

Storytelling Guild wants you to Pass the Book

Want to make a difference in the life of a child? You can improve the likelihood that a youngster will arrive at school ready to read and learn or that an older child will become a better reader, leading to greater self-esteem and future success.

Here's how: donate a children's book that you and your child loved to read (new or gently used) to the Storytelling Guild's Pass the Book program. Collection crates will be available throughout the month of January 2016 at all Jackson County Libraries (www.jcls.org).

The Storytelling Guild distributes between 5,000 and 10,000 books each year to more than 25 agencies that work with children from newborns to older teens—agencies like Kids Unlimited, Head Start, Jackson County Juvenile Detention, community health centers, and several others.

The Storytelling Guild (www.storytellingguild.org) is a group of volunteers dedicated to serving the community by providing opportunities for children to be exposed to the magic of books and the joy of reading. Pass the Book is just one of its programs. You may also recognize the name as the presenter of the Wednesday morning story time for preschoolers at the Medford Library.

For more information, email Anne Billeter at annebilleteroregon@gmail.com.



Patt Colwell prepares for the Storytelling Guild's Pass the Book program in January.



Pasture Management Education celebrates 10th anniversary

2016 class is open for registration

Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District will offer its Pasture Management Course for the tenth consecutive year this winter. The classes were created for small landowners to help them improve the productivity of their pastures, while protecting the natural resources on their land. Class topics include grazing management, weed control, ranching economics, improving soil, protecting water sources, and creating an overall management plan based on the goals of the landowner.

This nine-week class begins in February. Tuition includes books, materials, site visits by the instructors, and field trips to local ranching operations in southern Oregon. Beginning and experienced pasture managers are welcome.

Registration is open now until January 14, 2016; classes begin February 4. Forms are available at the Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District office at 89 Alder Street in Central Point. For more information, visit www.jswcd.org or call 541-664-1070.

Free agricultural chemical collection for small or large farm operations and contractors

A free agricultural chemical collection event will take place in Grants Pass on Friday, March 4, 2016, and in Medford on Saturday, March 5, 2016.

This event is for small and large farms or farm contractors who have agricultural pesticide and containers for disposal. Anyone who wishes to dispose of agricultural chemicals at this event will need to pre-register and make an appointment. Details will be provided through the Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District website at www.jswcd.org.

OPINION

River Right: It's enough to give you heartburn

BY TOM CARSTENS

To maneuver Class 3 rapids in a kayak requires skill and concentration. Lost in a daydream, my buddy entered one without planning his "line" of attack. The powerful Rogue River was unforgiving—he was violently flipped and tossed like a rag doll into the churning whitewater. Slam! Bang! Flip! Scrape! Crash! Whack! Into those big boulders and along the rocky bottom he went. When he finally emerged from this torrent, he had no broken bones, but he sure was banged up. Medical care is always a concern when you're deep in the wilderness.

Even though our Medford neighbors believe we live in the wilderness out here in the Applegate, we *do* have access to some pretty fine medical care. For starters, our Applegate Fire Department is top-of-the-line. When you dial 9-1-1, these highly-trained volunteers get to you quickly and provide expert care until the paramedics arrive. The ambulance or helicopter will whisk you off to the hospital in a flash. It's impressive.

And, as I found out recently with my own health emergency, it's no different once you reach the hospital. Talk about expert care—wow! With all the negative hoopla surrounding Obamacare and Medicare, I was apprehensive. But that must have been more about websites, sign-ups, insurance, bureaucracy, and the like. Once I was in the system, I found the actual medical care to be great. I had a lot of confidence in everyone around me.

While in the hospital, I learned a few things. For one, the low- to mid-level caregivers aren't living high on the hog. And they haven't had a raise in years. Many of them think that a big portion of those government payments and insurance premiums end up in the pockets of the bureaucrats and insurers who run the system. Anybody surprised?

I don't think there's anyone alive who really understands the "system." Why does it have to be so complicated? Why we don't treat health care like we do groceries? Let the market compete for business while providing a safety net for those who need a hand (think food stamps). I'll bet prices would come down. Let's cut the government bureaucracy—focus on retail.

Make no mistake: our healthcare stacks up pretty well when compared with the rest of the world, but it's

really *expensive*. According to the Commonwealth Fund (google them up), our healthcare costs us about 17 percent of our Gross Domestic Product; it's around 10 percent for the rest of the developed world.

I'm pretty sure that Obamacare is going to see some changes. While a lot of people, including some of my own family members, have been helped by this new law, it's giving heartburn to others. Now they're hitting folks with fines for not having insurance and other fines for having insurance that's too good. Go figure. We are seeing rising premiums, higher taxes, fewer insurance selections, bankrupt insurance co-ops, fewer MDs, and longer waits in the emergency room.

We're part of the problem, too. As patients, we don't do such a good job of monitoring our own care. When is the last time you asked the doctor's office how much that procedure is going to cost? Or whether the lab tests or x-rays are really necessary? Or requested less expensive generic drugs? We don't price-shop—we're disengaged from the market. And society is paying big time.

It's been a couple of months since my week-long stay in the hospital, and I'm starting to see the bills come in. It's hard to believe how little the government actually shells out for medical supplies and procedures. Medicare is paying only about 16 percent of my bills. No wonder we're starting to see a shortage of physicians! And now the high deductibles required under Obamacare are going to make mincemeat of our bank accounts. Despite the high taxes, a lot of us are forced to buy supplemental insurance and, in the end, pay for a substantial portion ourselves. To top it off, Medicare is going broke. It's enough to give you heartburn.

My friend was lucky—he lived through his wild ride and required only a few bandages. My own problem needed more than first aid, however. Since I wasn't in the wilderness, our local healthcare pros were able to take quick action to save my life. I won't be running any rapids for awhile—disappointing, but better than the alternative.

One last thought: those chest pains you feel might *not* be heartburn. Get them checked out by the pros.

See you on the river.
Tom Carstens • 541-846-1025



HAPPY NEW YEAR!



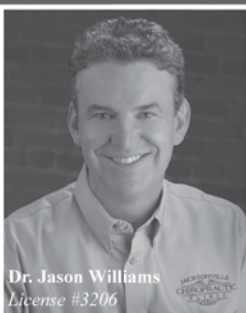
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