

A sign of the times

BY CATHY RODGERS

I remember my first trip to the Applegate Valley almost 30 years ago. I fell in love with the small-town congeniality, the conspicuous lack of traffic lights, and bucolic country roads winding through the valleys along the pristine Applegate River, conjuring up images of days gone by. I fell in love with waving at neighbors I had not yet met (who eagerly waved back), with cars braking, not for traffic, but for the variety of animals routinely crossing the road (not chickens, generally), and with hand-painted wooden signs signaling wine, lavender, eggs, or honey for sale. Not a single billboard, and this to me was a big "SIGN"!!!

Within a day I bought my home, without ever looking inside. For me it was all about the river. I was giddy with excitement to have land on one of the best swimming holes on the Applegate River, spectacular views of Boaz Mountain, the Milky Way galaxy vivid in the night sky, and Grayback Mountain, marking Oregon's southern border. This is what it is like when you turn your life inside out! It was a sign for me that my life was taking the path less traveled.

I dreamed of running for mayor, only to learn that our community is defined by our watershed and the dozen or so creeks that define our "neighborhoods." We have no mayor, and, as history has proven, we

don't need one, for we have our very own Shangri-la, a community that is centrally isolated, yet tightly connected (at least for those that want to be). It's a tapestry of talent, intertwined by goodwill. Life here in the Applegate takes on a different pace by design, celebrating space by choice. It strengthens the spirit, nurtures the soul, reaffirms faith in humanity, and reminds us how good it feels to be outdoors. It is a powerful combination of self-reliance and neighborly dependency.

I recall my first visit to Ruch Country Store. I had picked out a loaf of bread, a dozen eggs (didn't have my own chickens yet), some lemonade, a little of this and a little of that, probably a bottle of local wine. At the check-out register, I was having pleasant conversations about the weather and Applegate Lake levels when lo and behold! I was \$1.40 short. As I contemplated what I could really live without, (keeping the wine for sure), I made a note to self: no ATM, no gas stations, no banks, and instantly my version of rural living was redefined. I felt lighter.

It didn't take long to get used to the refreshing simplicity of "less is more," especially when the congenial gentleman at the register told me, "Just pay us the balance the next time you come to the store." I told him I was new to the area and only in town once a month, and, without hesitation, the young man said, "See you



Be they whimsical, quirky, insight-provoking or simply funny, we should be aware of signs we encounter as we go about our day-to-day lives. Here Patrick McDonald sits in front of one such sign after getting dropped off for "husband day care" in Jacksonville while his wife shops.

in a month." I left the market loving this community even more: a place where trust still exists, your word is your bond, respect is reciprocal, and a smile goes a long way to make your day better. I came back the next month, handed over two dollars and still, 30 years later, tell this story.

This place, our community, is special. I took that first encounter with community as a "sign of the times," days gone by when

community, civility, and trust defined us. Over the years I have found our area offers something even more unique that epitomizes us, something most other communities have missed—the vital signs: (see photos)

What's not to love?
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