formed through SLUG Queens.

**T**he royal slugs are fueled by community support and involvement. In recent years, after being crowned, queens have chosen a passion project to support.

During her year as SLUG Queen, Nilson visited local schools in her costume. Nilson wanted to partner with the School Garden Project of Lane County, a nonprofit that provides hands-on gardening and education to local public schools. At Edison Elementary, the children were enraptured by her vivacious dress.

“I was always happy to visit school kids because it gave an opportunity to understand the importance of slugs in every garden and forest,” Nilson explained. “They are master composters and help turn our food scraps and other yard waste into rich soil.”

In 2022, Alyssa Buttons-Garten was crowned Queen Sativa Slugworth, the 40th Slug Queen. Before her crowning, Buttons-Garten worked at cannabis camps in Northern California and became familiar with people imprisoned for possession of pot. “I saw so many people that I loved get taken down for small amounts of cannabis,” she said. “And some of those people are still in jail.”

With 75,100 followers on TikTok and 1,160 on Instagram, Buttons-Garten uses her platform to bring awareness to criminalizing people for minor

cannabis use. “There needs to be an era of activism,” said Buttons-Garten.

For instance, the day after 4/20, Buttons-Garten dressed in a hot pink off-the-shoulder dress, a fuzzy lime green head wrap “that looked like a mug of weed,” and 9-inch neon green platform boots with googly eyes glued to them. At a Eugene pub, she hosted a benefit show in support of The Last Prisoner Project, a nonprofit organization aimed to end cannabis criminalization and help those imprisoned for minor cannabis crimes. The event raised over \$300 for the organization.

“I think it’s really important to be like, ‘Yes, it’s awesome that we can all smoke weed, get high and take our little gummies to go to sleep,’” she said. “This is a rebellious thing that they’re now allowing us to have, and there’s still some rebels that are still paying the price.”

The quirks of a SLUG Queen don’t just go away after their coronation. Old Queens leave trails of their trademarks throughout the Eugene community.

On a breezy morning in April, Williamson-Smith, Queen Holly GoSlugly, strolled the Saturday Market in downtown Eugene. She wore a pink and white polka dot dress and a neon green wig as she stopped at the occasional vendor and gifted chicken stickers to those who recognized her royalty. During her queen year, she began keeping chickens. She’s known in the SLUG community for her love of chickens. Now that Williamson-Smith judges some of the SLUG Queen competitions, any bribe related to chickens receives a gold star. It’s apparent to Williamson-Smith that when a bribe like this happens, the person running knows the Old Queens well. “I know they took the time to research me because we’re a small subset of a community,” she said. “Once a queen, always a queen.” ☆



# *a furry* FUTURE

Despite their ecological and cultural significance, sea otters haven't inhabited the Oregon coast since the early 1980s. Is it time to bring these lovable mammals back?

*Written by* **OLIVIA BENNETT**  
*Photographed by* **KAI KANZER**



Along Route 101 on the Washington coast, almost 200 miles west of Seattle, tourists and locals can stop to look out into the Pacific Ocean. They watch as waves go on for miles. Rocks tower from the ocean floor and sea lions rest atop their surface. Seagulls fly in the air, circling the ocean waters.

While many come for the vast views, there are some at these spots in search of what rides past the waves. Dr. Shawn Larson is one who makes the 156-mile drive from Hansville, Washington, to Washington's coast. The senior conservation research manager at the Seattle Aquarium monitors sea otters and the ever-changing habitat. As Larson looks through her telescope at the Kalaloch Lodge in Olympic National Park on a windy, March afternoon, she spots what she came for.

"There's a raft of about 200 to 300 sea otters," Larson says, pointing out into the ocean.

To the naked eye, what Larson sees seems like a small brown dot riding over the waves. But with a telescope, she observes hundreds of sea otters, some foraging for

food, others holding their pups and all of them riding the Pacific's waves.

Once a month, Larson travels to different locations along the Washington coast to track both the number of sea otters and their activity, including their eating habits. Besides the research, Larson says she enjoys looking at sea otters in their natural habitat.

"No matter what they are doing," Larson says. "Whether they are eating, sleeping or playing with other otters or pups, it's just great."

From La Push to Neah Bay, towns that span the northern Washington coast, sea otters can be spotted in the ocean floating on their backs or gliding through the waters. In Washington, the sea otter population is upward of 3,000. In the waters of southeast Alaska, the numbers are even greater, with roughly 25,000 sea otters. And from Monterey Bay to Baja California, sea otters have become an attraction in recent years.

But on the Oregon Coast, there are none.

"Every time I see an otter out on the outer Washington coast, I'm reminded of their history and that



*The Oregon Coast Aquarium in Newport is one of the few places in the state to see sea otters. After a morning of activities, Oswald rests on his back and basks in the sun.*



we are so lucky to have them here,” Larson says. “Oregon and northern California aren’t so lucky, but there’s efforts to reestablish the sea otters there.”

**It’s hard to look at sea otters** and not instantly *awe* at their cuteness. The majority of the time, this sea mammal floats effortlessly on its back. After diving down into the ocean to find their meal, sea otters come up to the surface and use tools, like rocks, to smash open different shellfish and then quickly devour them. Their fur looks silky as they swim through the cold waters.

Sea otters’ fur is what has made for such a rich history along the Pacific Northwest coast. Sea otters have the thickest fur of any sea mammal, and during the fur trade from 1741 to 1867, they were overhunted for their fur. In the 1970s, a program was launched to reintroduce the sea otters, but by the early 1980s they were all gone.

Now, more than 40 years later, another plan to reintroduce the creature is under serious consideration.

Since 2018, the Elakha Alliance, a nonprofit organization formed by tribal, nonprofit and conservation leaders, has worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to bring sea otters back to the Oregon coast.

The Alliance has been showcasing the benefits of reintroducing sea otters to schools, fishing communities and aquariums. Chanel Hason, the alliance’s director of outreach and community relations, goes to schools and retirement centers and even holds a beer festival to help educate people about sea otters and their significance.

“They are way more than just a cute, super furry critter in the ocean,” Hason said. “They play a large role in the ecosystem and for tribal culture.”

Sea otters are an example of a keystone species. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, such species, even in small numbers, “can have a large impact” on their environment. In shallow water ecosystems, sea otters can be a predator as well as protector of the environment. The sea otters’ role in the ocean’s kelp forest habitat is an example.

Kelp forests grow from the ocean floor; some species can reach a height of 150 feet. Research shows

kelp can absorb carbon emissions. But kelp’s carbon-eating ways are endangered by sea urchins that feed off the brown algae. Michele Zwartjes, field supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said sea otters help increase the density and coverage of kelp forests because they prey on urchins. Zwartjes said that sea otters can have “extremely positive impacts in the areas where the [habitat grows].”

As a keystone species, sea otters “have so many cascading beneficial effects on multiple species, and increases in biodiversity and bringing back sea grasses and kelps,” Zwartjes said. “So, all of those things would all flow from just this one animal coming back.”

Bringing them back to the Oregon coast could help restore a balance that was lost years ago. In British Columbia, with the presence of sea otters and an expanding kelp forest, there has been an “increase of 4.4-8.7 million metric tons worth” of carbon storage, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services.

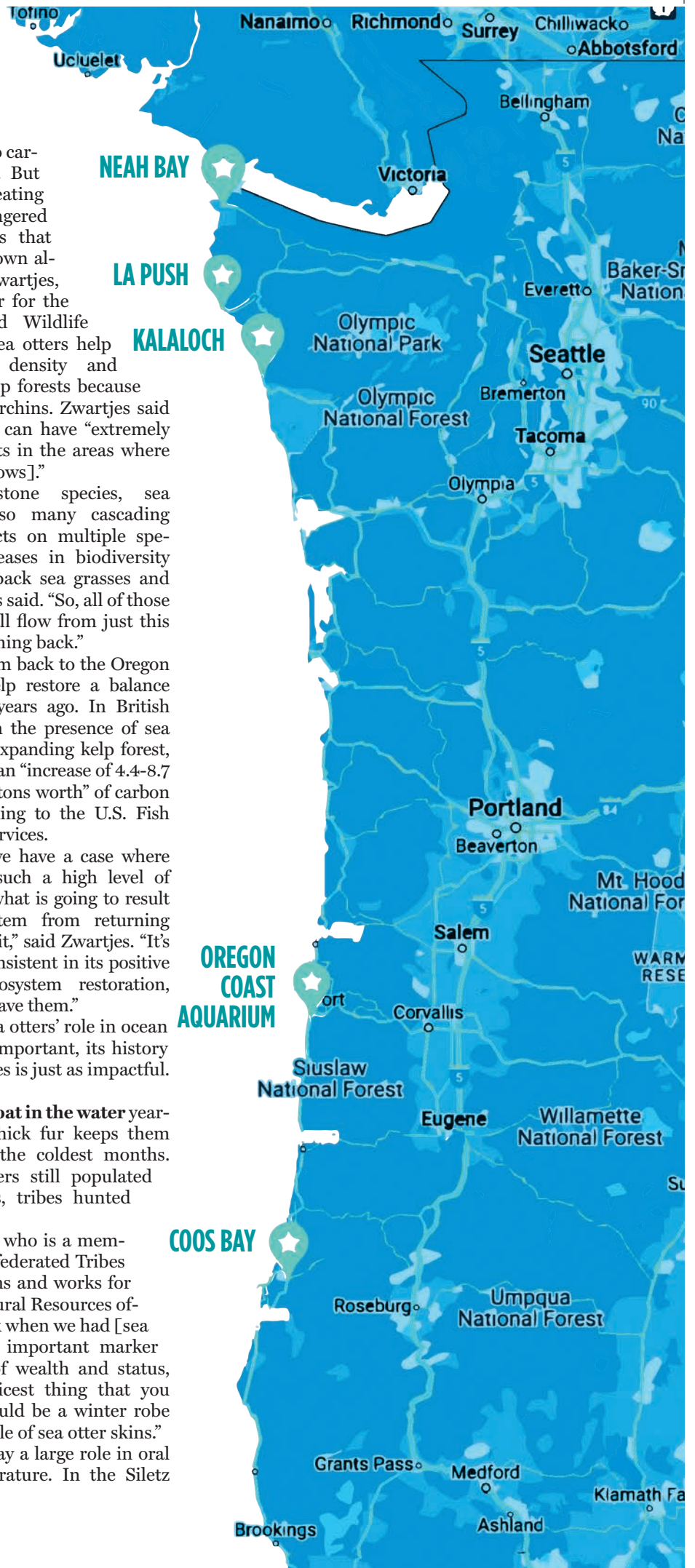
“Rarely do we have a case where we can have such a high level of confidence in what is going to result in the ecosystem from returning that animal to it,” said Zwartjes. “It’s just been so consistent in its positive effects on ecosystem restoration, wherever you have them.”

While the sea otters’ role in ocean ecosystems is important, its history in tribal cultures is just as impactful.

**Sea otters float in the water** year-round; their thick fur keeps them warm during the coldest months. When sea otters still populated Oregon waters, tribes hunted for their furs.

Peter Hatch, who is a member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians and works for the tribe’s Cultural Resources office, said, “Back when we had [sea otters], a real important marker for a person of wealth and status, kind of the nicest thing that you could own, would be a winter robe made of a couple of sea otter skins.”

Sea otters play a large role in oral traditional literature. In the Siletz





tribe there is a story of a young Coos woman going out to live with the sea otter people and marrying them. That interrelationship story traveled down generations and “ensures the prosperity of both,” said Hatch. He described this genre as showing the “boundary between human people and animal more fluid than most people see it as today.”

This genre is present throughout tribes in the northwest and it affects the approach tribes take with these animals and how they treat them. It can become obvious in these stories that otters are more than just a resource for the tribe; they are “relatives,” Hatch suggested.

When Hatch was growing up in Portland, Oregon, in the late 1990s, he and his father, Dave, were building a sailboat. Wanting to give the boat a name, the two searched in the Gill’s Dictionary of the Chinook Jargon and came across the word E-lāk’-ka, which means sea otter.

*“They are way more than just a cute, super furry critter in the ocean.”*

— Chanel Hason

“That sent dad down the path of inquiry,” said Hatch. In the succeeding years, his father would advocate for the return of the sea otter. But it wouldn’t be until 2018, and after Dave Hatch had passed away, that the Elakha Alliance was formed as a nonprofit. The Alliance is trying to “restore the ancient cultural connections between sea otters and coastal Indigenous people.”

The extinction of the sea otter in Oregon “is a recent thing humans did and that humans can undo,” Hatch said. “So, we should try.”

**Crates stacked with bags** of Dungeness crabs move throughout the docks at Hallmark Fisheries in Coos Bay, Oregon. Their claws poke out of the bags as they are prepared to get shipped around the world. In Oregon, Dungeness crabs make up one of the largest commercial fishing businesses. Over the past 10 years, their catch value, the amount of money fishermen receive from their catch, has ranged from \$33 to \$74 million annually.

These crab markets are one of the “most valuable single-species fisheries in Oregon,” according to the Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission. Crabs are also one of the sea otter’s favorite meals. Sea otters eat about 20-30% of their body weight a day.

*Story continues on page 34.*



*The bulk of the northwest sea otter population resides in Washington. Researchers are looking to reintroduce otters along the Oregon coast.*



An underwater photograph showing a school of fish swimming in a blue, sunlit environment. In the foreground, there is a large, dark, textured rock formation on the left and a piece of kelp with a round, bulbous base on the right. The fish are silhouetted against the bright light filtering down from the surface.

*Sea urchins endanger  
carbon-eating kelp.*





*At the Oregon Coast Aquarium, tall pieces of kelp sway in tanks. They can provide shelter and combat global warming for nearshore ecosystems.*





Since the creation of the Elakha Alliance, its members have reached out to communities to inform them about what the reintroduction would entail. The Alliance wanted to make sure those who could be affected by the reintroduction were included in the conversation from the start.

“It’s really about engaging community members on a monthly basis, including with various stakeholders and community organizations,” Hason said, “just to make sure everyone is on the same page. We answer their questions and concerns with factual data and evidence based on other relocations.”

Tim Novotony, executive director of the Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission, said that the Elakha Alliance has heard his concerns involving the crabs and fisheries, but that the commission is still “trepidatious.”

To preserve a sustainable fishery, the Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission follows certain rules. It doesn’t harvest female crabs and it makes sure not to harvest underage male crabs. “Obviously we don’t expect sea otters will adhere to those same rules, and that becomes a concern,” said Novotony.

*“There is going to be some impact to the fishery regardless.”*

— Tim Novotony

One reintroduction model that the commission could look to was when sea otters were placed in southeast Alaska. The population of sea otters grew more than expected, and the mammals decimated the crab population.

“There is no history of our fishery ever interacting with a large amount of sea otters,” said Novotony.

Novotony said he wants the Dungeness Crab Commission to be heard throughout this process and protections put in place ahead of time. “There is going to be some impact to the fishery regardless,” said Novotony.

In Neah Bay, Washington, local fisheries were affected by the growing sea otter population. Jonathan Scordino, the marine mammal biologist for the Makah tribe, said that the sea otter population is at carrying capacity, referring to the number of species an environment can hold. Scordino said these sea otters have affected people’s fishing businesses. There used to be several families who had sea urchin fisheries in their area, said Scordino; now, there are none.

Scordino said he understands that there are ecological benefits to reintroducing sea otters, but humans need to be a part of the conversation.

“That’s where you get the impacts to people’s livelihoods and cultures,” said Scordino. “That’s where your cost starts to outweigh the benefits.”

**In order for sea otters** to be reintroduced along the Oregon coast, it would take several years of research and planning to determine the most suitable locations for the sea mammals. Once locations are picked, an environmental impact statement would be written.

From that point, another five to six years would be needed before sea otters would be placed into the ocean. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services estimates the reintroduction process would take 13 years and cost between \$26 and \$43 million. It would take time to see the effects the mammals would have on Oregon’s ecosystem.

Each time Shawn Larson makes her way to the Washington coast, she is watching the effects of the reintroduction that occurred there in the 1970s. “It’s always changing out there, and there is still so much that we need to understand,” Larson says. “It’s important to be out there and observe what is happening.”

On this March afternoon, she stands on a cliff, binoculars to her eyes. Larson stands next to Brittany Blades, a curator of marine mammals at the Or-



*On the docks in Coos Bay, fishermen raise their nets full of crabs. Crabbing is one of the most profitable industries in the state, reeling in over \$91.5 million in 2022.*



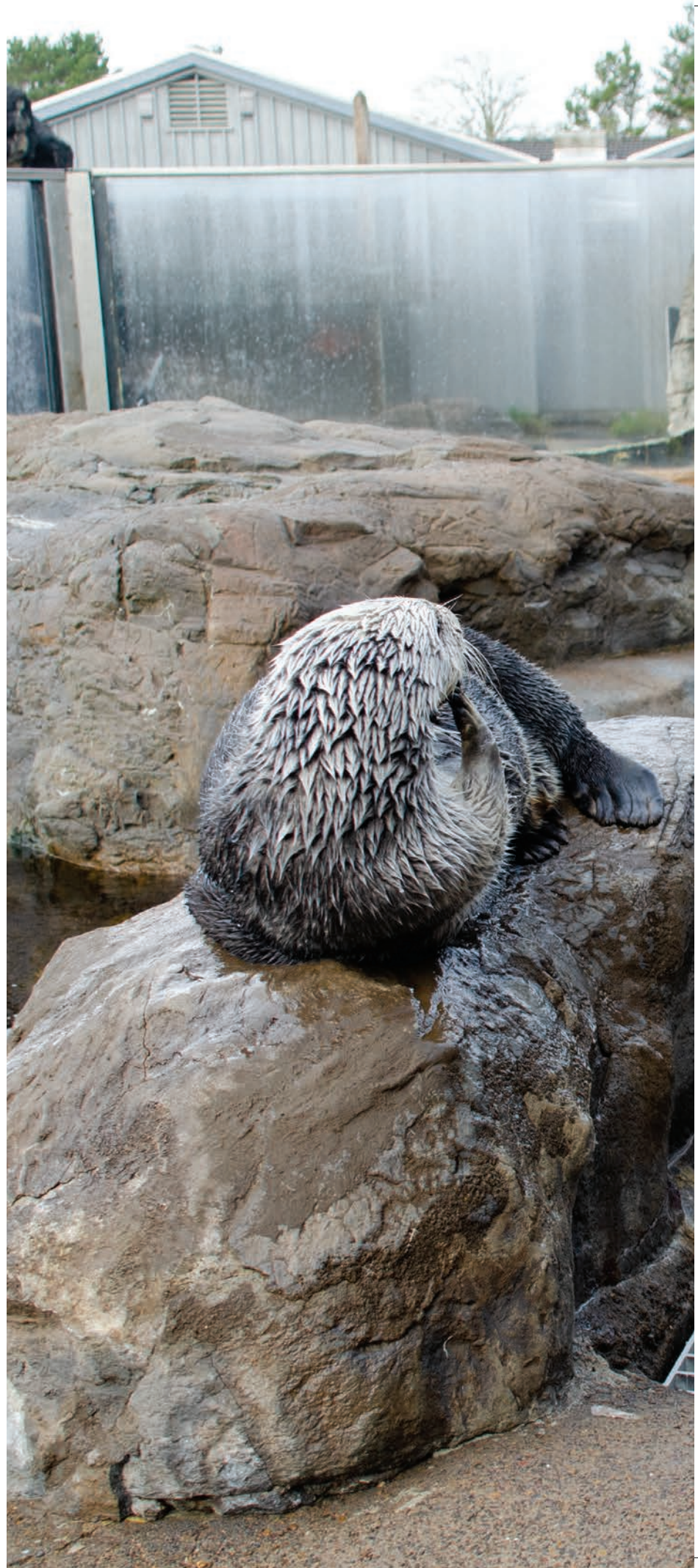


egon Coast Aquarium. The pair are tracking a lone sea otter as it forages for food, keeping the time it stays underwater and the type of food it brings up.

Larson calls out, “It’s up,” indicating the otter has come back to the surface. Blades stops the timer, jots down the time and waits for Larson to say what the otter is doing. For Blades, this is only her second time getting to make the six-hour drive to Washington. The only place Blades can observe sea otters in the wild is in Washington.

Getting to survey and witness sea otters, Blades says, is “really cool” and helps with her work at the aquarium.

After a few minutes pass, Larson yells, “It’s down!” and Blades starts the timer. Neither knows when the sea otter will resurface, but they keep their eyes glued to the water, waiting to see when the creature will pop back up. ★







*Brittany Blades, who has worked at the Oregon Coast Aquarium for 12 years, prepares the next activity for the morning.*





# *somebody to* **LOVE**

Let's get one thing squared away: dating is no easy feat. From navigating an awkward first-time interaction to officially sealing the deal on a relationship after having the classic "what-are-we" talk, the scene for love and intimacy is full of surprises. It's no wonder the intricacies of relationships tend to pique our interest. Each quest for true love is one of a kind. The following vignettes offer a sample of just that, providing a glimpse into the tangled web of college romance in all its unpredictable forms.

*Written by* **SYDNEY GREENE & CARLIE WEIGEL**

*Photographed by* **LIAM SHERRY**



# seeking LOVE

Sarah Whalen was hungover and in her feels the Sunday morning after Valentine's Day. She had hosted a wine-about-it party the night before to honor college singles' least favorite holiday and couldn't help but curse herself for drinking one too many glasses of peach Moscato.

To drown out the noise of her throbbing headache, Whalen turned on the radio during her drive home from breakfast. She switched stations until a *This American Life* episode called "Math or Magic?" caught her attention.

The podcast, which featured a series of love stories, offered just the dating advice Whalen needed.

The University of Oregon sophomore is actively searching for a relationship but has yet to find her soulmate. She juggles various methods of modern dating, from bouncing between complicated situationships to needlessly swiping on Tinder.

"There's not a time when I'm not looking for a significant other," Whalen said. "I'm always going on dates, always trying to meet new people, always having some sort of love interest. I feel like I just haven't found the one."

After the episode's special guest described his experience creating a list of standards to consider when choosing a romantic partner, Whalen felt convinced she had to do the same. "It just resonated with me," she said.

Drawing inspiration from the podcast and multiple failed attempts at falling in love, Whalen convinced her roommate to create a list of standards with her. They each ripped off a sheet of paper from a notepad and jotted down their perfect partner's must-haves.

Whalen now keeps her exhaustive list in her backpack alongside other essentials, like a planner, gum and Aquaphor. The list requires that her future partner be funny, caring and willing to initiate conversation and intimacy. It would be a red flag if they didn't know how to cook.

"I'm waiting for someone to walk into my life," Whalen said, "and for it to feel right to be with them."



*"I'm waiting for  
someone to walk into  
my life and for it to feel  
right to be with them."*

— Sarah Whalen





# *exploring* **LOVE**

Kaed Dodge, a University of Oregon senior, knew he was gay at the age of 12. But he didn't explore his sexuality and dip into the dating pool until last summer. Scrolling through Tinder, he matched with Nathan, a French man visiting Oregon for a few months.

The two seemingly hit it off on the first date; they took a brisk walk in Portland, Oregon, grabbed coffee and went to Sauvie Island to beat the heat.

But Dodge still felt a sense of nervousness. Although he didn't feel any pressure to explore things sexually with Nathan, Dodge figured their dynamic would eventually become more intimate. When Dodge tried cuddling with Nathan, nausea overtook him. He couldn't help but feel the need to cough — almost like a gag reflex.

*“It does kind of make you wonder if it is a subconscious response to internalized homophobia.”*

— Kaed Dodge

Dodge had only kissed one other man before, and he questioned whether this new experience was generating a sense of “internalized homophobia.”

“I thought, ‘Why do I get nauseous around men?’” he said.

As they continued to go on dates, Dodge tried to calm his nausea with breathing exercises. But his feelings refused to subside.

Fed up with this uncontrollable stress response, Dodge decided to go see a doctor, who prescribed him an anti-nausea pill to take before dates.

“It does kind of make you wonder if it is a subconscious response to internalized homophobia, even though I had come out seven years prior,” Dodge said. “But at the same time, that type of thing does linger.”

After taking the nausea medicine, Dodge felt more comfortable being with Nathan and more confident exploring his sexuality.

“It gave me some of my power back,” he said. “I felt very at ease.”



# in LOVE

Xena Lane describes Rowan Hamilton as someone she can depend on and someone who she can do things with when no one else is available.

Through an unexpected injury, the University of Oregon senior met the person she loves spending time with.

Lane was sitting in her dorm room experiencing another lonely night in Eugene. A notification popped up on her phone — it was a message from Hamilton. He invited her to go skateboarding at the local skatepark under the Washington-Jefferson Street Bridge.

At one point, Lane skated into the bowl, but her leg slipped off the back of the board and twisted. As she lay on the concrete, a sharp pain shot up and down her leg. Her vision blacked in and out. She was unable to walk on her leg.

“He laid me down on the skateboard and pushed me to the car,” Lane said.

After the doctor confirmed Lane’s leg was broken, Hamilton cared for her during the recovery

*“He laid me down on the skateboard and pushed me to the car.”*

— Xena Lane

process. For two and a half months Hamilton bought her groceries, made her food and drove her around Eugene. The two then began to have feelings for each other and started officially dating.

Lane values Hamilton’s constant generosity and care. Having those qualities in their relationship is what keeps Lane and Hamilton’s love salubrious.

“I love being in a relationship,” Lane said. “Your partner should be your best friend and someone you want around all the time.” ★









# **BREAKING NEWS: THERE IS NONE.**

As newspapers collapse across Oregon,  
communities are left deprived of information.  
Is this how the story ends for local news?

*Written by* **NICK LAMORA** *Photographed by* **HENRY COHEN**







*The Mail Tribune's production facility remains vacant following the paper's closure. The Tribune is one of three Oregon papers that closed this year.*

**I**t was the summer of 1978, and Medford, Oregon, was baking in a heat wave. A sweltering sun smoldered at 110 degrees on some days, and smog covered the city's lush green hills. Jill and Bob Wolcott were about to move to Medford from Southern California, and the couple got a glimpse of the year's unusual heat after subscribing to Medford's daily newspaper, the *Mail Tribune*.

Once the Wolcotts got to Medford, and temperatures normalized, reading the paper turned into a routine. Jill would look through the religious page and cut out recipes, and Bob followed stories about the students he taught during his elementary teaching career. They made a pastime of keeping up with their middle son's baseball games in the sports section. And as their children grew up and moved out, Jill, 74, and Bob, 76, said that the paper became more relevant to them for finding obituaries, community activities and volunteer opportunities.

"It's important for us to be able to keep track of things that are happening in our own neighborhoods," Bob said.

For 45 years, the Wolcotts spent their afternoons reading the paper. But their everyday regiment came to a screeching halt. After over a century in operations, the *Mail Tribune*

shut its doors on Jan. 13, 2023. Steven Saslow, an East Coast media entrepreneur who bought the paper in 2017, abruptly announced on the news outlet's website that reductions in advertising funds and difficulties with hiring staff had led to the paper's closing.

"The end was swift and stunning," Jill said.

The *Mail Tribune* is one of over 360 newspapers nationwide that have closed since the start of the pandemic — and one of three newspapers in Oregon that shuttered in January of this year. Other publications across Oregon continue to see cutbacks, with papers such as *The Register-Guard* in Eugene laying off staff and limiting coverage.

It's not just Oregon enduring a news shutdown. From decreased advertising spending to profits drying up, local news outlets across the country are struggling to survive. Newspapers are closing at an average of two per week, according to a report by Northwestern University's journalism school, with the U.S. on track to lose one-third of all publications by 2025.

The decline in local news throughout Oregon and the nation has raised concerns about communities' abilities to meet their information needs. Without news outlets, news deserts — areas with limited access to local news — crop



up. More than a fifth of the people in the United States live in or are at risk of living in a news desert, according to the Northwestern report. Medford came into that conversation after the *Mail Tribune* closed.

Regina Lawrence, the research director for the University of Oregon's Agora Journalism Center, which focuses on strengthening local news sharing, said the loss of a newspaper can have drastic consequences for communities that rely on a single paper.

"That local newspaper, if they even still have one, may be the only local news source that they really have," she said. "And so, if they lose that, they really lose local news."

**Lebanon, Oregon, a quaint city** with a population of under 20,000, is another area in Oregon feeling the reverberations of losing a local publication. After serving the community for almost 136 years, the *Lebanon Express*, a weekly paper, closed on Jan. 18, 2023, just five days after the *Mail Tribune*.

Wyatt King, a longtime Lebanon resident, said that losing the *Express* was "a real deficit" to the community. Growing up reading the paper, King found a connection to his town and was able to learn more about his family through old articles, including his great-grandfather who passed away 20 years before he was born.

"It's only through the *Express* that I've been able to see things beyond family stories," he said.

The *Express* was run by Iowa-based Lee Enterprises, which owns two other papers in Linn County. According to King, the paper consolidated staff and locations, running the three publications as a larger operation.

"Lee Enterprises took over and we first lost our staff, then we lost our editor and then we lost our Lebanon physical location," he said.

Sarah Brown, a former reporter for the *Express*, said that Lee Enterprises has tried to cover Lebanon through the *Democrat-Herald*, a paper in Albany, Oregon, but only reports on some stories.

"They usually can find one good story to pull out from City Council or maybe something else going on in town," she said. "They're missing the community and the heartbeat of the community."

In the absence of the *Express*, Brown and newspaper publisher Scott Swanson have been trying to fulfill community information needs with a monthly paper, the *Lebanon Local*. Swanson started the *Local* in 2016 following layoffs at the *Express* and the decision to close the newspaper's Lebanon office.

"We provide a service that's important to the community, and that is lacking in some of these big investment firms — they don't care about journalism," Swanson said. "What killed the *Lebanon Express* more than anything was when they shut their office door to the community.

King said that he appreciates the depth of the reporting and the way that the *Lebanon Local* is helping the community. But he said the paper can only address so much when published monthly.

"When you're a monthly paper, you don't really get as good of an opportunity to connect people to local issues and events and causes," King said. "It's really more after-the-fact reporting."

**Although some Oregon communities** still have local news outlets to rely on, surviving newspapers struggle to stay afloat. With the transition to online and the loss of funding through advertisements, newsrooms have seen major staff reductions.

*The Register-Guard* in Eugene has suffered from the precarious news climate. Despite being in business since 1867, the paper reduced its staff from 20 to six people between 2019 and 2023. The reporters are stretched thin, having to also produce stories for the *RG's* sister paper, *The Salem Statesman*. Scaled-back resources led to the death of the paper's opinion section in November 2022.

Publishing company GateHouse Media acquired the paper in 2018. Gatehouse later merged with media conglomerate



Scott Swanson (left) and Sarah Brown work to provide information to Lebanon through the *Lebanon Local*, a monthly paper. Following the closure of the *Lebanon Express*, the *Local* is now a primary news source for the community.



*“Disruption creates opportunity, and that’s why this is such an exciting time for journalism. It’s a time to think about what the replacement is.”*

— Peter Laufer

Gannett Co. in 2019. Gannett also owns *USA Today* and over 200 other newspapers, making it the nation’s largest newspaper publisher by total daily circulation.

Gannett’s cutbacks are an example of prioritizing profits over community needs, according to Peter Laufer, a journalism professor at the University of Oregon. Laufer, who wrote an occasional guest column for the *RG*, said that Gannett’s business model is not sustainable and will eventually leave Eugene without a daily newspaper.

“What I see is just a ghastly example of extraction capitalism at its worst,” Laufer said. “How can we best, it seems the corporate entity is saying to itself, ‘get as much as we can out of this property while investing as little as possible?’”

In response to an interview request with Gannett, a company spokesperson said, “*The Register-Guard* has deep roots in Eugene and the greater Lane County area, and we are committed to the sustainable future of local news.”

Concerns about the quality of the *RG* echo across Eugene’s community, with many residents taking to NextDoor, a social networking service for neighborhoods, to express their discontent. Community members raised issues with reduced content, errors in stories and insufficient reporting.

Mike Russo, a Eugene resident and business professor at the University of Oregon, started a thread on NextDoor to





announce that he was unsubscribing from the paper after more than 30 years. He said that he could not “continue to even indirectly support the corporate policies,” highlighting the loss of local jobs, errors in the paper and sparse local coverage.

“What we have now is clearly unsatisfactory,” Russo said in a recent interview. “We are not hearing about, you know, school board meetings.”

Russo said that the gaps in reporting are leaving the community in the dark about “stories waiting to be written.” Without in-depth reporting on local government, he said “scandalous” information could be swept under the rug.

In an effort to save local news in Eugene, Laufer has proposed that the University of Oregon purchase the *RG* and have students write for the publication. He said that the community could ideally find a renewed news source.

“Disruption creates opportunity, and that’s why this is such an exciting time for journalism,” he said. “It’s a time to think about what the replacement is.”

**When the most recent Pulitzer Prize winners** — journalism’s most prestigious award — were announced in May, they reflected the direction of the nation’s news landscape. National publications such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* dominated. But one publication stood out: *AL.com*, a local Alabama newspaper that won for reporting on uncovered abuses by small-town police.



Photo illustration  
by Davis Long

*After losing the Mail Tribune, Jill Wolcott feared that Medford would be left without a local paper. Just two weeks following the Tribune’s closure, the Rogue Valley Times (formerly the Rogue Valley Tribune) saved the city from becoming a news desert.*

*AL.com’s award is reminiscent of the Pulitzer the Mail Tribune won in 1934 for coverage of political corruption. It was the first Oregon newspaper to take home the prize.*

*Now, the Mail Tribune is nothing but a memory for Medford. On the quiet intersection of North Fir and West 6th, the abandoned production facility rests under the hazy skies of southern Oregon. The staff is gone, a damaged delivery van sits in the parking lot and the Pulitzer is nowhere to be found.*

*“It’s hard to know what’s happening,” Jill said.*

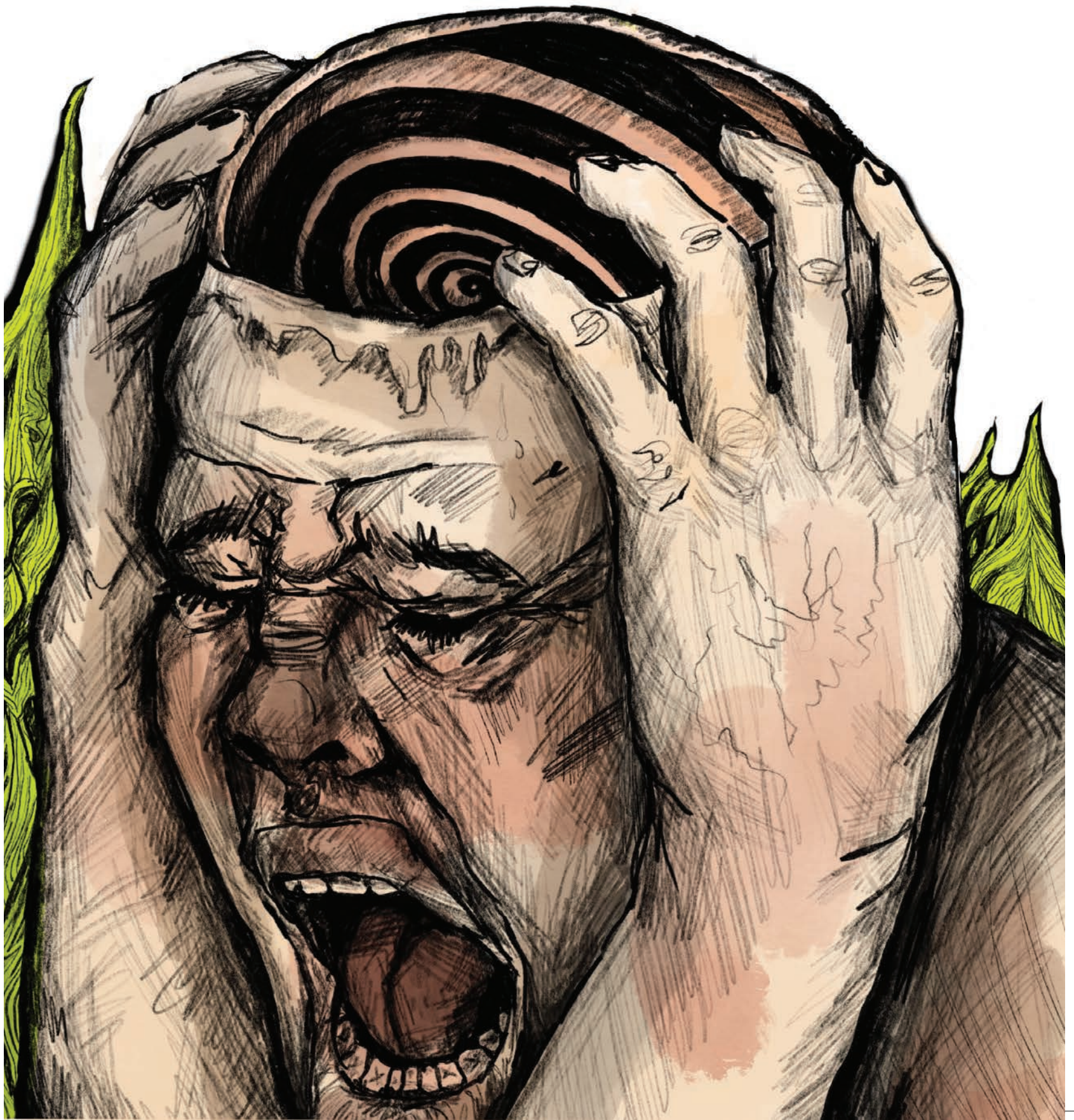
*But the Wolcotts’ fear of not having a paper transformed into hope for something new. Two weeks after the Tribune’s closing, EO Media Group, an Oregon-based publisher, launched the Rogue Valley Times. The paper currently publishes stories online and offers a print newspaper three days per week, filling the void left in Medford.*

*At the Agora Journalism Center, Lawrence said the launch of the Rogue Valley Times could mark the turning of a page for local news in Oregon. Journalism scholars will watch closely to see what unfolds.*

*“It’s kind of exciting that at least in this case, there’s this continuation to the story,” Lawrence said. “The typical story is it closes; it goes away.” ☆*









# 4 WAYS

*to finesse the*



Let's be honest — we're all past our limits. School, social media and relationships can all be suffocating. How do you find a way to just chill? Well, you've come to the right place.

*Written by* **ROMIE AVIVI STUHL & SYDNEY HELMUTH**

*Illustrated by* **SISI HUSING**





The background features a colorful illustration. On the left, a large eye with a red and black spiral iris is shown. To its right is a coiled grey cord with yellow highlights. Below the eye, a hand holds a scroll with the words 'SOCIAL' and 'IB' visible. In the bottom right, a green hand is shown holding a pen over a document with the words 'Time Lin' visible. The overall style is a mix of sketchy lines and solid colors.

# PULL THE *plug*

Last fall, University of Oregon student Dax Lynch saw the mental toll social media was having on him; he felt his ADHD worsen and his connections with others deteriorate. His phone consumed every part of his life. Lynch decided he had to quit social media. “Instant gratification content consumed all my time,” he said. “It made me feel incompetent when it came to school and reaching my goals.”

Ruth Ellingsen, director of the University of Oregon Psychology Clinic, said that social media has many benefits. It’s a way to stay in contact with others, share creativity and learn new information. But, she added, “it’s when we stop being mindful about our use of it that problems start to occur.”

While quitting social media was challenging at times, Lynch discovered some helpful tips along the way. He turned off all notifications and placed screen-time limits on his phone. Additionally, he began carrying a watch and small notebook everywhere he went. He no longer had to rely on his phone for basic tasks, such as knowing the time or taking notes. This helped him reduce a phenomenon he calls attention blinks, where he loses touch with the task at hand due to a notification on his phone.

Quitting social media provided Lynch with an excess amount of free time, something many college students don’t have. He said that if he did not find something to fill that time, he likely would have fallen right back to spending hours on his phone. Instead, Lynch began going to the gym and even started his own club on campus. The Quit Social Media Club works as a support group and community for other people who want to reduce the time they spend on their phones.

“I think everyone recognizes that to some extent, [phone addiction] is kind of an epidemic,” Lynch said. “This group will help provide support.”

*“I think everyone recognizes that to some extent, [phone addiction] is kind of an epidemic.”*

— Dax Lynch



The background of the page is a colorful illustration. The top right shows a person in a dark blue swimsuit and swim cap running on a StairMaster. The top left shows a swimmer in a pool with a lane line. The bottom left shows a splash of water. The bottom right shows a close-up of a StairMaster's handrails and seat.

# WORKIT *Out*

Moving hundreds of miles away from her hometown of Albuquerque, New Mexico, to Eugene, Oregon, was challenging for Sara Swinson, a University of Oregon freshman. “The first term of freshman year was really, really hard for me. I was in a new place with new people, doing something that I had never done before,” Swinson said.

Fortunately, Swinson discovered an outlet at the gym. She swims on the club swim team and takes Group X fitness classes at the Student Recreation Center. She makes time for movement in any way she can. Whether jumping in the pool or breaking a sweat on the StairMaster, she has found the gym to be her stress reliever.

Swinson recalled her first weeks on campus. “I felt completely overwhelmed and at a loss. I lacked the confidence in all of the things that I was doing,” she said. “I didn’t know if I would be able to make friends, and I didn’t know if I would be able to just succeed in school. But I knew that I could swim and be active in my body.”

According to Chantelle Russell, the associate director for physical education at the University of Oregon, when pent-up anxiety starts taking a toll on your mental health, physical activity can relieve that stress. Walking, biking and dancing are all exercises that decrease stress, no matter your experience level.

“When you’re stressed or when you have a test, that’s actually when you should really come to the gym,” Russell said.

Finding time for the gym may be difficult, but prioritizing your physical health can dramatically benefit your mental health. “If I feel like everything else is falling apart, I can go get a good workout and then I get to control that,” Swinson said.

“It helps me feel more grounded.”





# SET YOUR MIND *at ease*

Giving your body and mind time to reflect and be aware of the moment is important for stress management. “Just like we take care of our body, [meditation] is an opportunity to take care of our mind,” Russell said.

Meditation is one method through which a person can practice mindfulness. Meditation is “creating space to just be — whatever that might be at that time,” Russell said.

Starting college in the middle of a global pandemic, Connor Schulz, a University of Oregon product design student, meditated in his backyard to relax from the stressors of COVID-19 and school. Schulz would usually take 30 minutes to listen to the birds chirp and cars drive by and feel the grass beneath his legs. To help with his practice, Schulz also used a variety of mediation apps. For example, Down Dog provided him with guided meditations based on a topic and time frame of his choosing.

“If I can make the time in the morning, a sitting focused meditation is really, really helpful,” Schulz said.

When classes went back to in-person, Schulz no longer had time to commit to his meditation practice. However, he has found meditative moments all around him — everything

from riding his bike in the morning to making pottery. While he is throwing on the wheel, he feels the clay in his hands, engages his core and forgets about the past and the future. To focus on the present is meditation.

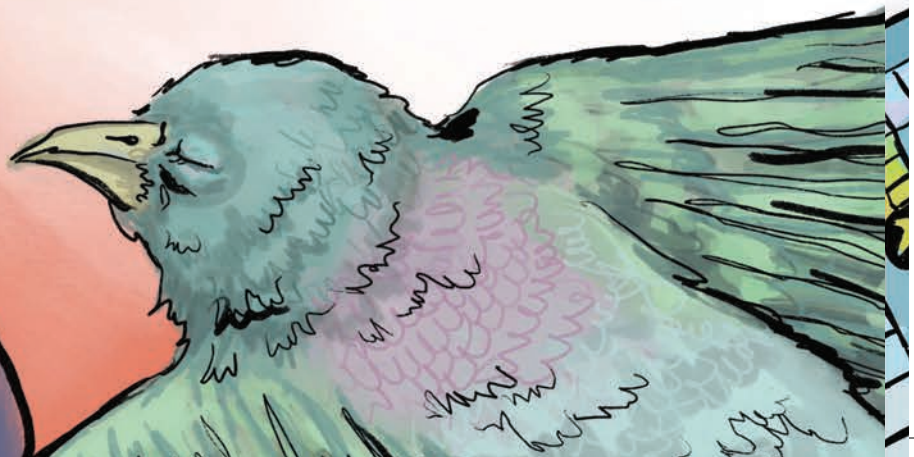
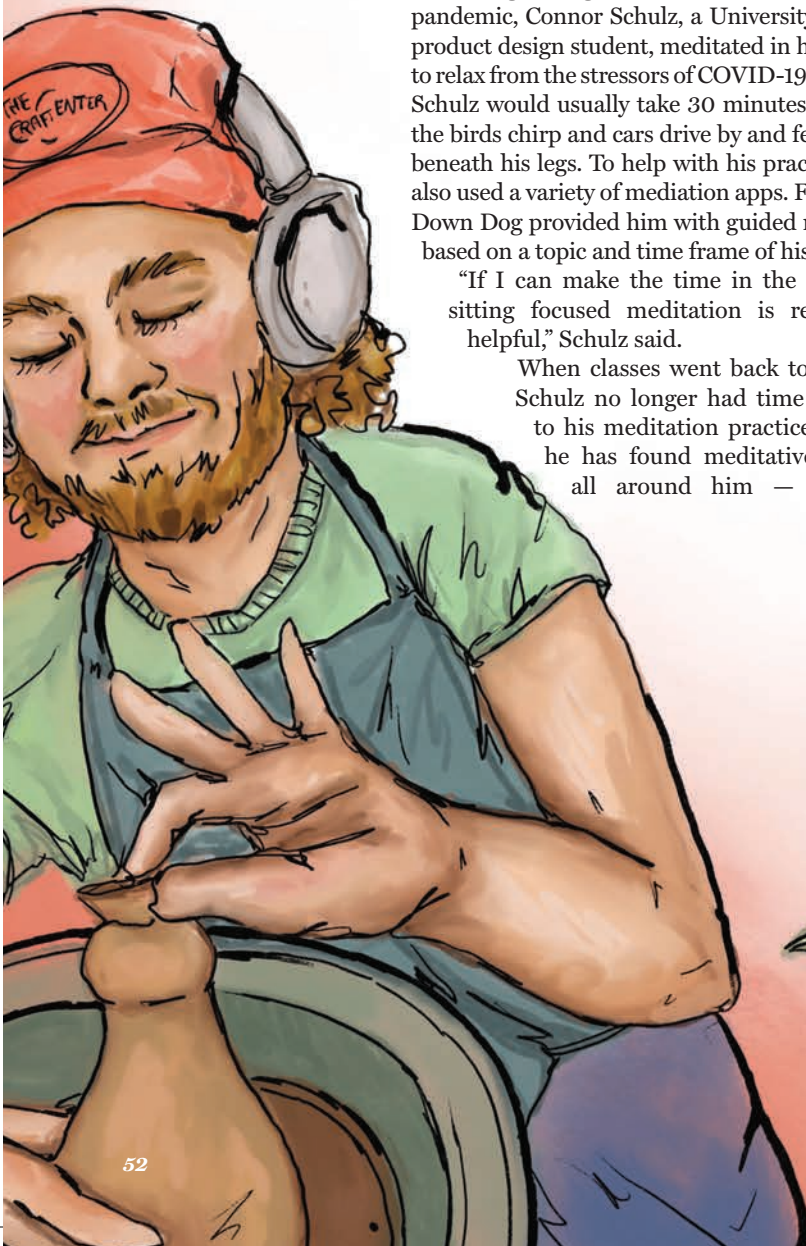
Almost anywhere Schulz goes, he wears large, gray headphones. Listening to music helps him reduce the distractions around him and be fully mindful of his practice.

“That’s always really amazed me about music,” Schulz said. “How immediately and powerfully it can alter your mood or your emotional state.”

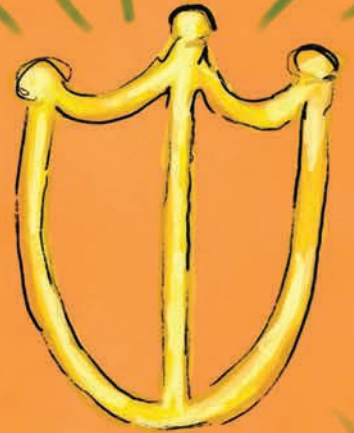
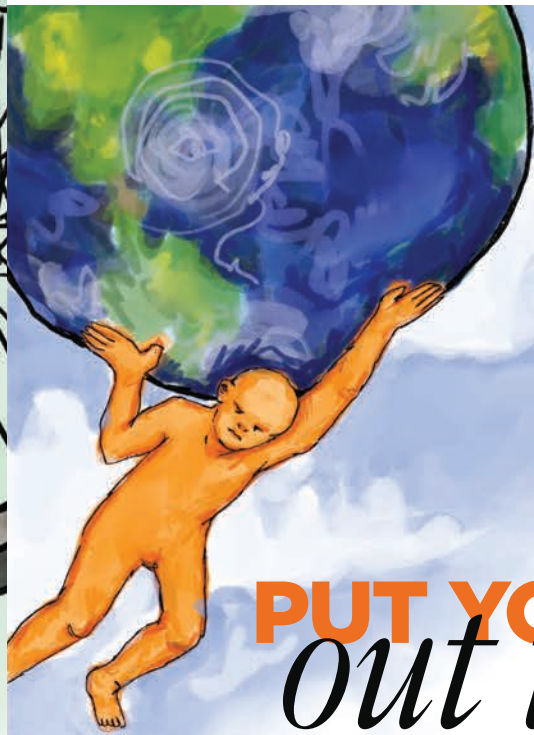
Meditative moments live all around you — if you are willing to find them. Take a deep breath in and a deep breath out. Allow yourself to feel the present moment and put your mind at peace. Learn to accept the fact that you cannot change the past and cannot control the future. It may help you live a happier and more fulfilling life.

*“Just like we take care of  
our body, [meditation]  
is an opportunity to take  
care of our mind.”*

— Chantelle Russell







## PUT YOURSELF *out there*

*“Just because I was different  
didn’t mean I wasn’t valued.”*

— Yazzie Chee

Everyone experiences hard times. It may be a challenging assignment, a breakup or the struggle to find belonging. Whatever it may be, Ellingsen said social connections can provide individuals with support to deal with these stressful situations. “It helps protect you from a lot of things, helps protect you from depression [and] anxiety.”

Yazzie Chee, a first-generation Native American student at the University of Oregon, saw the impact a support system can have on his well-being. COVID-19 hit his family particularly hard, and with stay-at-home orders in place and not being able to visit his relatives, he felt isolated and his social anxiety worsened. It wasn’t until he found a supportive community that Chee realized how much he longed for social connections.

Chee decided to take small steps to reconnect with the community around him. Last spring, he joined DucksRISE, a program that provides underserved students with career readiness and support. The program helped him see his worth and apply for an on-campus job.

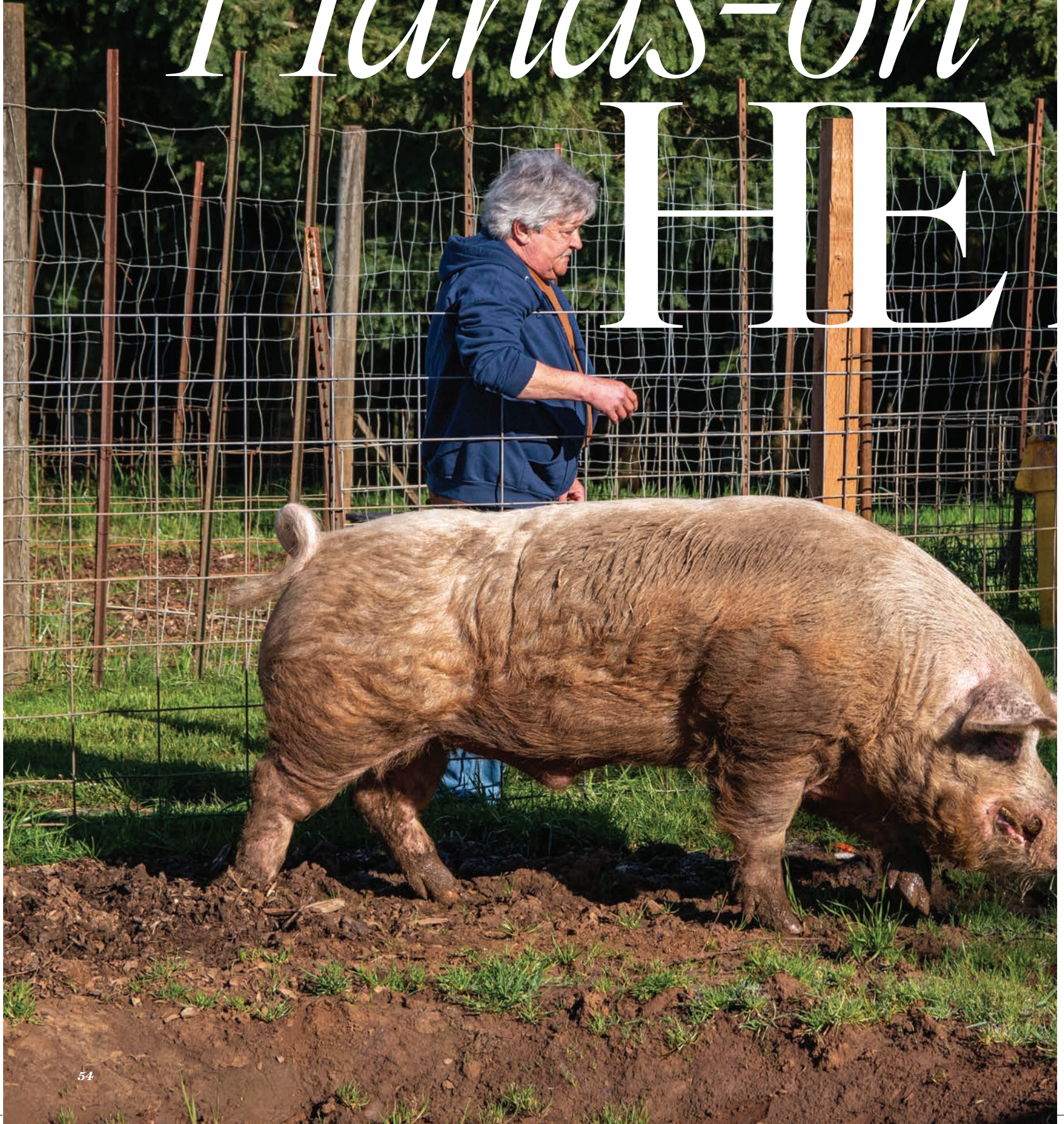
Chee said he felt like the program was made with people like him in mind. DuckRISE helped him feel a sense of belonging. Chee started attending the program’s events and creating connections with other students, something he had previously struggled with. Today, Chee hangs out with friends on a regular basis and leans on them for support during rough times.

“Just because I was different didn’t mean I wasn’t valued,” Chee said. ★





# *Hands-on* **HEE**





# ALLING

A small farm in Northwest Oregon is helping men recover from addiction through responsibility, brotherhood and manual labor.

*Written by* **AINSLEY MADDALENA** *Photographed by* **KYLE PRINCE**

*Ron Lovegreen, the former foreman for Blanchet Farm, steers 700-pound pig Oscar to his cage. At Blanchet, working with animals is a part of the residents' recovery process.*



**W**aking up before dawn, Louis Gonzalez climbs out of bed and drifts into the kitchen. He pours a glass of well water and whips up a plate of waffles and fruit. As 8 a.m. rolls around, Gonzalez picks up his breakfast and heads out to the pigpen. Tulip and Oscar, 700-pound pigs, grunt in excitement as Gonzalez carefully scales the metal gates. His jeans damp and boots muddied, Gonzalez rinses out the slop trays in the pigpen. He gives Oscar a nudge and encourages him to the other side of the pen. Oscar begrudgingly moves as Gonzalez teases him for being lazy.

“Come on, Oscar,” says Gonzalez. “Work with me.”

It’s another morning at Blanchet Farm, 62 acres of emerald-green pastures in Yamhill County, 36 miles southwest of Portland. On this working farm, Tulip and Oscar spend their days rolling around in the muddied field while goats scale a playscape built by local Boy Scouts just a few weeks ago. But for Gonzalez, it’s a morning much different from the ones he has experienced over the past 16 years. It was three months ago when Gonzalez came to Blanchet Farm, his first recovery program.

Distinct from many traditional recovery programs, Blanchet offers farm work as a method of substance abuse recovery. Opening in 1962, the farm can house 21 men. Farm work, animal therapy, beekeeping, woodworking and mechanical tasks are just some of the activities Blanchet provides as part of its recovery program. The farm is equipped with a woodshop, beehives, toolshed and animals: goats, pigs, hogs, chickens, ducks and dogs. Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday in the late afternoon, residents meet in the living room of the housing facility to attend an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.

*Farm work, animal therapy, beekeeping, woodworking and mechanical tasks are just some of the activities Blanchet provides as part of its recovery program.*

Blanchet Farm has a partnership with several organizations around the county and in Old Town Portland, where Blanchet House is located. In 1952, Blanchet House opened its doors to “help people suffering from extreme poverty, many of whom are unsheltered, housing insecure, food insecure and without community and friendship,” says Scott Kerman, executive director of Blanchet House and Blanchet Farm.

Kerman says that Blanchet seeks to provide residents with a range of assistance, including food, shelter and community. “We serve a lot of people for whom life has told them they don’t matter and no one cares about them,” says Kerman. “Through our service, we strive to say to people that they do matter and there are many people in our community who care about them without judgment or scorn.” Blanchet is free of cost to all residents.

“Here, there’s no pressure to pay rent or anything,” says Ron Lovegreen, once a resident of Blanchet. Lovegreen overcame drinking issues developed while working as a mechanic for 23 years. “You work here for three months on the farm and then once [you] do get a job, [you’re] allowed to stay here for four months.” After going through the program in 2015, Lovegreen became the farm’s foreman until deciding to leave in May.



*Resident Ryan Surle feeds Blanchet’s chickens. A majority of eggs produced on the farm are trucked to Portland and used for meal programs put on by Blanchet House.*





*Residents have the job of walking goats to a small pond on the property. Louis Gonzalez (in black) says, "I'm lucky to be the goat guy — a lot of guys want my job."*



*Gonzalez relaxes with farm dog Miko after a day of work. Gonzalez says the schedule at Blanchet gives him structure.*



**Blanchet Farm manager Ross Sears** stands atop the deck outside of his office, gazing across the property with phone in hand. As he gets a call, Sears takes one last glance before opening the wooden window-paned door to his office and stepping inside. This call is the first of many Sears will take.

Sears' day is filled with calls, meetings with contractors, resident intake and new resident interviews. From 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sears moves around his office, taking on whatever that day throws at him.

Sears grew up in Springfield, Oregon, playing a variety of sports throughout his adolescence. Still, being a quarterback and the center of attention would soon lead him to abuse substances.

Sears says he noticed he drank more than his high school peers. Alcohol provided an escape from the social anxieties of high school. Finally, he realized he "didn't want that lifestyle anymore," but going into recovery wasn't easy.

After trying to quit "100 times" and being admitted into a medical detox in Portland, "I came to Blanchet when I was 41," says Sears, who is now 56.

"I was terrified. Terrified," Sears says. But in his experience, "the more you do [recovery], the easier it gets."

On the farm, the road to recovery requires a list of chores, and that means getting your hands dirty. Since Louis Gonzalez arrived in February, he has been helping maintain the farm. On

this early spring day, Gonzalez gets ready to move on to his next chore. He fastens the gates on the pen and says his goodbyes to Oscar and Tulip for the morning. He reaches into a box of chocolate chip cookies, pulling out four. Oscar's and Tulip's ears perk up at the sound of the stiff plastic box opening and closing. They excitedly drag themselves to their feet and lumber to the side of the gate, awaiting their cookies.

For Gonzalez, getting to this routine and to the farm was a long journey. He says that when he was 13, his parents divorced and he turned to alcohol. "It was very tumultuous trying to navigate that as a young man," says Gonzalez.

Despite not being legal, he would find a way to consume alcohol if it was around. Later, during his early and mid-20s, he found himself drinking regularly, "more from impulse than from want." At 29, he was hospitalized for his alcohol consumption. While in the hospital, he found a pamphlet for Blanchet Farm. He came to the farm in February.

"The structure [Blanchet] gave me, taking care of the animals — it's been amazing," Gonzalez says. "Taking the goats out, I never know what to expect." Depending on how much energy the goats have, it can take anywhere from 45 minutes to two hours to get them corralled again.

For Gonzalez, Sears and Lovegreen, the brotherhood aspect is a big reason why Blanchet Farm works as well as it does. After





*Many residents credit connecting with Blanchet's animals as an important part of their recovery. From goats to hogs to dogs, residents tend to a variety of animals during their stay.*



*Tulip the pig relaxes in her pen. Every animal at Blanchet Farm has a name, and many of the animals have noticeable personalities.*



work, the men will sit down in the living room — walls covered in wood paneling and framed photographs of former members — and watch sports together, relaxing on their time off.

“The guys control the flow of the farm,” says Sears.

The residents are responsible for feeding all of the animals that Blanchet Farm houses, tending to the garden in the spring and summer, keeping the house tidy, and holding themselves and each other accountable for their sobriety. Residents are expected to do their part around the farm, respecting everyone in the program while doing so. “We try to live harmoniously,” says Gonzalez.

Sears, who does the intake on prospective patients, says he can tell when a possible resident is going to work out or not, and when they’re “flirting around the truth.”

**When Lucas Pattison arrived** at the farm in March 2017, he had no idea that there was a woodshop. He stayed at the farm for just a month, but ever since he has been sober. Now, he runs his own woodworking business, Pattison Design, in Portland. Pattison makes the occasional trip to the farm from his home in the city.

Blanchet Farm is a no-kill farm and receives many of the animals in its care via donations. Blanchet House and Farm receive food the same way; 90% of the food served is donated from partners such as Safeway, Trader Joe’s and local restaurants, says Kerman. Blanchet takes food that, regardless of looks, can go on to feed hundreds and provide warm meals to many in need.

For Sears and many others, Blanchet Farm has become a “safe place.” He no longer is bothered by alcohol advertising. Similarly, Pattison can attend sporting events and bars with his friends without worrying about drinking.

But for Gonzalez, seeing alcohol commercials is still difficult. “Watching sports and beer commercials, there’s always an urge,”

says Gonzalez. “Ultimately, it’s washed away by thinking about the after-effects: the hangovers, not getting out of bed for days, that kind of stuff. I think about what I want to do with the next 10 years of my life.”

For men like Gonzalez, professional help plays a vital role in staying on the path to sobriety. Harrington Health Clinic (HHC) first opened in April 2020 inside Blanchet House. The nonprofit “provides primary care and mental health care services to the residents of Blanchet,” says clinic founder and nurse Emily Harrington.

HHC is staffed by a family practitioner, a psych-mental health nurse practitioner, nurses and nursing students who connect “farm residents to virtual care/visits with outside providers” and administer vaccines, says Harrington.

But everyone’s sobriety journey is different. Some residents that come to Blanchet have children and spouses. Others have been unhoused, and some have even been to prison. Some have been through recovery multiple times; for others, once does the trick. The road to recovery looks different for every individual.

As Gonzalez continues his journey at Blanchet Farm, he says he is growing stronger mentally and physically. At the end of the day, Gonzalez heads into the garage and begins to work out. It’s something he does frequently to keep his mind and body

in shape. For Gonzalez, myriads of things aid him on his path to recovery.

Throughout the country, there are many different types of recovery programs and methods for substance abuse. While some recovery programs offer a cookie-cutter set of guidelines, others offer diverse programs. No matter what the recovery program entails, they all are connected by the thought of helping people recover. ☆

*“The more  
you do  
[recovery],  
the easier it  
gets.”*

— Ross Sears



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# got Cavities?

Energy drinks play a big part in many students' lives at the cost of a trip to the dentist.

*Written by JAKOB SALAO  
Photographed by JOHN ADAIR*

**G**race Moul was one of around 20 students in the dental program at Lane Community College. On top of her classes, Moul also worked as a barista at a popular coffee chain in Eugene, Oregon.

The aspiring dental hygienist worked in the early hours of the morning. Illuminated by nothing but lights from the streets and store, Moul often had to find something to keep her awake during her shift. Moul's drink of choice was one of the coffee shop's signature energy drinks.

One day in the dental program, Moul and her classmates practiced taking X-rays of each other's mouths. Later, when the instructor, Cris Houser, checked all of the X-ray results, she saw something interesting once she got to Moul's.

"Grace, I thought you said that you've never had a cavity before?"

"I haven't," Moul said.

"Well, I'm looking at the X-rays now," Houser said, "and you have six of them."

Moul was shocked. Brushing twice a day and flossing were good hygiene practices that she was taught growing up, and nothing about that routine had changed.

"My reaction was to laugh because I was like, 'Oh my God, I don't even know how to react,'" she said.

Many college students have had a similar experience. An article published in "The Application of Specialized Diets and Supplements for Athlete Health and Performance" showed that the increased consumption of energy drinks among athletes correlated with a rise in oral health issues despite "good oral hygiene practices." Over 63% of the people researchers observed had dental caries.

Dental caries refer to tooth decay and dental cavities. Tooth decay can occur when the acidity, or pH levels, in the mouth is lower than what your mouth is naturally at. Normally, your mouth has a pH level of 7, which is "neutral" on the pH scale. Dr. Jason Ellis, a dentist at the University of Oregon, said that tooth decay can start at a pH level of 5.5, which "isn't that low." At that level, teeth can become exposed to harmful bacteria in the mouth. If the bacteria are left in the mouth for extended periods of time, holes will form in teeth, leading to a costly trip to the dental chair.

Energy drinks are particularly concerning for their high acidity, with popular beverages including pH levels of 4.0 and under, according to data from the National Library of



Medicine. That's well below the 5.5 that can cause tooth decay.

It's not easy to just cut energy drinks out of the daily routine. One reason students drink them is for the caffeine. Having hectic schedules with loads of homework to do at night makes it tough for many students to stay awake throughout the day. Haley Calvert, a third-year physiology major at the University of Oregon, has an energy drink during the day. She said that the taste, along with the boost of energy, keeps her hooked on them.

"So far in [2023], it's been like once a week, but it's starting to ramp back up again with the term getting crazier," Calvert said. "Last term, I drank [an energy drink] every other day."

Inherently, nothing about caffeine makes your teeth start rotting if you drink too much of it. Dr. Peter Snyder, a dentist who practices in Eugene, Oregon, said that caffeine does create "an addiction" to drinks that have high levels of sugar and acid. Constantly consuming those kinds of drinks can cause cavities or other dental problems.

"If you have any kind of soda or sugary drinks, the carbonation with the sugar and the acid all going into the mouth changes the environment of the mouth," Dr. Snyder said. "It helps create a more acidic environment that's more conducive to making cavities."

When Dr. Snyder graduated college and began working as a dentist in 1994, he said that energy drinks were not as popular with students as they are in 2023. However, he also said that there are many other factors that can lead to cavities,

including poor home care and strength of teeth. Energy drinks aren't the sole reason that will lead to cavities, and there is no direct correlation between energy drinks and cavities alone. The combination of some of these factors, like energy drinks or poor home care, alongside each other, contributes to the increased chance of cavities.

"I just saw this girl last week. She used to have nothing; now she has half a dozen etches and one or two cavities in her teeth," Dr. Snyder said. This does not mean that energy drinks alone are the cause of cavities. While the consistent drinking of energy drinks is a factor, there are many others that combine together to cause cavities.

College-aged students could have an increased risk of cavities. Faye Young, an Expanded Function Dental Assistant at the University of Oregon, said that the number of dental problems among college students is at "crisis levels."

"It's a little more compromised in the university population just because of the stress level, the whole diet, the lack of sleep," Young said.

To remedy cavities, dentists will put a filling in between your teeth, or in severe cases put a crown on the tooth or conduct a root canal. Cavities are painful and can cause constant toothaches if they aren't cared for, and the remedies can range upwards of \$200 for fillings to over \$1,000 for crowns. To avoid any of this, the best practice is to prevent cavities from occurring in the first place.

Dr. Ellis advocates for cutting out energy drinks entirely. In his opinion, water is superior to other





energy drinks or sports drinks. Many sports drinks say they have increased electrolytes compared to water to “boost recovery.” But Dr. Ellis said the average person needs these boosts.

“You need water to be hydrated and nothing else. Gosh, courtside [of basketball games], that’s all [athletes] should ever have because those other things actually dehydrate you,” Dr. Ellis said.

The added electrolytes or caffeine boosts from energy drinks may sound appealing but aren’t always necessary. If you’re an athlete who works out for hours and sweats constantly, electrolytes from the drink can help replenish the electrolytes that are sweated out. But the average student walking to class and doing homework in the library doesn’t sweat nearly as much and doesn’t need the extra electrolytes. As Dr. Ellis said, water, which doesn’t have any acidity, will hydrate you enough to get through you the day.

Six cavities are a lot for anyone, especially when they appear all at once. However, after having the cavities filled, Moul recovered with no lingering problems. “Luckily, [the cavities] were small,” Moul said, “and that was because of good home care helping to moderate that.”

The root of good home care for teeth starts with brushing and flossing. Frequency is one of the most important factors. Dentists say brushing once in the morning and once before bed is the routine that most effectively cleans teeth every day, while flossing needs to be done just once a day. However, it’s also important to do so with the right technique. “Rather than going straight up and down with the floss between the teeth, you want to wrap the floss around like one side of the tooth,” Moul said. “So it’s similar to shoe shining the tooth.”

Getting into the routine of taking care of teeth isn’t always easy. Sometimes life gets too busy and you fall asleep before that second tooth brushing session, or there’s no more floss in the cabinet and you haven’t had the chance to restock. It’s all a part of life, and even Moul, a dental hygienist, wasn’t able to completely prevent cavities. But maintaining proper dental health has to start somewhere.

“I would love [it] if my patients floss every day, but if they’re not at all, I say, ‘Okay, start with like three times a week,’” Moul said. “You know, if you can do that, that alone will make a significant difference in your gum health and cavity prevention.”★

# “The carbonation with the sugar and the acid all going into the mouth changes the environment of the mouth.”

— Dr. Peter Snyder

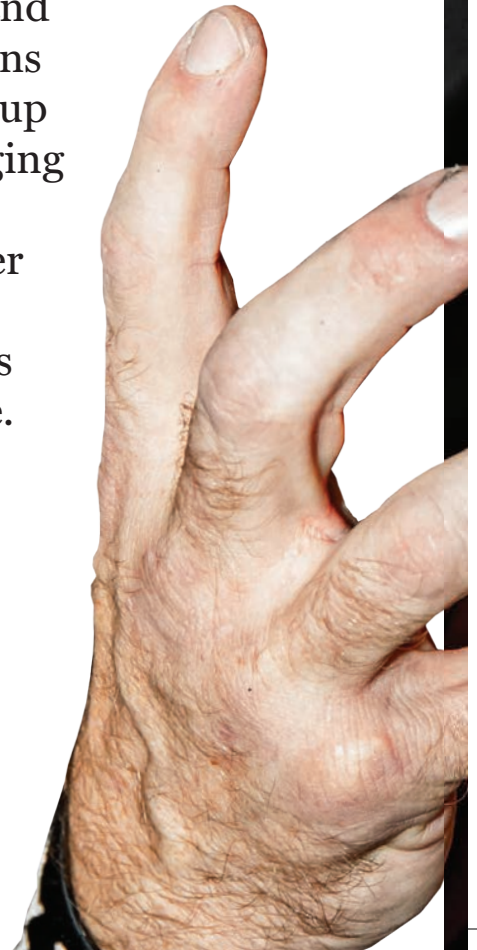




# NIGHT AT THE ROPE OPERA

*Photographed & Written by* **MADDIE STELLINGWERF**

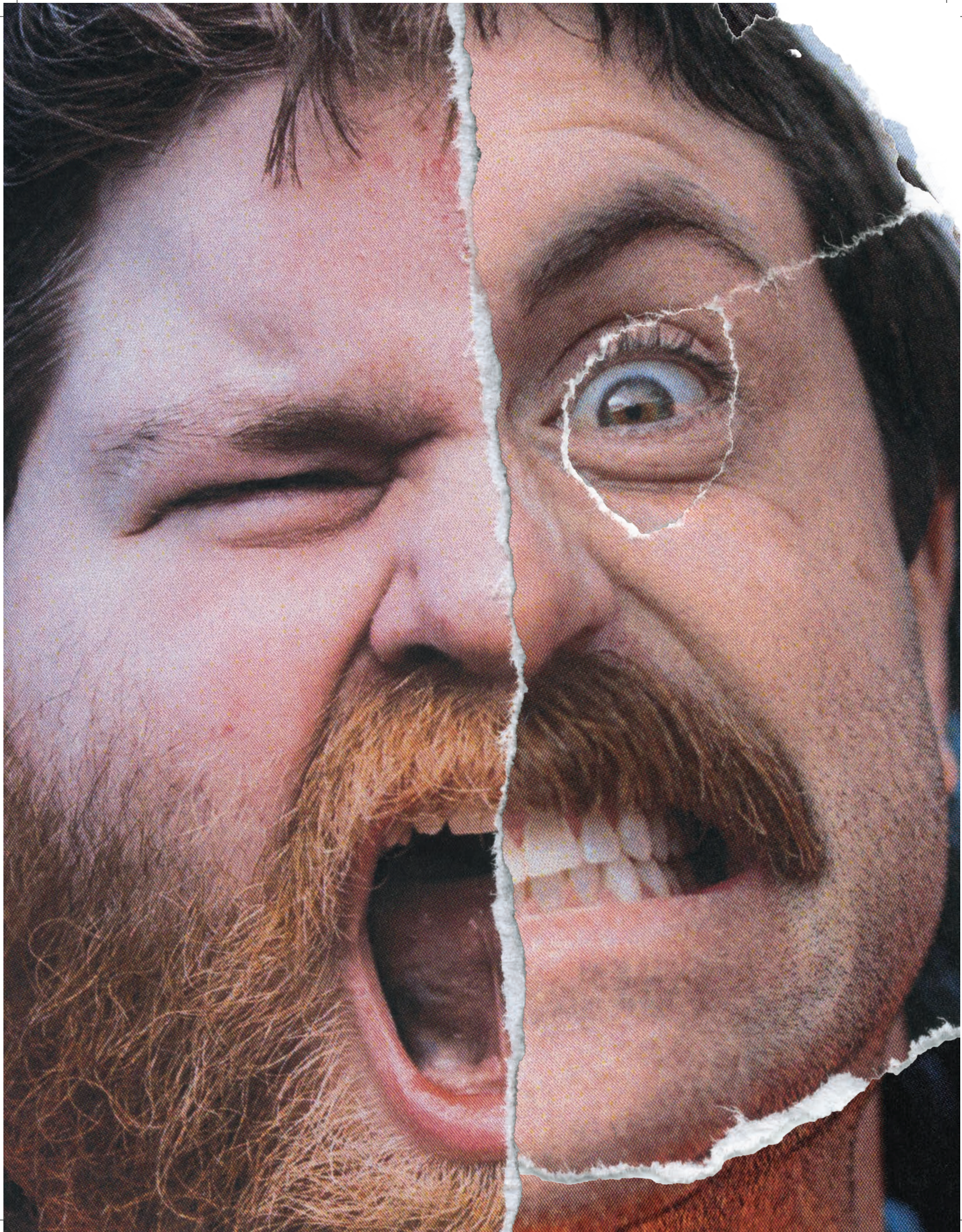
Within the walls of a downtown Eugene pizzeria, a packed crowd roars as another night of body slams, beatdowns and bold promos kicks off. Over the past two years, fervent fans have come together every month to watch an eclectic group of pro wrestlers act out their continuing storylines. Bringing together kids and adults alike, the events have developed a niche community in the Pacific Northwest. At the center of the ring is a man of mystery, Mister Ooh-la-la, who promotes the wrestling showcase. He affectionately refers to the evening's extravaganza as a theatrical performance. "It's all a story," says Ooh-la-la. "It's a rope opera."















Emerging from backstage to a screaming crowd, the Hammer Brothers are handed two mics to perform their pre-show routine. "Once you get out through the curtain," says Kyle Hamlin, aka Jack Hammer (above in white), "the adrenaline rush kind of hits, and then the nervousness goes away." As the brothers approach the stage, fans aid them in reciting their signature motto: "When you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail." Casey and Kyle Hamlin grew up wrestling on a trampoline and have had dreams of wrestling professionally for much of their lives. Six months after their debut, fans voted the two as the most popular act among the regular cast of wrestlers. "The next step would be eventually getting to the point where we go to even bigger venues and see even more fans," says Casey, aka Sledge Hammer. "So that's the goal — to eventually expand to other cities, but I know that we want our home here to be in Eugene."









Abigail Warren makes her way up to the Pacific Northwest from her home in Sacramento as frequently as twice a month to compete in matches. "I love it up here, especially with me being a trans person. The queer wrestling scene here is really cool," says Warren, known to many as La Bruja. Being a lifelong fan of horror and gothic aesthetics, La Bruja found her name after hearing it used in dialogue during a playthrough of *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. "I just said the whole name out loud and knew, 'Yeah, that's it forever.'" Warren commonly plays the role of a heel in her matches. She is usually met with the crowd cheering for her heroic opponent, but she wouldn't have it any other way. "My main concern is that the fans feel like this is a safe space, because if they don't feel like it's safe to come to a show, then why would they ever want to come see us wrestle?"





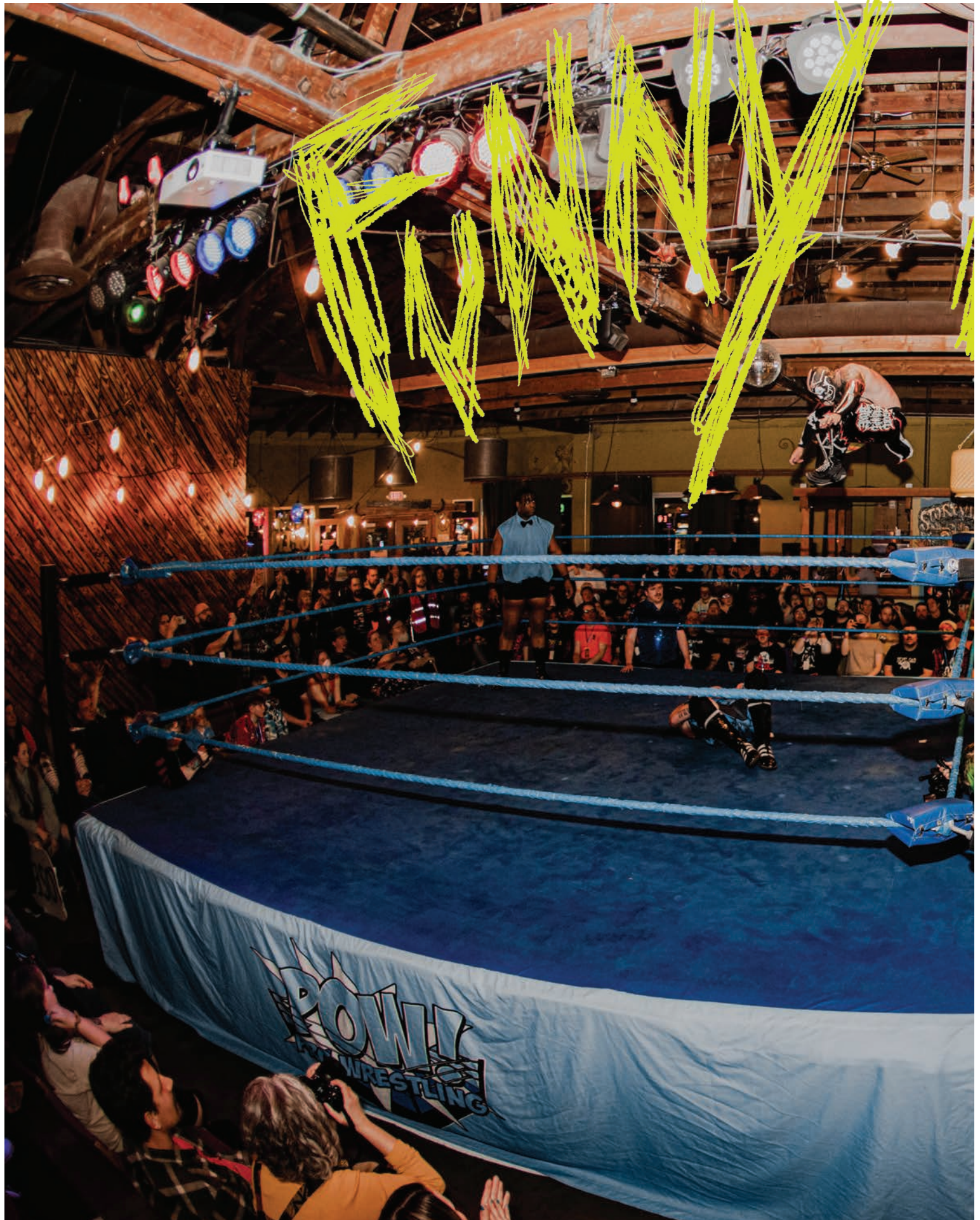






Commonly a favorite spot for pizza lovers, Whirled Pies transforms into a wrestling forum once a month. Over 200 fans pack into the restaurant, sitting in folding chairs around a makeshift ring built earlier that day. Spectators are encouraged to be active participants in the night's events. They cheer for their favorite wrestler, boo their opponent or proudly hoist handmade signs. Many fans have Joseph "The Sign Guy" (opposite page) to thank for the signs they hold up. The Sign Guy has become a local celebrity at the pizzeria for providing many of the posters that attendees hold up as the night plays out.









*"Wrestling is the only thing I've ever wanted to do," says DGOD Funny Bone, the lead character and heavyweight champion for the wrestling showcase. With one-half of their face dedicated to mimicking a skull, Bone is known to terrify fans and foes alike. They pride themselves on their ability to shock the crowd through their eccentric performance and high-octane action. Bone, who works as an adult film actor and personal trainer between competitions, says, "This is what I do for a living; the other stuff is extra." ☆*







*After working for the Albany Democrat-Herald, Jesse Skoubo is using his journalism skills to teach students in his classroom how to be writers, photographers and graphic designers.*



# New Beginnings

Nothing in life is certain, especially one's career. Take these three who successfully switched their careers and formed brand new paths.

*Written by* JOHNNY MEDIA *Photographed by* LAUREN ASSAEL & ZACH SCHACHERER

**Deciding fresh out of high school what major you want to study and what field you should enter is daunting. It's a big task fraught with worries. It puts a concrete resolution to a situation that is anything but stable and solid. In an effort to show that change and uncertainty are not only okay but natural, a few brave souls share their journeys toward happiness.**

## *Photo Finish* —————

Jesse Skoubo's road to his current job as a high school career and technical education teacher had more twists than straightaways. He did a stint in the Navy, then went to college. He then went to a newspaper job before finding a home at North Eugene High School. But perhaps even more shocking is that Skoubo, 40, barely made it out of the Oregon high school he attended. He graduated as a self-described "undisciplined student," with a 1.76 GPA.

"I was an unfocused student," he says through a laugh.

After four years in the Navy, Skoubo attended Linn-Benton Community College. There, he returned to a high school passion. "I took a lot of pictures in high school," he says. Skoubo transformed that interest into a profession.

While in college, Skoubo joined the *Democrat-Herald* in Albany, Oregon. He covered a football game one day and a press conference at the state capitol the next. Some days, he'd traverse the entire 130 miles that make up the Willamette Valley. "I loved the variety," he says. "I loved that, for a while."

The traveling didn't make for the best relationships.

"My wife and I would sometimes only see each other for 30 minutes over a 72-hour stretch," says Skoubo. So, he looked for another new path.

Hailing from a line of educators and knowing firsthand how easily students check out in high school if not fully engaged, Skoubo dedicated himself to becoming an educator invested in his students. He returned to college, attended Western Oregon University and received his Master of Education.

"I like telling my students my GPA," says Skoubo. He does so to highlight the importance of living your own path and self-discovery.

Skoubo teaches his students writing, journalism and graphic design. "I had a great time in journalism," he says, "but spending more time with my family and having an impact on students is even better."



*For University of Oregon students who find it hard to navigate college life, Tara Parrillo is available to make the process easier.*



## *At Your Service*

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Next to tables filled with doughnuts, Tara Parrillo chats with students looking for a little added assistance — and a doughnut to boot. Parrillo is the director of the University of Oregon’s TRIO program, which aids underrepresented students as they pursue their dreams of obtaining a college degree. On an April morning, she checks the time. She has a handful of advising meetings with students. Later, she’ll head to a presentation for prospective students to the program. Despite all the commitments, Parrillo says, “I love days like this.”

Parrillo, 52, took a winding path to reach her current career.

Like many of the students she advocates for, Parrillo was a first-generation college student. After graduating from the University of Arizona in 1992, a conversation with her mother led to law school.

“She always wanted to be a lawyer,” Parrillo says of her mother.

It didn’t take Parrillo long to realize her mom’s dream wasn’t her own. “I knew almost right away that I didn’t like it. I hate confrontation and arguments. I don’t like to fight.” That wasn’t helpful when trying to hammer out the details of a divorce or custody battle.

By the time she was 30, she had left the legal field and let her license to practice lapse. “I like to call myself a recovering lawyer,” Parrillo says with a chuckle.

In the succeeding 15 years, Parrillo raised a family, did volunteer work and directed a preschool.

An opportunity to do more for students at crossroads similar to those she faced as a college student presented itself. When the position at TRIO opened up in 2014, “I couldn’t pass it up,” Parrillo says.

As TRIO’s director, Parrillo works with students who need an extra hand navigating college. Parrillo finds scholarship opportunities, study groups, clubs and organizations, additional food benefits — anything the 500+ students she works with might need.

Parrillo says she is happier than ever in her role working with the next generation of leaders. She helps people follow their path toward fulfillment.

“If I could have written a job description for myself,” she says, “this would be it.”



## *From Boards to Brew*

Walking around Lovely, his Springfield, Oregon, cafe, Josh Matthews chats with regulars. He shares a laugh with one and checks in on folks who might need a refill. “Need any more coffee? Did I already say that?” Matthews asks one of his guests at the counter. Every now and then, he throws a smile to his wife, Sarah, behind the counter preparing orders.

From 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Josh and Sarah focus on having healthy and delicious options for their loyal patrons. The time outside of running their cafe is dedicated to family, as they balance running a small business while raising kids.

Years before becoming a cafe owner, Matthews, 35, had a much different daily grind. For over a decade, he was a professional skateboarder.

Matthews took week-long trips all around the world. Armed with a few skateboards, some pairs of shoes and a camera operator, he was photographed for skate magazines such as *Thrasher*. “It was a good time, skating with friends,” says Matthews. He would skate all day, and soak in as much of the atmosphere and community once the photo sessions were done.

The role of a professional skater wasn’t always the plan. Matthews picked up his first board when he was 12. Like most preteens, he was looking for an entertaining pastime. A board previously collecting dust in his family garage became his new form of entertainment as Matthews spent most of his free time skating. After high school, the hobby turned into a full-time gig.

“I moved to San Francisco and that’s when things took off,” says Matthews. The Mission District became his home base for most of his career. It was only when globetrotting began to catch up with Matthews that he started contemplating life after skating.

Years spent grabbing coffee and snacks from small, local cafes in countries like Germany and New Zealand had left their mark.

In 2020, Matthews and Sarah opened Lovely, not far from where he took his first few spills on that trusty skateboard. “Skating was so fulfilling for so long,” says Matthews. “This is just as fulfilling, just in a new way.”

These days, the only spills Matthews tries to avoid are the ones where he overfills a coffee mug. ☆



*Before owning and running Lovely, Josh Matthews traveled around the world with a skateboard in hand.*

*“Skating was so fulfilling for so long. This is just as fulfilling, just in a new way.”*

— Josh Matthews



*Melanie Stanley gazes in front of the melted sign that once welcomed customers to the general store she and her family owned in Blue River, Oregon.*







# Still STANDING

It's been almost three years since the small town of Blue River was turned into ashes. Where is the town now?

*Written by* **KATE DENHART & ANNA WARD**

*Photographed by* **IAN ENGER**

**C**liff Richardson still remembers the sound of the sheriff pounding on the door of his Blue River, Oregon, home, and telling him and his wife, Connie, that they needed to evacuate — right away. Cliff looked out his window to see his hilltop neighborhood engulfed in flames.

On September 7, 2020, what would become known as the Holiday Farm Fire was sweeping through tiny Blue River, an unincorporated town of fewer than 900 people that sits on the McKenzie River 51 miles east of Eugene, Oregon. The fire would destroy 430 homes and claim one life.

Cliff and Connie survived the fire, but not before spending fleeting minutes running around their house grabbing clothes, documents, rifles and their cat.

"You're never ever completely ready for an evacuation," Cliff said of that night, when the couple had expected to celebrate their 47th wedding anniver-

sary. "It's amazing what you think you need," Cliff added. "And then you look back on it [and think], well, I really could get by without that."

The Richardsons then got into separate cars — Cliff in his red pickup and Connie in her Subaru — and headed west toward Eugene, away from the fire that was spreading faster with the wind.

Their two-acre property sits atop a hill. Their backyard, complete with a chicken coop, stalls for horses and a wire scarecrow, was surrounded by flames as they drove away. They had no idea if they'd ever see their house again.

"We got to the bottom of the hill," Cliff said, "and the firefighters said, 'We're trapped. You can't go any further.'" They had no choice but to seek refuge at the community track.

"The fire department was driving around on the track surface and spraying us on occasion, and also where the fire encroached on the track," Cliff said.

They were with other residents of Blue River who had sought refuge at the



track. They sat, watching and listening to their town burn. The sound of propane tanks and exploding ammunition filled the air as they waited for any sign of hope.

**For some Oregonians** who have faced the devastating impact of wildfires in recent years, hope is all they had once the fires were finally extinguished. Increasingly, more and more state residents, not just those in Blue River, are facing such a fate. In 2021, Oregon had 1,661 wildfires. In 2022, there were more than 1,000 wildfires. According to state officials, Oregonians lost nearly \$1 billion in homes and belongings in 2020. Nine people died, more than 4,000 homes were burned and more than 1 million acres of land were destroyed.

The residents of Blue River have been dealing with the aftermath of the Holiday Farm Fire for almost three years and are still trying to recover.

Blue River Drive, the main street in town, used to house a general store, library, clinic and fire station. Those buildings were the heart of Blue River. The people flowing in and out of them kept the blood coursing through the town's veins. Now, a small structure that is the new post office sits on the edge of town. While only 20% of the town's homes have been rebuilt, the post office is the only business that's back.

One of the few homes that stand in town is Melanie Stanley's new two-story, dark gray house. Her former home burned in the fire. A few minutes west, above the McKenzie River Community School, sits Cliff and Connie Richardson's home. If you continue east on Highway 126 about a mile or two, you'll find Mike and Margaret Godfrey's new ranch-style house and property. Like Stanley, the Godfreys had to rebuild after the fire. All of these families have been pillars in the Blue River community for decades and remain an example of the persistence and perseverance of the town.

**It was a quiet February afternoon** in Blue River, two and half years after the fire. Melanie Stanley walked outside of the trailer where she spends most of her time fighting for Blue River. She crossed Blue River Drive and stood under the burnt remains of the Meyer's General Store & Liquor sign. Stanley's family has lived in Blue River for almost 30 years and her parents owned the general store before she did.

"Our store was more than just a store. It was an unofficial town hall," said Stanley, 45, standing with her shoulder-length







*In 2020, much of Blue River was burned to the ground. Since the fire, only 20% of the town has been rebuilt. Drone photo by Davis Long.*





*Cliff Richardson looks out at his property, which was scorched during the Holiday Farm Fire in September 2020. The surrounding trees and foliage have been regrowing, but the scars of the fire can still be seen.*





faded blue hair, purple-beaded jewelry and winter boots. “Everybody just gathered there when there was good stuff, when there was bad stuff. That was where they came for information.”

For the past 15 years, Stanley has been the unofficial mayor of Blue River, a title given to her by the community. Since Blue River is unincorporated, it has no local government, but it has Stanley.

“She knows everyone, and she’s probably on three or four different boards,” Marc Brooks, the executive director of the disaster relief team at Cascade Relief Team, said.

She knew leaving Blue River wasn’t an option for her and her family after the fire, even though she lost her house and store in the disaster. Stanley was able to grab some clothing items, her husband’s bass guitar and important family photos before leaving her home, unbeknownst to her that it would be for the last time.

Her current home sits on the lot behind where her store once stood. It is one of a handful of homes that have been rebuilt. While she has her home back, she is still trying to rebuild her store. Its melted sign acts as a reminder of what once was — and the work that is needed to recover the soul of this town.

Even with the store gone, Stanley and her family still act as the central information point for many in town. Most days, Stanley spends hours on the phone with state and area government officials pressing for financial support and resources the town and its residents need.

Stanley is doing what she can to rebuild the town. She wants to see businesses come back and she wants to see her community thrive.

“For every bit of loss, we had to see it come back,” Stanley said.

As Stanley stood outside, looking around the town she has called home for 30 years, she finished a cigarette and headed back into the trailer.

**The trailer that Stanley walked back into** was brought to Blue River by Marc Brooks and the Cascade Relief Team. Brooks started the CRT in hopes of helping smaller communities recover from disasters and rebuild. He is from Molalla, Oregon, a town in Clackamas County with a population of just over 10,000.

Coming from a small town, Brooks understands how such places are often “resource deserts” and are unable to easily access agencies like the Department of Human Services.

Brooks first got involved in relief help in 2017, volunteering during the cleanup

of the Columbia Gorge. He started CRT in response to the devastating wildfires that swept through Oregon in 2020.

Since then, Brooks hasn’t looked back. He quit his day job, and CRT’s team of 20 has aided communities all over the United States.

CRT is focused on helping communities recover. Members collect and deliver donations to communities in need of assistance and also connect community members with organizations that allow them to take the next step toward rebuilding. The team also works to clean up the ash, trees and debris that are left from the fire.

“We do it for a while and go back to our daily lives. And then this became our daily lives,” Brooks said.

Brooks and his team came to Blue River in February 2021. He met with Stanley and others to figure out how CRT could support them. Brooks remembers his first weekend in Blue River when 80 volunteers gathered. The group partnered with Reach Out Worldwide, another disaster relief group that traveled to Blue River for the cleanup.

“That’s how the recovery started: just by the volunteer cleanup, which was incredible,” Brooks said.

Brooks and his team were in Blue River for five months before they had to move to aid the next community. However, the organization has transitioned into helping the town long-term. Stanley works every day from the CRT trailer still stationed at the epicenter of Blue River.

**Margaret and Mike Godfrey** moved to Blue River in 1987 for Mike’s job. At the time, he was an engineer with the United States Forest Service in Gold Beach, Oregon. On the night of the fire, the Godfreys were harvesting the last of their tomatoes in their garden before the forecasted windstorm struck. They sat, waiting for the wind to come, when the power went out around 8 p.m.

“We stepped outside and saw this orange glow,” said Margaret, 74, a retired teacher turned artist. “We just kept thinking we had time when we really didn’t.”

They piled paintings, photos and animals into their cars and left.

“And that was the end. Our house burned down,” said Margaret.

For the Godfreys, rebuilding was an easier process than most. With Mike’s engineering background, the couple was able to navigate the confusing insurance policies and building contracts required. Their new house was up about 20 months after the old one was destroyed.





Now, the Godfreys are focusing on aiding the recovery of their community in any way they can. Mike is the chair of the rural fire department and is helping with the rebuilding of the town's fire station. He also helps by offering his engineering expertise at committee meetings for the new library and clinic.

Margaret used her art to create a metal memorial sign for the town that sits at the high school track as a reminder of September 7, 2020. The two also constructed a large, aluminum light-up star that hangs from one of the tallest trees on their property.

"It was the star of hope. It was like, 'We're coming home. We're coming back,'" said Margaret.

The Godfreys have stayed true to their word; the couple is here for the Blue River community. Margaret doesn't see another place for the two to live.

"We like our community. We love our property," she said. "The roots are deep. This is where our community is."

**Blue River is no stranger to setbacks.** The town has a long history of overcoming adversity and persisting through hard times. Since Blue River's establishment in the early 1900s, the community has seen many generations come and go. In the early days, it was miners looking for gold. When the mines dried up, the logging industry took its place and the town thrived for many years as a logging town. From logging, the town shifted to what was known

as "the dam years." That was when the dams were built for power and to prevent floods.

After years of ebbs and flows in population size, a new wave of tourist-based businesses began to take shape in the town. Blue River and the surrounding area expanded with new restaurants and inns for visitors to stay. However, the influx of tourists mainly happens in the summer months. With the devastation of the fire, Blue River is once again fighting to stay afloat.

"Blue River is an older community, a strong community," Marc Brooks said.

In the two-plus years since the fire, community leaders and residents have played a role in creating the new Blue River. Although the process is slow, the community is far from hopeless. The residents all want to see their community come back.

Just out the front of the CRT trailer in the middle of Blue River Drive stands a phoenix made from scrap metal that is impossible to miss. Various pieces of the town — old and new — were used to create the massive bird that sits on the almost empty main road. It acts as a symbolic reminder that the town will rise from the ashes, as it has done many times before, and continue to be a thriving community.

"Come hell or high water," Stanley said, "we will come back." ★





*Residents had no choice  
but seek refuge at the  
community track.*



**ABOVE** Many Blue River residents took refuge at McKenzie High School's track during the fire. Part of the area burned, but the track and most of the school were left unscathed.

**LEFT** The metal phoenix sculpture in the center of Blue River is composed of material from homes and businesses that burned in the Holiday Farm Fire. The sculpture, titled "Viribus," was made by sculptor Jud Turner and stands as a symbol of resilience.







# Escape *from the* Cold

On dangerously cold winter nights, volunteers team up to offer shelter, warmth and community to Lane County's unhoused population.

*Written by* **NICK AZIMI**

*Photographed by* **CLARA FERRER-PERRY**

*Illustrated by* **SISI HUSING**





**A**t 5:45 p.m. on a January evening, the daylight had faded and the temperature was dropping toward freezing outside of a blocky, two-story building in downtown Springfield, Oregon. Inside, about a dozen people had gathered in a loose circle of chairs. They were the volunteers who would devote their time this night to run an emergency shelter for their community's unhoused individuals.

The two lead volunteers, Dave Strahan and Theresa Koford, began their pre-shift announcements.

Koford scanned the laptop propped open on her leg. Strahan sat with his hands placed in his lap, looking out from under the brim of his signature camo cowboy hat.

Koford kicked things off. "One of the Eugene sites had to use narcan three times last night. So, who here knows what narcan is?"

A few volunteers' hands went up.

"For those that don't know, it's an opiate antagonist," Koford said. "It's easy to administer and it saves lives. It's the most amazing thing I've ever seen."

Strahan interjected with another concern. "Oh, and if there's a fire," he said, "make sure you help get guests out first, and make sure our disabled guests don't get left behind."

Outside, a line of about 30 unhoused people had been waiting for almost two hours. The clock would soon strike 6 p.m., and the doors would open to those waiting in the cold. As they entered, they would become guests of the Egan Warming Center.

"All right," Koford said, "let's start letting people in."

**In the winter of 2023**, the Egan Warming Centers opened their doors at seven different locations in Eugene and Springfield when temperatures dropped to 30 degrees or below. They welcomed 240 people on an average night, with 75 of those staying at the Springfield site. This season, 1,465 people stayed at a warming center at least once. Without this service, these people would have had to endure the cold and possibly face the same fate as Thomas Egan, whose name and story live on through the legacy of the warming centers.

Egan was an unhoused veteran who lived in Eugene, Oregon. One night, during a harsh cold stretch in December of 2008, Egan failed to find sufficient shelter. His frozen body was found in the snow the next morning.

During the same cold stretch, a woman named Marion Malcolm started contacting churches. Her goal





*The Memorial Building in Downtown Springfield has been used as a warming center for four years.*

was simple: find a safe place for the unhoused to stay during the dangerous weather. Malcolm and her advocacy group, the Springfield Shelter Rights Alliance, found three willing churches. Together, they offered six nights of shelter the same December Egan died.

Malcolm remembers a handful of unhoused people that came to stay the first night. By the sixth night, that number had grown to over 40.

“We did it because we didn’t want people to die,” said Malcolm. “We had no protocols, we had no safeguards, we had no nothing. It was clearly risky, but it wasn’t as risky as being homeless on the street.”

Malcolm and the Shelter Rights Alliance teamed up with other local homeless-rights advocates and petitioned Lane County for support. The county commissioners offered up the historic Eugene Armory building for temporary use, and the coalition quickly converted it into an emergency shelter. They named it the Thomas Egan Warming Center to honor the man who froze to death on the street a month before.

An average of 131 people took shelter at the Armory over five freezing nights that season. The building went out of use after the first winter, but Egan’s name stuck as the program moved to inhabit new and available spaces.

The coalition then started meeting with local nonprofits to figure out how best to continue their work. St. Vincent de Paul, an organization that serves the unhoused, joined the effort and provided logistical and financial support.

During initial discussions, the program was designed to open about 15 nights a year. This winter, 15 years later, the warming centers opened a record 31 times. Without fail, unpaid volunteers rose to the occasion and acted as the lifeblood of the operation.

“For all the staff work and all of the organizational support that happens behind the scenes from St. Vincent de Paul and others, when the shelters open, it’s volunteers in there,” said Tim Black, winter strategies and emergency response coordinator for St. Vincent. “It’s unbelievable.”

Without these volunteers, and the few St. Vincent employees who offer backup, the warming centers could not open. When they are in action, it’s about far more than meeting basic physiological needs. It’s about creating a space where the unhoused are welcomed as full-fledged members of the community and offered the respect and compassion they rarely get in other areas of life.

**During his evening shifts,** Dave Strahan is constantly on the move. One moment, he’s listening intently to what a guest has to say in order to best understand their needs. A few minutes later, he’s saying hello to a guest he recognizes from previous nights. He has more than 10 years of experience as an Egan volunteer, so if someone has a question, he probably has an answer.

One night this past winter, he paused for a moment to lean against a doorway and look into the common





*Frank Goser, a volunteer, prepares mats for Egan Warming Center guests to sleep on. The mats get laid out every night that Egan activates.*

area at the Springfield site. At a table, a group of guests and volunteers sat solving a jigsaw puzzle. They scanned the scattered pile of available pieces for the correct dash of color, complimenting each other as they worked together to reveal the picture, piece by piece.

Strahan later reflected on how these kinds of social interactions are a central part of the service the warming centers provide.

“It’s breaking down the barrier between them and us. It’s humanizing these people because they *are* humans,” said Strahan, 62. “It’s the missing social interaction that they don’t get on the street.”

Strahan recalls times when guests have come in to get supplies like hats, gloves or hand warmers, but chose not to stay the night. These guests still might stay for an hour or so just to talk with the people at the front desk or other volunteers.

“I think that’s part of humanity to want to gather in a group, to want to be heard by others,” said Strahan. “The unhoused are exactly like that, but they don’t get to have those interactions because they don’t have the comforts that we do.”

Another doorway leads from the common area to the gym that serves as the sleeping quarters. Inside, rows of thick black mats line the wooden floor. At one end of the gym, a lamp casts a soft yellow glow around the volunteers sitting side by side, gazing

out at the sleeping guests. Every so often, the volunteers stroll through the aisles to make sure nobody requires assistance or attention. Most of the time, the nights are quiet, and the silence is only broken by a light snore, a whisper or the hum of the heater.

“It’s usually about 68 in there, but I like to kick it up a few degrees to get them deeper into those REM cycles,” said Strahan.

Around midnight, Strahan usually heads home for the night, but he won’t be gone for long.

**Volunteers take special care** to provide a comfortable sleeping experience for the guests. A row of mats against the far wall is exclusively for women. Volunteers will also stack mats on top of one another to create a higher, more accessible surface for disabled guests. Couples who come in can sleep together on two mats pushed side by side.

One volunteer, Trevecca Winters, who works in emergency services and hospice care, understands that some guests don’t feel safe sleeping with the others. “For people living unsheltered, the amount of trauma they endure is likely huge, with multiple layers and different forms,” said Winters, 42.

With this in mind, she offers those guests the option to sleep in another room where they might have more space and privacy.

“It takes a focus on trying to really look at this



person as a human being and take into consideration their past situations, what they're currently going through, and how we can provide non-judgmental care in order to help meet peoples' needs," said Winters.

It's also part of Winters' job to deescalate intense or stressful situations that may occur under the warming center's roof. She remembers one time when two guests had gotten into a heated argument. She and another volunteer stepped in. One guest went on a walk to cool down, and the other got something to eat. Thanks to Winters' help, both were able to calm down and stay the night.

As the hours of the evening press on into the night, guests continue to arrive seeking shelter. If Melissa Swick is working the front desk, she greets them with bright eyes and a big smile. She has been working at the Springfield warming center for only one season, but she has come to know about 70 percent of the guests by name.

Swick has lived on and off the street at different points in her life, so she understands the struggles of those who come to spend the night.

"I can't say I know where they're at at that moment, but I've probably been there, if not a little bit worse," said Swick, 51.

Swick found housing in 2009, and eventually made her way into a career where she supports people who live unhoused. She now works at St. Vincent as a case manager and helps clients find housing.

This winter, she started working the 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. shift at Egan on overtime because the team was in need of someone who knew how to operate the data entry system that tracks Egan usage. On a few nights, she stayed on for an additional four hours because of a lack of volunteers.

Beyond the intake work, she says she enjoys seeing the guests when they come in, and she tries to brighten their day if she can.

"I believe I'm here to help others smile. If

I can help someone smile when they're having a bad day, that's just good," said Swick. "If they have their head hung low and I remember their name, it brings them up."

**Through the quiet hours** of the night, new rounds of volunteers come to take over for those who worked the shift before. At 6 a.m., the final volunteers arrive. Strahan is usually with them, having returned to help out with the closing shift.

In the morning, volunteers slowly raise the lights in the sleeping quarters to wake the guests gently. Healthy portions of biscuits and gravy wait steaming in the kitchen for anyone who wants to eat.

As guests pick up their bags and begin to leave, Strahan will eye them to determine what they seem to need for the road. He might offer food or extra layers of clothing that guests can take with them when the shift comes to a close.

About two years ago, Strahan suffered a heart attack. In the resulting surgery, he had four major arteries replaced. He still experiences pain, but his volunteer work offers him a healthy distraction.

"In about 10 years, my pain levels may reach a point where I don't want to live. I could see that happening," said Strahan. "But what's important to me at that point is that I've brought people up to better levels, that I've been of service to my community." ☆





*A family forged in*

# BRONZE

The sculptor responsible for some of Oregon's most famous public art embarks on his next project: a commemorative bust for his son-in-law.

*Written by* **CHANDLOR HENDERSON**

*Photographed by* **DEREK HEATH**









*Pete Helzer begins molding the face of Betty Henderson. For reference, a photo of her rests on the pedestal supporting the clay Helzer works with.*



In the forested town of Dexter, Oregon, Pete Helzer has been making bronze pieces since 1988. Pete is responsible for making some of Oregon's most well-known public art pieces: sculptures of Ken Kesey and Rosa Parks on display in downtown Eugene; bronze doors for the Medford Public Library; and a variety of animals for the Portland Zoo. Most recently, he sculpted the Black pioneer Louis Southworth for Waldport, Oregon.

Pete is also my father-in-law, and since the beginning of the year he has helped me memorialize my late mother by making a bronze bust of her likeness. My mother, Betty Henderson, passed away on September 27, 2007.

Dexter, located about 16 miles southeast of Eugene, is a town that my mother would have loved. She enjoyed small country towns. My mother was born in a small Florida town and spent her formative years on military bases in Germany, returning to the United States when she was 16. Dexter has a population of around 839, which she would have preferred to Centreville, Virginia, the much louder and busier Washington, D.C., suburb I grew up in.

A natural spring runs through my in-laws' property, and Pete has painstakingly laid stone to build one of the most beautiful patios I have ever seen. As a family, we didn't start on a good note. Pete was not pleased with his daughter's choice of partner, and as a result I didn't meet him until three days before our wedding in 2019. The reasons for his hesitancy were hurtful.

The main point of contention was that I wasn't a college graduate. This didn't sit well with Pete. His daughter and my wife, Alison, is a Dartmouth graduate — class of 2014, with a degree in neuroscience. In his mind, I simply wasn't deserving of her. In an effort to create peace with my in-laws, I returned to school.

Despite our difficulties early on, I enjoy the bit of family time that we have. In Marge, Pete's wife and Alison's mother, I see some similarities to my mother. My mother attended church every Sunday and Wednesday. Marge has ties to her own religious upbringing, which in some ways makes her familiar to me. But, of course, there is no replacing my mother.

Pete started sculpting with clay on February 5; the primary workspace was my in-laws' dining room table. Photos of my mother were scattered all around the room. While I have photos of my mother on my walls and in books around my house, I haven't seen so much of her at once since 2007. It was a surreal experience.

We first packed heavy handfuls of clay around a supportive armature of wire, which held the clay in place. As the shape of my mother's head and neck took form, we added smaller and smaller bits of clay. Pete used calipers and an old pencil to mark vertical and horizontal lines across her face. As he used a butterknife stolen from the kitchen, a face began to appear.

Pete warned me that seeing a passed loved one memorialized tends to invoke sadness. Instead, I found myself reflective. It occurred to me that in some way, my mother and my in-laws were getting to know each other for the first time. And, dare I say, becoming friends. It was as if the clay was alive and communicating with them. The sadness came when I realized this is the only way my future children's grandparents will ever interact. I found myself wondering what my mother might be telling them.


The next major stage of the sculpting process is to reassemble the mold and fill it with wax, which allows the artist to add more precise details before casting the piece into bronze. On March 12, we poured molten wax inside the mold, turning it around and around so that the





*Helzer uses simple protractors, hand pliers and his bare hands to form and shape the clay bust that will later be used to create a mold for the bronze pour.*





wax filled each crevice and curve. Shortly after, while carrying the mold and wax from the studio into the house, I was reminded of the past.

I remembered when I carried my mother's remains to her final resting place in Fairfax, Virginia — a spot that I visited daily for the next year. I wondered if Pete could feel I was struggling to hold my composure during that moment. I handed Pete the wax mold halfway to the house and took a few minutes to gather myself.

Over the next couple of weeks, Pete made his finishing touches to the wax bust and enclosed it in another plaster mold. This mold was much thicker than the last, and was reinforced with a layer of chicken wire and small vents. He placed the mold upside down inside a kiln so that the wax would melt and drain from the mold. This was the last step before the main event: the bronze pour.

Through the years I've helped Pete with several bronze pours, but this one was the most important. This one was personal. I felt nervous anticipation building days before the pour.

When I arrived at the studio that day, Pete had already begun melting ingots of bronze inside a crucible that reached 2100 degrees. A giant blowtorch roared inside the furnace while we suited up in protective gear. I tend to only wear goggles

and gloves because I'm a rebel, but Pete, Marge and oftentimes Alison wore shields, leather welder's aprons, welding gloves and closed-toed, leather shoes. When you are working in these conditions, it feels like you're standing on the surface of the sun.

Pete and I buried the reinforced mold into a sandpit. Then, Marge and I took our places. Pete cut power to the furnace, and the deafening roar turned to deafening silence. It was time for action. The pour itself took less than two minutes, but the bust will last at least for the rest of my life.

After 15 minutes, during which time the bust cooled, we used a hammer to break away the plaster from the bronze inside. This process is a bit difficult because the bronze is still very hot. Even wearing thick leather gloves, I burned my finger. When parts of the bronze began to show through the plaster, Pete cooled the bust with water from a nearby garden hose. The remaining bits of plaster crackled and jumped away as the cold water turned directly to steam. When I saw my mother's image in bronze, I felt relieved that it was finally completed, and a tinge of sadness that more of her family wasn't present to witness the moment. My nephews and my future kids only have photos.

On April 16, we took the final step to making a bronze bust: adding the patina, which looks like painting. What is actually happening is a forced oxidation chemical reaction. By heating bronze with





*Chandler Henderson brushes on the ferric nitrate patina solution after heating the bust of his mother with a blowtorch.*



a blow torch and then painting on a mixture of sulfur and ferric nitrate, an artist can add specific colors to the mostly finished piece. Then by buffing the “peaks” with a power sander, you can create contrast with the rest of the sculpture.

In this case, we decided to buff the peaks of her hair with a fine wire brush. The buffing was somewhat nerve-racking for me, as I didn’t want to push too hard with the power tool and knock the bust over. I could hear my mother saying, “You better not knock me over!” I was also relieved because in the true form of any artist, I could feel myself looking forward to the next project.

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Working on this piece with Pete has been interesting, to say the least. For one, he is unsure how many more pieces like this he will be able to do, but he’s still enjoying making bronze. “The way I’ve managed to make it more enjoyable is to only take projects I’m interested in doing,” Pete, who is 76 years old, told me.

“A lot of times people call me and ask me to do a sculpture of a cowboy shooting a buffalo, but I don’t do that,” Pete said. That’s not the kind of work he wants to do. “If I took that for the money, it would be like digging ditches or something.”

Pete is a lifelong artist who has explored many other art forms. While bronze is now his passion, it didn’t start out that way. “Before I got into bronze I did a lot of woodcarving and stone carving, and I really enjoyed it,” Pete said. When he decided to specialize in bronze sculpture, it was partly a business decision as well as an artistic decision, because he could make twice as much money in the same amount of time with bronze.

“Once I got good at it, [bronze] became more enjoyable,” Pete said. “But at first, I didn’t enjoy bronze casting as much as I enjoyed stone carving.” Currently, Pete is working on whimsical animals to be displayed in Marshall Park, located in Vancouver, Washington, this summer. The park is designed to be fully accessible to children with special needs.

I asked Pete if his motive for working with me on this project was to “pass the torch” of bronze working. Throughout this process, that is one question that has been asked of me many times. He said, “I don’t expect you to be a sculptor, but I thought it would be nice to have a sense of your mother’s presence in your house.”

I agree. It will be nice to have her presence in my home. ★





# A pendant of *hope*

Written by **ROMIE AVIVI STUHL**

In early February, I attended a jewelry workshop. My instructor handed me a piece of brass, and when I got home I began sketching out ideas. On my desk lay a stack of greeting cards featuring the Hand of Fatima, a symbol of protection believed to ward off evil spirits. I continued sketching when I realized a Star of David could perfectly fit in the Hand of Fatima. It reminded me of an essay I had read recently; it mentioned that wearing a Jewish star can help combat Jewish hatred.

I finished polishing my pendant just two weeks before Ziploc bags filled with anti-Semitic flyers were left on the doorsteps of Eugene and Springfield residents — a sign that the global rise of anti-Semitism had reached my home. Although I knew the risks it may bring, I wore the pendant everywhere I went. For me, it was a sign of pride in my culture, my identity and my grandfathers who survived the Holocaust.

In my search to understand the present, I went back to learning from the past. In mid-March, I drove to Portland, Oregon, to meet with Ruth Bolliger, an 85-year-old Holocaust survivor. Before World War II, Bolliger's grandfather won a Nobel Prize. It provided him with connections to the Belgium crown, which later helped her family receive the necessary documentation to escape Czechoslovakia. As the war escalated, Bolliger and her family fled Belgium, France and the Dominican Republic. She shared with me the message she grew up

with: "Be better than everyone else, but don't stand out in the crowd."

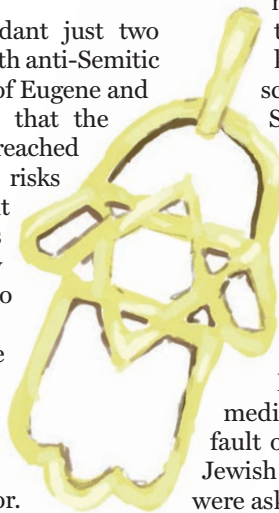
Today, Bolliger continues to live by that message. She frequently shares her story with students and visitors of the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education. But Bolliger doesn't readily share her Jewish identity with everyone she meets.

Bolliger owns a silver Star of David pendant, similar to the one I crafted and wore to our meeting. Bolliger told me she only wears the necklace to Jewish events, and keeps it tucked under a shirt or puffy scarf before reaching her destination. She explained to me she doesn't want to put herself in a situation where she may again face anti-Semitism.

"I keep seeking safety," she told me, "but I can never trust it."

Bolliger's story reminded me of the time my friend tucked my pendant under my shirt. I was heading to a party on what was called the National Day of Hate. A post circulating social media stated America's problems are the fault of "the Devil's chosen few," referring to Jewish people. Supporters of the movement were asked to participate in "mass anti-Semitic action." My pendant was supposed to protect me, yet my friend feared it would compromise my safety.

The following week, my friend apologized for tucking in my necklace. I told her I hadn't noticed but appreciated her apology. Since that day, though, I promised myself that I will wear my pendant — my identity — with pride. ☆





*Thank you, from*

**FLUX**



# FLEX



# THE COMEBACK

HOW MEGAN SMITH — AND OTHER BRAVE OREGONIANS — ARE TACKLING LIFE'S BIGGEST CHALLENGES. *ISSUE*