

Winthrop '49er Days: celebrating our heritage

Celebrating its 76th year, Winthrop's '49er Days is an old west heritage festival that recalls the Methow Valley's colorful past. The three days of activities are presented by the Winthrop Chamber of Commerce and Washington Outfitters and Guides Association (WOGA). Sponsors include Pardon's Mini Market, River's Edge Resort, Sun Mountain Lodge, River Run Inn, VIP Cascades Insurance Agency and Pine Near RV Park.

Here's a schedule of events to help plan your weekend. The activities are free unless otherwise noted. Please be aware of and observe COVID protocols.

FRIDAY, MAY 7

- Noon: The annual Washington Outfitters & Guides Association's (WOGA) Ride to Rendezvous wagon train arrives in downtown Winthrop. Watch the horses and wagons ride through town after spending five days on the Methow Valley's backcountry trails. WOGA joins other sponsors in hosting several wounded warriors on the ride.

SATURDAY, MAY 8

- Downtown Winthrop
- 11 a.m.: The '49er Days parade proceeds up Riverside Avenue, featuring pack strings, horses, floats, music, mountain men, old-time vehicles and much more. Look for Grand Lady and Marshal Carolyn and Bob Groninger, as well as '49er Days junior royalty Peyton Lawrence, Hannah Binning and Madi Surface. Prizes will be awarded for the best entries in each category. Parade entry forms, due by Friday (May 7) are available at <https://winthropwashington.com/events/old-west-festival>.

- Noon-2 p.m.: Old-fashioned games for kids in front of Sheri's Sweet Shoppe on Riverside Avenue, including egg toss, pie eating contest, hula-hoop contest, international gummy bear spitting and a rock-paper-scissors contest.

- 7-10 p.m.: Country western family street dance on Riverside Avenue featuring Johnny Green and the Pack String. Cost is \$10 per person; buy tickets on advance at <https://winthropwashington.com/events/old-west-festival>. Old Schoolhouse Brewery and Methow Valley Ciderhouse will host a beer garden. Mack Lloyd Park

- Noon: Outfitter display camps, live music, crafts and merchandise vendors, demonstrations at the Mountain Men camp.

Winthrop Kiwanis will offer barbeque pulled pork sandwiches until 2 p.m., or until they sell out. Proceeds go to support the community projects. Cost for a sandwich, drink and chips is \$10; sandwich only, \$9, drink or chips only, \$1.

- 5-6 p.m.: Outfitter Dinner including steak, barbecue and Dutch oven fixings. Cost of \$25. Dinner includes cowboy poetry, music and stories around the campfire.

SUNDAY, MAY 9

- Mack Lloyd Park
- 8-10 a.m.: Mother's Day cowboy breakfast. Cost is \$10.

For more information, visit <https://winthropwashington.com/events/old-west-festival>.

'49er Days junior royalty united by friendship

LBHS seniors blend tradition, distinct personalities

BY ASHLEY LODATO

When Winthrop's 75th '49er Days was canceled in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic, it dashed not only the town's plans for a diamond year celebration of the event, but also the spirits of the two students slated to serve as junior royalty: Queen Tommie Ochoa and Princess Peyton Lawrence.

Although Tommie graduated and left for college without getting the chance to represent her valley at '49er Days, this year Peyton is back, now as queen, attended by her good friends Hannah Binning and Madison (Madi) Surface, who are serving as princesses.

The 2021 junior royalty's life experiences so far are different, but the similarity of their interests — in particular the sports teams they play on together — united them years ago as friends and more recently as symbols of Winthrop's western heritage.

Queen Peyton was born in Texas and spent much of her early childhood there, but when her father passed through the Methow Valley on a business trip he fell in love with the place and set his sights on moving his family to the valley.

Peyton's family relocated here seasonally for many years, living out of a travel trailer in the fall and spring and returning to Texas in the winter, when it got too cold in the trailer. "We kept looking for a home here and we finally found it in 2017," Peyton said, "and then we got to move here permanently."

Peyton said that she wanted to participate in the junior royalty program because "Western culture is similar to Texas, so it's a reminder of my first home as well as the place that's my home now."

Local roots

Princess Hannah has lived on farms in Okanogan County all her life; since 2016 her family has been settled on a farm in Carlton. Hannah said she hadn't considered applying for a junior royalty position until Peyton persuaded her. "Doing it together makes it more fun," she said.

Unlike her fellow royalty, Princess Madi has lived the quintessential Methow Valley childhood. A fourth-generation valley resident, Madi lives on a farm and has been riding horses since she could stand upright. Madi spends summers working in the stables at Sun Mountain Lodge, following in her great



Photo by Steve Mitchell

Princess Madi Surface, left, Queen Peyton Lawrence and Princess Hannah Binning make up the junior royalty court for Winthrop '49er Days, which is returning after being canceled last year.

grandfather's footsteps.

Like Hannah, Madi wasn't initially interested in serving as junior royalty ("poufy dresses and tiaras are not usually my thing," she said), but the prospect of doing it with her long-time friends sealed the deal for her.

Horses are Madi's thing, though. Typically during '49er Days week, Madi would be supporting the annual Ride to Rendezvous on horseback. This year, due to '49er Days commitments, her involvement in Ride to Rendezvous will be limited to helping with breakfasts.

Hannah, too, is a competent horsewoman. Together, the princesses are working to bolster the queen's confidence on horseback, as Peyton's experience in the saddle is more limited. "But if you're not comfortable on the horse," Madi told Peyton, "we'll all just walk in the parade."

Adapting to COVID

It's a year for flexibility and adaptability indeed. The young women have already modified a typical junior royalty schedule to accommodate COVID restrictions. Instead of attending a series of events like Kiwanis breakfasts and Chamber of Commerce meetings, the junior royalty is participating in online introductions to civic and philanthropic groups.

Previous junior royalty spent time at Jamie's Place and Little Star Montessori School; the 2021 royalty will not. They're

still showing their faces around the valley, but on those Zoom screens that we've all become accustomed to.

All three young women are starters on the Liberty Bell High School softball team (Peyton pitches, Madi and Hannah play in the outfield), which presented a dilemma for the junior royalty on Saturday of '49er Days: was it possible to participate in the parade and also make it to the softball team's double-header against Lake Roosevelt at home? The scheduling conflict was resolved when the double-header was moved back to Friday afternoon.

Complicated schedules don't stop these young women from trying to balance their commitments to their sports teams and to extracurricular activities such as their roles as '49er Days royalty. All three seniors are busy with jobs, internships, hobbies and sports.

Peyton gravitates toward the visual and performing arts — photography, jazz band, choir, theater (she's currently rehearsing for the Liberty Bell Drama Company's May production of "The Laramie Project") — but also participates in cheer and softball. Hannah, too, is often seen on stage and on the cheer squad, as well as participating on the swim, volleyball and softball teams. In addition to her work as a horsewoman, Madi is a dedicated athlete, playing basketball since second grade, softball since sixth grade, and volleyball since

seventh grade; she also plays guitar and sings.

Not traditional

Representing a festival steeped in tradition, the '49er Days princesses are anything but traditional. Hannah, for example, enjoys firing rifles, and participates in shooting competitions. Madi draws attention to the tattoos on her shoulders and arms, saying "Most princesses aren't covered in ink."

These two young women are currently interning with the Twisp Police Department, going through evidence, learning about state and local laws, and helping the department with a recent move to a new building.

Hannah is preparing herself for a military career and will report to Lackland Air Force Base near San Antonio, Texas, in July to begin basic training, while Madi plans to start at Wenatchee Valley College and work toward a degree in criminal justice. "We're not overly girly-girls," Madi said of the interests she and Hannah share.

Consequently, when it came time to select dresses, "we chose the most masculine dress we could find," Hannah said. That dress, which the princesses chose to complement the queen's more feminine dress, is navy blue, with a high collar and buttons up the front. Unlike previous junior royalty gowns, this dress will not be worn with a hoopskirt. "It was the dress that seemed the most like us because it looks a little

like a man's suit," Madi said. "We gravitate more toward jeans or cargo pants with dad shirts."

Peyton, on the other hand, was drawn to a more traditionally feminine dress with lace and ruffles. "We haven't had any school dances for over a year — no opportunities to dress up," she said. "I'm making up for it with this dress."

"The dresses represent us in the way we feel is most authentic to who we are," Hannah said. "We're here to serve the community, and we want to do it in a way that feels natural to us."

Originally begun as a way to re-energize Winthrop residents after a long hard winter, '49er Days developed into a means of revitalizing a town. In conjunction with the opening of the North Cascades Highway in 1972, Winthrop was restored aesthetically to an 1890s western town. As the vision for the town evolved, residents' and visitors' perspectives on traditions changed and progressed. The old blended with the new to create something contemporary and relevant — just like Peyton, Hannah and Madi are blending tradition with personal identity to transform what it means to represent a community.

In this respect the young women are classic western gals: versatile, confident, self-aware, bold. Like '49er Days itself, the 2021 junior royalty is redefining the legacy of western heritage.

'49er Days logistics: getting there, getting around

Downtown Winthrop — Riverside Avenue in particular — will be given over to '49er Days activities for a good part of Saturday (May 8) — which means vehicle traffic will be affected. But if you're patient, or don't mind taking a break from your travels to enjoy the event, it's not really that much of a hassle.

At noon on Friday (May 7), the Ride to Rendezvous wagon train will pass through downtown Winthrop. Drivers are advised to use caution during the 20 minutes the Ride rolls through town.

During the big parade on Saturday, drivers who must pass through Winthrop should be aware that Highway 20 — Riverside Avenue — will be closed to traffic between the two bridges from 10:45 a.m. until around noon or shortly there-

after. The 14-mile bypass around the parade route will be signed, and will add about 25 minutes to any east- or west-bound highway travel.

No parking is allowed on Riverside Avenue from 9:30 a.m. to noon on Saturday. Parking is available at the Winthrop Barn and library parking lots on the west end of town; uptown in the lot above the Duck Brand or along Castle Avenue; or at the Town Trailhead parking lot, from which a short walk across the Spring Creek Bridge leads to the festivities. Drivers must not block driveway access when parking in residential neighborhoods.

Parade organizers have asked that for the safety of parade spectators, no candy or other items be thrown from mounts, floats or

vehicles.

Public restrooms will be open at the Visitor Information Center and at the Barn.

Parade staging will begin uptown along Corral Street between Bluff and Castle at 9 a.m. Entrant judging will be at 10 a.m. The parade route proceeds down Bluff Street, south along Riverside Avenue, and then returns to the staging area after the event.

For information, visit <http://winthropwashington.com/event/49er-days>.

File photo by Steve Mitchell
Unless you're on a stagecoach, like in this 2019 picture, you might want some help getting around Winthrop during '49er Days.



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An otter moment brought to you by Tom Forker, photographer & the Purple Sage Gallery on the old west Winthrop boardwalk.