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Lost River a real find for new owners

Mazama-based winery changes hands 20 years after founding

BY DON NELSON

In a sense, the new owners of Lost River Winery were part of the business even before the sale of the 20-year-old operation closed in late February.

Rick and Joanne Coursey sold the first crop of grapes they've been growing near their home in Milton-Freewater, Oregon, to the longtime owners of the Mazama-based winery — John Morgan, his ex-wife Barbara and marketing/sales manager Liam Doyle — last summer, and so contributed directly to the 2021 vintages.

At the time, the Courseys and Lost River's then-owners were in negotiations over sale of the winery, and getting to know each other in the process. Each side came away impressed.

"It's a terrific fit," John Morgan said of the Courseys. "They're very nice folks. I'm really pleased to have somebody who is such a good fit."

"He [Morgan] has done a great job," Rick Coursey said in an interview this week. "That's what attracted us."



The Lost River Winery tasting room in Winthrop is a popular stopping spot for visitor and locals alike.

Photo courtesy of Lost River Winery

The sale closed Feb. 28. Morgan, who announced the owners' intentions to sell the winery in January 2021, called the sale

process "a roller coaster" because of all its business and regulatory complexities. He said two "serious" potential buyers,

including the Courseys, emerged through

See **WINERY, A2**

Loup looks to future after short season

New day lodge a big hit with ski area's users

BY ASHLEY LODATO

With its central location in a county known for its scrappy resourcefulness, it's no surprise that the Loup Loup Ski Bowl (the Loup) leveraged the season's lone significant snowstorm to the hilt.

"We had one epic snowstorm on Jan. 4, and we opened all operations on the Jan. 5," said Executive Director Brent Nourse. "Thanks to our amazing grooming crew, we got 14 fully operational days out of that one snowstorm."

By any skier's standards, 14 days is minimal. For die-hards, it's inadequate. But without the capacity to make snow, the Loup is subject to nature's vagaries.

This winter snowfall was limited, and what fell in the early season was so cold that it was nearly impossible to pack to establish a base, making grooming challenging.

In addition to the 14 days of full oper-

See **LOUP, A3**

MV Trails Collaborative blazes new path as a nonprofit

Will help coordinate valley's rec goals

BY ANN MCCREARY

Recreational trails are an essential part of the Methow Valley's character and appeal, and a group of local trail advocates is working to increase development and maintenance of trails in and around the valley, and address issues including wildfire damage and the growing popularity of local trails.

The Methow Valley Trails Collaborative, created six years ago, brings together a wide array of trail users with the common goal of improving and maintaining trails around the valley. The all-volunteer organization has accomplished several trail-related projects over the years, including improvements to trails at Lewis Butte, Riser Lake and Burch Mountain, and installation of a new toilet at the Chickadee Trailhead at Sun Mountain.

Trails Collaborative members recently decided to step up their game and incorporate as a nonprofit organization. That will give the collaborative greater capacity to apply for state and federal grant funding and hire staff to carry out trail projects.

"From the very beginning we thought, 'How can we be most effective at getting more done, getting more resources

See **TRAILS, A2**

AIR WAVE



Photo by Steve Mitchell

A flotilla of colorful hot-air craft hovered over the Methow Valley during last weekend's Winthrop Balloon Roundup. See more photos from the event on page A8.

Primed for the paralympics

Methow trails prepared Erin Martin for Beijing

BY RICK LEWIS

The Methow Valley's connection to the 2022 Winter Olympics extends beyond last month's Beijing Olympics into the current Paralympic Games. Competing this year is part-time Methow Valley and Seattle resident Erin Martin, who regularly can be found training and sit-skiing the community's roads and trails.

Martin, 35, qualified for the 2022 Paralympic Games after meeting Team USA criteria at a race in the Bozeman, Montana, in January. She was notified of her placement on the team in late January while in Winthrop training with local Nordic enthusiast and retired veterinarian Betsy Devin-Smith.

Growing up in Sioux Falls, South

Dakota, Martin has always been enamored with the outdoors in winter. She was a recreational skier who tried cross country but preferred downhill skiing as a child and through her high school years.

Growing in her love of the outdoors, as a young adult in 2005 she moved out west to the Seattle area, taking to the trails and mountains. Hiking and rock climbing becoming true passions. It was that call of the outdoors that changed her life on a summer's day, July 11, 2013.

She was hiking with a group of friends on Little Si above the Snoqualmie Valley town of North Bend. Martin was traversing a rock face "off-belay," essentially without ropes and not actively climbing the rock. She lost her footing and slipped, falling about 30 feet and incurring multiple injuries, including a broken arm, several rib fractures and an injury to her spinal cord. She was transported to Harborview



Photo by Rick Lewis

Erin Martin, who trains in the Methow Valley, is representing the United States in the Paralympic Games in Beijing.

Hospital in Seattle where she spent two weeks in recovery before a month in a nursing home, then on to a five-week stay in the University of Washington's Rehabilitation Center. After her primary recovery, she returned to her duties as a care coordinator nurse at Children's Hospital in Seattle.

Learning independence

The spinal cord injury left her paralyzed from the chest down, but it is obvious the words "confined to a wheelchair" do not apply to Martin. While that is her primary means of movement, she has

See **MARTIN, A3**

It's time again...

The annual Daylight Saving Time spring leap forward this weekend won't quite get us to the vernal equinox, but close. Remember to set your clocks (those that require your assistance) ahead by one hour at 2 a.m. on Sunday (March 13). Most digital devices will self-adjust. Spring officially starts on Sunday, March 20. Daylight Saving Time ends on Nov. 6 this year, when you can reclaim that lost hour as we all "fall back."

ADDRESS LABEL

THURS.	FRI.	SAT.	SUN.	MON.	TUES.
March 10	March 11	March 12	March 13	March 14	March 15
41°	47°	50°	49°	49°	52°
25°	31°	34°	30°	32°	27°
Cold and Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Cloudy	Snow Possible	Cloudy	Snow Possible

WEATHER DATA BASED ON ACCUWEATHER.COM FORECAST FOR TWISP

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LOUP

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ations — which served 4,400 guests, including fifth-graders on field trips — the Loup opened the tubing hill and the junior poma on a handful of other days, to accommodate ski school participants, as well as to host an event to thank major donors of new day lodge, the result of The years of dreaming and scheming and fundraising come to fruition.

“Everyone loves it,” Nourse said of the lodge. “It’s bigger but still intimate, beautiful, with a great new kitchen and café area.”

Nourse remembers the old lodge from when he was a kid growing up and skiing at the Loup in the 1980s. The new lodge still offers a cozy place to warm up and a stunning view of the mountain, but with increased capacity, more effective heating, and improved foot traffic flow.

More use for lodge

Nourse said that the on-mountain concessionaire, Saskatoon Kitchens, has been wildly successful from a customer satisfaction perspective. “Nomadic caterer” Sophia Boesenberg, who owns and operates Saskatoon Kitchens, was born and raised in the Okanogan Valley and served up traditional ski lodge fare along with vegetarian sandwiches, breakfast options, pastries and beverages.

“Sophia’s food is excellent and she and her staff provide top-notch service,” Nourse said. In fact, Boesenberg’s offerings were

so popular that the Loup hosted several dinners catered by Saskatoon Kitchens, providing guests with a tasty meal in the new community space.

“We want to be able to use the lodge as much as we can,” Nourse said, “partly because it’s a great lodge, but also because it’s a labor of love from the community. We want people who don’t ski or snowboard to be able to enjoy the lodge as well.”

Like everyone in the winter recreation industry, Nourse and the Loup board are thinking creatively about the potential for shorter, drier winters of the future. “Careful planning and an eye toward expansion are guiding us,” Nourse said. “We are working with the U.S. Forest Service to explore becoming an all-season venue.”

Although Nourse and the Loup board are not ready to make any official announcements about summer season operations, Nourse said that “we are in the middle of significant strategic planning for the next 10 years, which — pending approval from the Forest Service — will include opportunities for users to enjoy the Loup in the summer.”

Nourse said that he and the board appreciate the working relationship with Methow District Ranger Chris Furr, as well as Program Manager Rosemary Seifried, who are helping Nourse and the Loup navigate the details and permitting required for summer operations.

“They’re great stewards of the forest around here,” he said. “We have to jump through hoops, but



Photo courtesy of Loup Ski Bowl

Snow conditions limited the Loup’s season to 14 operational days.

they’re helping us through the process.”

Making the most of it

In the meantime, Nourse notes that his staff “did a really great job with what little snow we had,” making it possible for not only regular pass holders and day lift ticket purchasers to get some solid turns in, but also for nearly all the elementary schools in the region to send their fifth-grade classrooms for a day of fun on the snow. Despite the financial hit of a low-snow season, the Loup still prioritizes the “fifth-graders ski free” program.

Toward the end of the season, the Loup made lemonade out of lemons — or slushies out of slush? — by hosting a video contest.

“We were in the middle of 18

days of 50-degree temperatures,” Nourse said. “What could we do? We asked the community to do snow dances for us. We didn’t get much snow, but we got a lot of great submissions to our video contest. We put out four finalists and asked the community to vote.” The winner received a free season pass for next winter.

Although the season was not as snow-packed as Loup users would have hoped, “sometimes the weather is just the weather,” Nourse said. “We appreciate the community’s continued support, patience and trust. We’re looking to the future; we’re focused on the many ways we can continue to offer great recreational opportunities and add to the many reasons why folks love the Loup.”

MARTIN

From Page A1

re-established her independence and activity through her skiing, has taken up rowing, bicycling and weight training, and blends in totally with the Methow Valley lifestyle, arriving for an interview at the Winthrop Town Trailhead in her late model Subaru Outback.

Her first venture back into competitive athletic activity post-injury was rowing. She connected with a rowing club, “Seize The Oar” at the south end of Lake Washington, and began rebuilding her training base.

Martin also began riding a recumbent, hand-pedaled bicycle, and was eventually introduced to the Nordic version of sit-skiing, starting with cross country and now learning biathlon. “I really love the liberating feeling of being outside and how physically demanding skiing is,” said Martin. “Seeing and experiencing physical improvements is empowering.”

“Nordic skiing is intimidating and kind of scary for me. It pushes me outside of my comfort zone,”

Martin added.

Indeed, as she illustrated, there were many skills she had to grasp immediately, like moving forward. “It takes a great deal of arm and upper-body strength,” she said. “With my injury, I don’t have the ability to develop my core, so I need to work totally on arms and upper body.”

There are also other necessary skills, like negotiating turns that are difficult enough standing up on skis, never mind sitting atop a chair mounted to a pair of “skinny” skis. Being able to master those skills, and go fast as well without taking a tumble, works for Martin as a tool of success.

“It’s made me feel more confident, just in general,” she said.

Her introduction to the sitting version of Nordic skiing came only three years ago, in the spring of 2019, which makes her rapid rise to the paralympic level all the more impressive. She said that she is honored to be named to the US Team. “Oksana Masters and Kendall Gretsche are amazing athletes. To be skiing alongside them is an honor,” she said.

Driving force

She is quick to also credit her training partner and friend Heather Galeotalanza as a driving force in her rise to the paralympic games. “I could not have done this without her,” Martin said. The two of them have shared more than just the sit-skiing experience. They met for the first time in 2013 while working at Children’s, not long after Martin’s rock climbing accident. Galeotalanza suffered a similar spinal injury, in similar circumstances, while rock climbing with friends, in 2016. Out of that adversity came their shared passion for paraski, traveling frequently to the Methow Valley to ski and train, driving each other toward the thought of competing internationally.

For Galeotalanza, it just didn’t quite work out this year. Environmental conditions and a lack of snow postponed the national qualifier event in Bozeman until later in January from the original date. In the interim, Galeotalanza fell ill to a non-COVID virus and her prolonged recovery from that took her out of that qualifier, erasing her shot at making the 2022

paralympic team.

While Martin is entered in this year’s paralympics only as a sit-skier, she is picking up the biathlon as another event for the future. She competed at the local Chasing the Sun biathlon event in early February, and has not ruled out an attempt to qualify for the 2026 games in Italy in both skiing and biathlon.

Betsy Devin-Smith describes Martin as a “really good biathlete who could have possibly qualified for the games had there been an opportunity.”

“I am so proud of her,” Devin-Smith said of Martin. “I hope for her to have a great experience and look forward to watching her give her very best effort on the international stage. This will help her go forward in so many ways.”

Martin’s first Paralympic event was scheduled for Wednesday morning (March 9 Beijing time) in the 800-meter sprint. She will have a second appearance, in the 7.5K sit-ski, scheduled for Saturday (March 12). Schedules and television listings are available online at www.nbcolympics.com/schedule.

MVCC, Futurewise sue county over comp plan revise

Raises similar challenges as 2015 lawsuit

BY MARCY STAMPER

Just two months after the Okanogan County commissioners adopted a new comprehensive plan, two conservation groups have sued the county over what they say is the plan’s failure to protect water, natural resources, and prepare for wildfire risk.

The lawsuit also charges that the county violated state law by not providing adequate opportunity for the public to review and comment on all components of the plan.

The Methow Valley Citizens Council (MVCC) and Futurewise filed the lawsuit against the county on March 1. This is not the first time the two groups have sued the county over its comp plan.

The plan that’s the subject of the lawsuit was adopted by the commissioners on Dec. 29, 2021. It was in part the outcome of a review the commissioners agreed to in Okanogan County Superior Court after MVCC and Futurewise sued the county over the last iteration of the comp plan in January 2015, just weeks after the plan was adopted in December 2014.

The 2014 plan was the first complete overhaul in 51 years. This revision took seven years.

The current lawsuit raises many of the same issues as the 2015 lawsuit, and says the county still hasn’t addressed them — namely, that the comp plan violates state law because it doesn’t adequately protect the quality and quantity of surface and groundwater. It also alleges that the plan doesn’t account for or prepare for the risk of wildfire or landslide hazards associated with fire. The lawsuit also contends that the plan doesn’t sufficiently protect habitat for wildlife.

The plaintiffs allege that the new plan — like the previous one — fails to identify and protect farmland and forestland with long-term commercial significance. They also say it fails to protect land with mineral resources.

But the new lawsuit alleges even more violations by the county. The circulation element in the plan doesn’t include adequate information about major transportation routes and utility lines, the plaintiffs say.

Limited input

The county didn’t provide adequate opportunities

for the public to review and comment on the plan because certain documents, including maps of agricultural and forest lands and transportation routes, were not available to the public until after the plan was adopted, the lawsuit alleges.

In addition, the county violated state law when it told the county’s planning commissioners that it couldn’t recommend any more changes to the plan, according to the complaint.

The lawsuit alleges that both the comp plan and the environmental impact statement (EIS), which evaluates its effect on the environment, are inadequate.

The plan fails to take into account analyses that found that most of the water in the Methow watershed has already been allocated. The amount of development allowed by existing zoning could leave more than a thousand parcels without water, according to the complaint. The EIS should analyze changes in the plan that increase the permissible number of dwellings per acre in some areas, it says.

The plan fails to include information from the county’s own Community Wildfire Protection Plan that found residential development expanding into forested areas, exacerbating the threat and pushing fire-protection systems beyond their capability, the plaintiffs say.

The plan allows agricultural land to be designated on a site-by-site basis, rather than a countywide approach, as required by state law, according to the complaint.

Zoning regulations haven’t been updated to reflect the changes in the comp plan, the plaintiffs say.

The comp plan is the philosophical underpinning for the county’s approach to land use and growth. Regulations such as the zoning code are based on concepts in the comp plan.

The plaintiffs say their members are affected by the plan and its failure to protect land and water. MVCC’s mission is to raise a voice for protection of the Methow Valley’s natural environment and rural character. Futurewise is a statewide public interest group that promotes healthy communities while protecting farmland, forests and shorelines, according to the lawsuit.

Van Ness Feldman, the law firm that handles land-use matters for the county, is reviewing the complaint, Okanogan County Chief Civil Deputy Prosecuting Attorney David Gecas told the Methow Valley News last week. No date has been set for the court hearing.

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