


Rivers of Life Center crew builds community

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Jerry Herrmann has spent this summer training another group of young men, giving them life skills and leadership opportunities in order to make them more appealing to employers. And this year's work crew has spent all summer enhancing the grounds and exhibits of three sites in Oregon City to make them more appealing to visitors and the community.



PHOTO BY ELLEN SPITALERI - Jerry Herrmann, left, watches as crew members push a replica wagon into place at the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center. Pictured, left to right, are Lucio Perez, Gabriel Gunvaldson, Craig Holfeld, Owen Civica, Isaac Ehrich and Cody Carver.

Herrmann is the president of the Rivers of Life Center, a local nonprofit serving youth, and this summer the Oregon Youth Conservation Corps awarded Herrmann's program a \$12,000 grant to upgrade nature trails and create living-history exhibits at the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, the Environmental Learning Center, and the Museum of the Oregon Territory.

The Oregon Youth Conservation Corps is an organization that provides funding, training and resources to youth serving agencies across Oregon, but it was Herrmann's idea to create a museum and attractions crew.

His goal is to take a group of young people, watch them come together to work as a team, and then see leaders

emerge. In addition to the physical labor involved in building or refurbishing existing trails, Herrmann also is training his crew to become experts on local history so they can lead van tours of local museums.

On these tours he has been gratified to see his crew members "pay constant attention to and reach out to older people."

The young men also will be tour guides on river cruises, like the one on Sept. 24 that will start at Oregon City's Willamette Falls and then take a 50-mile round trip to Sauvie Island and the Columbia River.

"This is the best crew I've ever had," Herrmann said. "My goal is to get them ready for employers; to teach them the skills to host and support the public. They become event planners and tour guides, and they'll even cook the salmon" at the end of the river cruise.

'Journey of discovery'

Herrmann's work crew is building a trail that he calls a "1,000-foot-long journey of discovery" at the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center.

Visitors will "get a feel for what it was like on the trail. In 1,000 feet they will take a 2,100-mile journey through Missouri, the Rockies, Montana, Idaho and Oregon," Herrmann said.

Along the way, visitors will see native plants, "a bison mural, plaques with diary entries [from pioneer journals], an old-fashioned wagon, a hand-carved canoe and a cross that represents a mass cemetery that the pioneers came across," said Owen Civica, crew boss.

Civica, a 15-year-old Oregon City High School student, said the tour guide aspect of the job has been rewarding, along with the opportunity to learn new things about his hometown.

Crew member Justin Taylor, 22, is a Clackamas High School graduate and a student at Clackamas Community College. He remembers studying the Oregon Trail in elementary school, and working on the trail project has brought back memories.

"There is so much culture and history [at the interpretive center]; it gives you the whole picture. Spots along the trail, like the placards with the black and white photographs, give you a glimpse of the past," Taylor said.

"We can see how far we've come as a state and a nation. Without [the interpretive center] that juxtaposition doesn't visually exist," he said.

Gail Yazzolino, the director of the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, said she is very impressed with Herrmann and his crew.

"He has them on task, they learn a lot and hiring them spurs economic development. [This project] is about more than just having a job, this is good for the community," she said.

Next up for the trail construction is the building of big mountain cutouts to depict places where the pioneers had to negotiate nearly impossible obstacles in order to continue on the Oregon Trail.

Visitors can walk along and "really feel like they're pioneers," Yazzolino said.

She added, "I highly recommend working with Jerry and his crew. It feels good to have the work done and know the community is benefiting."

ELC, MOOT

The Environmental Learning Center, located on 15 acres at Clackamas Community College, has nearly 12,000 feet of walking trails that needed to be upgraded, so that is another project the crew has taken on, Civica said.

The ELS is a place for children, families and adults to explore the outdoors and learn more about watersheds through hands-on activities and environmental education.

"We've made sure the weeds are gone, cut down overhanging limbs along the trails and removed blackberries. We even dug a salmon pit" for a summer celebration and salmon bake to be held from 4 to 6 p.m. Aug. 24, he said.

In addition to cooking an authentic Indian-style meal, crew members will lead tours of the ELC.

At the Museum of the Oregon Territory, Civica said the crew has worked on making the site look more appealing by clearing weeds on a nearby hillside, putting down red bark in planting areas to coordinate with the red roof of the building, and replanting native and heritage plants.

MOOT features exhibits of Native American baskets, an antique pharmacy, and photos, documents, implements and machinery from the settlement of the Oregon Territory.

Heritage sites

The End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center is located at 1726 S.E. Washington St., in Oregon City. The center is open from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. Visit historicoregoncity.org or call 503-657-9336.

The John Inskeep Environmental Learning Center is located at Clackamas Community College, 19600 Molalla Ave., in Oregon City. It is open daily from dawn to dusk. For more information, call 503-594-3015.

The Museum of the Oregon Territory is at 211 Tumwater Drive, in Oregon City. It is open from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday.

For more information about the Rivers of Life Center and the Sept. 24 river cruise, sponsored by Discovery River Tours and the Rivers of Life Center, call 503-260-3432.

