

What does our history mean to us today?

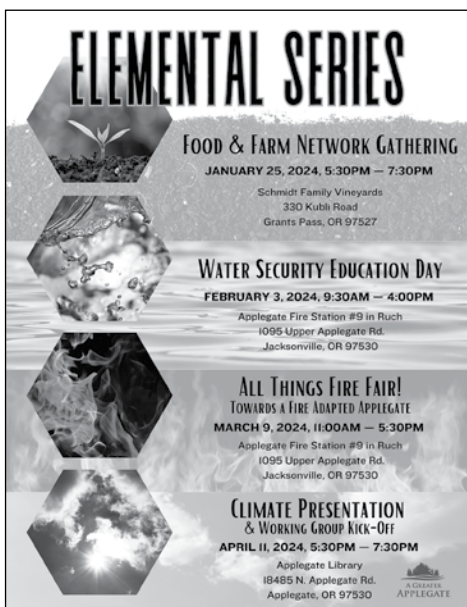
BY MEGAN FEHRMAN

My read of Applegate history—from the Dakubetede and other bands of Indigenous people who inhabited this place, to the early families who settled here and the waves of people who have come since—is a story of resilience, adaptability, and a rural culture that has persisted in an ever-changing world. What does that mean for us here in 2024?

At A Greater Applegate that has meant focusing on the elements—earth, water, fire, and air—the essential constituents of life. At our Annual Food & Farm Network gathering in January, we talked with farmers, ranchers, chefs, wineries, restaurateurs, and our country stores about how to make locally grown food more available and accessible to Applegate Valley residents. This includes better support for the Williams Farmers Market and the Applegate Evening Market, increasing farmer-to-farmer communication, developing the Community Food Hub to serve farmers, distributors, and consumers, and looking at infrastructure and resource needs for those who are running farm and food businesses. These efforts move us toward a more resilient local food system and rural economy.

In February, the Water Security Education Day brought presentations and discussions around household and landscape-level methods for conserving and storing water. This event was cohosted by the Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council and A Greater Applegate. Guest teachers from the Jackson County Soil and Water Conservation District talked about irrigation management and efficiency, Siskiyou Permaculture presented a program on building gray-water systems, Jim Reiland and Roarke Ball talked about how to increase water storage systems, and we also heard from the Water Master's office on the current state of water affairs. It was a highly informative and engaging day, and we hope to make a recording of the presentations available online soon.

March brings us to the All Things Fire Fair!, an all-day community event that will help us move toward a fire-adapted Applegate. The Forest and Fire Working Group is planning a mix of informational tables, presentations, and



In 2024, A Greater Applegate is focusing on presentations and discussions about the four elements of nature.

live demonstrations focusing on wildfire and community preparedness. The event will take place from 11 am-5:30 pm Saturday, March 9, at the Applegate Valley Fire District #9 in Ruch. You can expect a family-friendly atmosphere and a day full of demonstrations and presentations on topics such as home hardening and defensible space, prescribed burning, safe pile burning, and the Douglas fir die-off.

Please stay tuned to agreaterapplegate.org and social media channels for a complete schedule and list of participating organizations.

Finally, as spring is in the air, A Greater Applegate is collaborating with the Regional and Local Project of Southern Oregon Climate Action Now (SOCAN) to explore climate trends and what might be done to acknowledge, adapt, and address the implications of climate change in the Applegate Valley, including whether there is interest in developing a regular working group on this important topic. Please join us at the Applegate Library in Applegate at 5:30 pm Thursday, April 11, for the first meeting of this group. It will feature a presentation by SOCAN's Alan Journet on current research and projections, followed by discussion.

All of these "elemental" events make it clear that our beloved valley has many assets with which to create new opportunities and overcome challenges as we continue to learn, grow, and adapt together. We are continuing to build relationships and networks. We have people with skills, knowledge, innovation, and creativity. We can harness the collective power and resourcefulness of our local organizations and businesses, our pride in place, and community spirit. We can work with our natural resources and treasure the beautiful environment that surrounds us. The people of the Applegate Valley today love where they live, and I imagine that is a thread that connects us to those who have lived here before us. Change is inevitable, but together we have a say in those changes and ways to not only sustain our rural life but also to strengthen our community and improve our local economy.

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McKee Bridge Historical Society—our 25th year

BY PAUL TIPTON AND LAURA AHEARN

McKee Bridge is 107 years old this year, but still in great shape because of the community's diligent care over the years, through floods and windstorms and wear and tear. For six decades, local folks, in coordination with the Jackson County Roads Department, have come together to fund and perform needed work, like replacing the collapsed roof after the heavy snow that led to the Christmas Floods of 1964.

In 1989 the Lions Club and Save McKee Bridge Committee members joined US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) employees in a "Shake-a-thon." They rived (split) 6,000 Port Orford cedar roofing shakes the old-fashioned way—by hand. The BLM donated the tree. In 1995, the rotted and infested siding was entirely stripped and replaced at a cost of \$89,000, none of that coming from taxpayers. Last month we replaced 19 deteriorated planks in the long, suspended approach. The walking surface is again smooth and even.

The upkeep is constant, but so is the community's dedication. With the kind of support we've had over the years, it's possible that your great-grandchildren will be able to visit McKee Bridge and experience its unique beauty and history.

McKee descendants, in particular Evelyn Williams and her daughter, Janeen Sathre, are still intensely involved in safeguarding this historic covered bridge.

In January of 1999, Evelyn gathered interested community members to form MBHS and register as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in order to apply for grants and to accept tax-deductible donations. Charter member Barb Mumblo still serves as our secretary! Their foresight allowed MBHS to do its part when McKee Bridge was closed in 2012 due to major restoration that would cost over \$600,000. Consider: It cost around \$6,000 to build the bridge in 1917!

MBHS wrote grants, raised funds locally, and exceeded the 10 percent match of \$60,000 required by a Federal Highway Administration grant. The community championed our work, even though the bridge was closed to pedestrians for over two years.

You can see an exhibit covering McKee Bridge's 107 years at the Jacksonville



Huge trees carried by flood waters caused extensive damage in February 1927.



The roof was replaced after the Christmas Floods of 1964.

Library throughout February (with perhaps a few days left when this *Applegater* comes out), and then at the Ruch Library in spring. This exhibit will be displayed on the bridge from June through September.

In May MBHS President Laura Ahearn will present "A Century in Big Applegate" as part of the Windows in Time series hosted by Jackson County Library Services and Southern Oregon Historical Society. This never-before-told story of the Native American women of Watkins is based on original sources and inspired by the stories and keepsakes of direct descendants. Dates are May 1 at Medford Library, both in person and online, and May 8 at Ashland Library. Both programs start at noon. Register at jcls.libcal.com/event/11425700 (May 1) or jcls.libcal.com/event/11735148 (May 8).

We'll announce more 2024 events on Facebook and our website. You can sign up as a volunteer, become a member, or make a donation at mckeebridge.org.

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Nonprofit organizations in the Applegate Valley are welcome to submit news and event information to the *Applegater*.
Email gater@applegater.org.

"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better." - Albert Einstein

Happy Earth Day

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