

Small doesn't get in the way of opportunity

By Nancy Leonard
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Butte Falls is one of the region's smallest school districts and one many consider off the beaten path. Instead of viewing this as a disadvantage, there are those who took a good look at the community, at the student population and at what the area has to offer. And from that has come quite an opportunity for Butte Falls students.

Four years ago Chris Mathas approached the school board with an idea. He wanted to help some of the students build a boat and then maybe that boat could be rented to people at Willow Lake. From that seed has come a tree with many branches.

This year will be the third year for the boat rental business at Willow Lake run by Butte Falls students.

Last year, Dick Goodboe, and Rogue Recreation, let the students have the concession facility at no charge. He has been so impressed with the students and their work ethic that this year Rogue Recreation contracted with Mac Field Boosters (which is the Butte Falls non profit group) to take over the management of the general store with the students doing the work.

"Not every student ought to be a college grad and teach school," said Goodboe. "There needs to be some in fields such as retail and business. This gives them opportunity to apply at a Wal-Mart right after high school and to tell them they actually do have experience in retail."

As this story was being written, Goodboe and Mathas were waiting for the county to sign off on the project. "But we are sure they will," noted Goodboe. He said the students will have to pay a commission to the county, just like Goodboe has. Utilities will be furnished by Goodboe.

Jackson County Parks has agreed to let the students renovate the old lodge, recondition the kitchen and build a 50x50 events deck on the lake side of the lodge overlooking the water with a beautiful view of Mt. McLaughlin. By the summer of 2011, the students anticipate premiering their first dinner-theater events calendar. They will invite students from all over the valley and Klamath Falls to sign up for Friday and Saturday evenings during the summer. Their vision is to include culinary students, as well as music and drama students. The students will be expected to provide meals, service and entertainment for the general public for the weekend; all for a price, of course. Proceeds will go to the guest students and their programs.

Mathas is in the process of forming an advisory group consisting of all interested groups, such as culinary, music and drama. Those interested may contact him through Butte Falls High School, where he spends volunteer time, by calling 865-3563. But this is definitely not the only project being undertaken by the Butte Falls students. In collaboration with the Oregon Building Congress, they will engage students in construction projects at the lake for at least the next two summers, fulltime for eight to 10 weeks. They will build a new ADA bathroom and a yurt complex for the public and to serve as a housekeeping facility for the visiting students and employees. This project will actually get underway this June.

Currently under construction in the Butte Falls High Shop is the first of four sections of an ADA accessible boat dock. They hope to have it fully deployed and part of the newly remodeled facility by the spring of 2011. Handicap anglers will then enjoy easy access to their favorite fishing hole. This is being funded by ODFW and the Homebuilders Association of Jackson County.

In June of this year, the class will launch a 16 ft. sloop, the Jane Carpenter. The Carpenter Foundation, under the caring and giving eye of Jane Carpenter, funded the sloop, which has taken more than two years to construct.

The students and Mathas hope to have seven peddle boats on the lake this year along with four or five kayaks, four sailboats and the sloop. They also have a used tri-hull rescue boat and offer rescue service for stranded boats and also remind those on the water of the importance of boating safely.

By the way, Willow Lake should be open Apr. 1. Students will probably be on location in late May, with the help of parents and community members until school is out.

Students and adults all receive CPR and first aid training. They receive Marine Board Safety Cards before they can be employed. Carrie Driskell of Mercy Flights and a Butte Falls resident, does the all day class. There will be about 15 students and five adults in the Saturday class which probably will be held just before Memorial Day.

In addition to the Carpenter Foundation, funding has come from the **Gordon Elwood Foundation** and Reed and Carlee Walker Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation.

When people talk about partnerships and volunteerism, they need to look at a small school district in southern Oregon nestled in the mountains where there "just isn't anything for kids to do" and see what actually can be done.