Whether appearing at a local retail store or arriving on a rooftop in his sleigh pulled by eight reindeer, Santa has taken on a life of his own in children’s imaginations, always holding out the hope that he might make their wishes come true.

Santa Claus was originally based on a kindly, fourth century bishop named Nicholas from what is now Turkey. Legend has it that he gave presents to people in need. He also helped sailors, whose ships he was credited with saving.

The kindly bishop was eventually made a saint and has been transformed over the centuries into St. Nicholas, the Santa figure we know today.

In early American culture, German immigrants called him Kris Kringle, while the Dutch called him Sinterklaas, which eventually became Santa Claus.

Santa Claus was not forgotten by early Oregon pioneers, who had few possessions but lots of holiday spirit. In 1865, following the end of the Civil War, the new settlers in Ashland decorated a Christmas tree in the town hall where the Oddfellows building now stands, and sang Christmas carols accompanied by the justice of the peace on his flute. The town wagon maker played Santa, making sure that every child had a present.

Years later, Mrs. Anne Hill Russell recounted the scene for the Ashland Tidings, saying, “We all felt Christmas spirit and spent the evening together in a happy, friendly, love everybody fashion, hoping for better days to come.”

In Victorian Jacksonville, Christmas at the Beekman house was always a festive time, no doubt with stockings hung by the fire anticipating Santa’s arrival. For C.C. Beekman, possibly the town’s most prominent pioneer resident, Santa Claus, or Sinterklaas, would have been part of his Dutch heritage. One can imagine his children Ben and Carrie writing...
Letters (continued from page 1)

Santa a Christmas list and leaving it on the hearth with a plate of cookies.

Oddly enough, Santa Claus was not always depicted as a benevolent character. In 1810 the New York Historical Society commissioned an image of St. Nicholas in a long ecclesiastical robe with a switch in his hand seeming to threaten a crying child. An early picture-book shows Santa putting a birch rod in a naughty child’s stocking with a note that “Directs a Parent’s hand to use/When virtue’s path his sons refuse.”

Following this tradition of Santa as an arbiter of good behavior, early Santa letters were often written from parents to their children, advising them how to behave. In the 1850s, Fanny Longfellow, wife of writer Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, wrote to her children chastising them for using “naughty words.” She addressed the letters from “Chimney Corner,” as Santa was known for coming down the chimney to deliver presents.

While parents left their letters from Santa by the fireplace, children began replying with notes of their own, asking Santa to reward their good behavior and excuse any misdeeds. In the 1860s, Thomas Nast, an illustrator for Harper’s Weekly, gave Santa an address, and children began sending their holiday wish lists through the mail. Soon letters began arriving at post offices throughout the country addressed to “Santa Claussville, N.P. (North Pole).

For years those letters ended up in the dead letter office as the post office had no way to deliver them. Although the post office couldn’t deliver them, newspapers began publishing them. The letter initially was given to a local bookstore before making its way into the newspaper. Many early “Dear Santa” letters were sent to retail stores where Santa often appeared, as he does today, to listen to children’s Christmas wishes.

Further popularizing the tradition of publishing letters to Santa in the local newspaper was the letter written by Frank Church, editor of The New York Sun, exclaiming “Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.” The famous words were written in 1897 to reassure eight-year-old Virginia O’Hanlon of Santa’s existence. When Virginia asked her father if Santa was real, he told her to ask the newspaper because “If you see it in ‘The Sun,’ it’s so.”

The letters collected in the Santa Museum in Santa Claus, Indiana, and published in the book Letters to Santa, tell a fascinating story of American history through the eyes of children. During the Depression of the 1930s and during times of war, children’s worries about not having enough food and about wartime dangers were common in Dear Santa letters. Sheila from Australia wrote in 1916, “Dear Santa, I hope you are alive.” and “I hope this dreadful war has not made you any poorer…”.

The oldest letter to Santa Claus found in an Oregon newspaper is from Astoria, Oregon, in 1890 according to the University of Oregon’s Digital Newspaper Program. A boy named Frank wrote, “Dear Santa Claus; bring my little sister a doll and a doll wagon and some candy and some nuts and some peanuts, and a tin horn. Bring me an air gun and a buck saw and a knife and some candy and some nuts and some peanuts.”

Toy animals, dolls, games, candy, fruit and nuts are constants in children’s
letters, and Oregonians were no exception. In 1907, seven-year-old Edith of Portland asked Santa for “a big teddy bear.” Named after President Teddy Roosevelt, teddy bears became a favorite children’s toy. Tinker Toys also topped the lists.

Some letters to Santa showed practical concerns about location of the house and size of the chimney, such as this one from Maggie Bartlett, sent to the Stark County Democrat in 1874. “Dear Santa Claus: We moved in Patton’s house, North Market street, and I wish you would send me a doll and a little buggy and sleigh; our chimney is big enough to come down. Do send my little cousin Fannie a buggy too; be sure and come I will be a good little girl.”

One boy tried a quid pro quo approach in his letter published in the Portland Oregon Daily Journal in 1905. “Dear Santa Claus: when you come I will give you some cookies. …I want a drum; I want a pair of slippers…and a box of paints, and a brush, and a game of Flinch.”

Another boy worried that Santa might be taken for a thief. He wrote from Oregon City in 1908, “Dear Santa Claus – My Grandpa Burns is the policeman and I’ll tell him to not bother you on Xmas, cause he might think you was a robber going down the chimney.”

In 1952, a Medford child gave Santa subtle instructions for entering the house: “Dear Santa, I am a good girl and I am six years old. I want a doll and my little brother…wants a marble game. The front door will be unlocked.”

In 1956, Ashland High School teenagers, still humorously fascinated by the idea of Santa Claus, published Santa letters in their high school newspaper, The Rogue News, including this one: “Dear Santa … Please bring my mommie a mink coat and my daddy a Cad. Please bring my sister a teddy bear. Bring my neighbor Elvis Presley. (It does not have to be gift wrapped.) Bring my dog a bone, my cat a mouse, and my squirrel a nut.”

Santa Claus remains an icon in American culture, with requests ranging over the years from dolls and Tinker Toys to an Xbox and VCR. Today, children still write letters to Santa, although not always through the mail. In the age of the Internet and iPhone, children can now communicate their Christmas wishes online by filling in a template, with the promise of an instant reply.

But whether he rides a sleigh or a truck, comes down the chimney, or communicates via the Internet, Santa still holds out the promise of making children’s dreams come true.

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**C.C. Beekman Plays Santa**

We know that Cornelius C. Beekman, probably Jacksonville’s wealthiest pioneer, was not only a prominent businessman, he was also a public servant. He served on the school board; was town trustee and mayor; donated land for churches, schools, and a library; was a candidate for Governor of Oregon; and a Regent of the University of Oregon.

But did you know that Beekman was also a benevolent Santa Claus to two local boys who wanted to be part of the Presbyterian Church’s Christmas Eve celebration but lacked appropriate attire? A 1913 newspaper noted that Banker Beekman bought both of them new suits.
Luxury train travel was not supposed to be like this. The travelers had left Portland by train January 14th, 1890 anticipating a San Francisco arrival two days later. But they had gotten only as far as Ashland, and word that the tracks would soon be reopened proved illusory. Telegraph lines were down in both directions. Tracks were blocked to the north and south by heavy snows. When the railroad offered the travelers free hotel accommodations and two meals a day, they began to realize that things were seriously wrong.

Southern Pacific Railroad’s Shasta Route was picturesque, but also susceptible to bad weather. At the beginning of 1890 the line was struck by a combination of blizzards, torrential rains, and immense slides. The great blockade lasted almost three months and nearly brought the railroad to its knees.

In January 1890 heavy snows began to fall along the California/Oregon border. Farms and towns were isolated, roads became impassible, and the railroad struggled to keep its trains running. In midmonth, The California Express, pulled by three engines and carrying 110 passengers including Southern Pacific vice-president Colonel Charles F. Crocker, started up the Sacramento Canyon coming north, but 9 miles south of Dunsmuir became snowbound. This was the last attempt at a through train for the next 48 days and it would be rescued only after a harrowing ordeal. Crocker shared his private car food with the passengers and a conductor crossed an icy trestle 50 feet high to bring food twice. It would be another eight days before the stranded passenger train was finally towed into Redding.

Snow accumulations reached two feet in Jacksonville and seven feet at Siskiyou Summit. When engines fitted with plows failed to keep the line over the Siskiyou open, large bucker plows pushed by as many as seven locomotives were brought into action. By this time The Siskiyou summit was impassable. A heavy plow, powered by a string of pusher engines, and supported by 125 shovelers, was buried in snow a short distance south of the summit tunnel. For nearly two weeks the route over Siskiyou Summit was virtually abandoned.

Matters only got worse. At the end of January snowstorms were replaced by torrential rains, bringing more than 3 1/2 inches of precipitation in as many days. Water courses overflowed their banks and travelers between Medford and Grants Pass reported that every railroad trestle had been washed out with the exception of the bridge over the (continued on page 5)
Rogue River at Gold Hill. In the process, telegraph and mail service was severed. In some areas, food supplies began to run low, and farmers were unable to obtain feed for their animals. Railroad laborers, who sometimes worked 30 hours without a break, also suffered. Men unaccustomed to trackwork abandoned their posts. Other workers, dressed for snow work but lacking ponchos and rubber boots, had to be sent to shelters. By using stacks of railroad ties to shore up washouts, it was hoped service could be restored within a few days.

But the rains continued and more serious problems developed. At many places along a more than two hundred mile stretch of line between Roseburg and Redding, rock and mud slides began to be reported. One of the largest of these earth movements took place 30 miles south of Dunsmuir at Tunnel 9, where an entire hillside came down upon the tracks. A workforce of 600 men sent to dig out the debris proved insufficient to the task. Eventually, they used the mining techniques of building sluice boxes and placer mining hoses to send the mud into the raging Sacramento River below. No sooner were rocks and mud

(BLOCKADE, continued on page 6)
removed from the slide area than more debris shifted into the cut. Eventually, heavy timbers were brought up from Sacramento to build a protective shed over the tracks. In the meantime, a half mile bypass road was pressed into service to allow passengers and mails to be transported by sleighs and wagons to an awaiting Dunsmuir train.

Even greater difficulties were experienced in Cow Creek Canyon, 100 miles north of Ashland, where a major slide was reported on February 3. One day later, an entire mountain—its trees still standing upright—sheared into the canyon. Several miles of track were swept away, and a lake was formed three miles long, 50 to 75 feet deep and 500 feet wide, entirely submerging one tunnel. Trains from the north were now unable to run further south than Myrtle Creek. When roads became passable, mail and passengers were transferred by stagecoach to Glendale where other trains awaited them.

As days passed, supplies in towns along the line in southern Oregon and northern California dwindled. On January 18, a merchant in Sisson (today’s Mount Shasta) reported that he had only a few days left of meat. At Dunsmuir pharmacies ran out of drugs, and the Ashland Tidings that had been publishing special editions on a daily basis exhausted its supply of newsprint. Stories of individuals breaking trails through the snow to bring cattle to pastures, and of neighbor helping neighbor abounded. In one case, telegraph linemen made snowshoes from the wood of a telegraph pole so they could continue restringing their wire. More than anything else, it was lack of mail communication that caused many Oregon residents to feel cut off from the world.

Although the slide at Tunnel 9 was cleared away by March 7, another two weeks would pass before Cow Creek Canyon was opened for service on a temporary line. Not until January 1891, however, was work finished on 3 ½ miles of newly realigned roadbed, two new tunnels, and several new iron bridges.

The ravages of the storm were long remembered. Rail traffic on one of the Far West’s most important transportation corridors had been interrupted for 57 days. The winter of 1890 was considered the worst on record at the time. For the Southern Pacific Railroad in Oregon it is still the worst storm on record. The Shasta Route through the Siskiyous, completed in 1887, was for many years a critical link in the Southern Pacific’s 700-mile main line between Portland and San Francisco. Not until 1926 was it replaced by a much more friendly route to Portland via Klamath Falls and Oakridge. For an overview of the blockade see John R. Signor, Southern Pacific’s Shasta Division: Over a Century of Railroading in the Shadow of Mt. Shasta (Golden West Press, 2000), pp. 38-41. Contemporary newspapers accounts are found in the Ashland Tidings, Jacksonville Democratic Times, Los Angeles Herald, Sacramento Record-Union, and San Francisco Daily Alta California.

The landslides that beset the Shasta route in 1890 were removed by large work crews as large as 1200 men using picks and shovels. Even after more modern excavating equipment was put into service the line was difficult to maintain. The above photograph shows a heavy steam shovel clearing away a slide in Cow Creek about 1900.
The winter of 1890 was a harsh one for all living in the Rogue Valley of Southern Oregon. Heavy snows covered winter pasture for cattle and prices for hay rose from $6 and $7 a ton to $15 and $18 a ton. Thousands of head of stock died from January through March.

It was hard to find work during the winter unless you were willing to shovel snow and mud and rock. On January 17, men were offered $1 a day by the railroad to clear the tracks. By February 1, the Ashland Railroad office was offering $1.80 a day and board to men who would help clear the Siskiyous and there were few takers.

There were positive notes to the heavy snow and cold: sledding was great on the valley floor! And ice cutters up Ashland Creek had put up two-thirds of their annual quota in two weeks. Prospects for gold mining the next spring and summer were high.

Then the warm rain started, and with the rapidly melting snow brought flooding to all the streams and rivers. Every bridge across Bear Creek was reportedly washed out. Photos of the Main Street Bridge in Medford recorded the disaster. Three men were thrown into the raging waters when the bridge gave way and had to be rescued.

It turns out that the bridge at Central Point was still there and water covering one approach to it was passable by February 5. On the Rogue River, only the Gold Hill railroad bridge and the Rock Point road bridge were passable. All others were either washed away or the approaches disappeared in the roaring waters.

Beloved valley pioneer Isaac Constant of Central Point passed away on January 31. The snow was so deep on the valley floor, his body was sealed in a zinc lined coffin and kept in the family parlor. When the rains came, Jackson Creek was so high, Constant’s coffin could not be taken to the Jacksonville Cemetery for two weeks for burial. The mud was so deep, the stage from Jacksonville to Medford did not resume until March.

Resentment was aroused when it was learned in Medford that eleven tons of mail were finally delivered to Ashland from the south and then held there and not delivered to Rogue Valley citizens. When it was explained the mail was all destined for points north of the valley, many people were still incredulous. The Great Storms of 1890 caused much damage to property and livestock, but seemed to inflict the most suffering in the Rogue Valley by residents being cut off from the world.
The “Spanish Lady” arrived unannounced in the Rogue Valley on an October day in 1918. She accompanied a soldier returning from the Great War who disembarked from a train in Ashland. Within days, the soldier was dead. The soldier’s traveling companion was no lady; she was a murderous harlot—otherwise known as the Spanish Influenza—and she went on a killing spree.

Unlike earlier flu outbreaks, the virulent 1918 strain had its highest mortality rate not among the weak and elderly, but among the healthiest segment of the population—individuals between the ages of 15 and 40 in the prime of their lives. Early symptoms might be mild and cold-like—sore throat, runny nose, and general achiness. But they could soon be followed by excruciating headaches, blue lips and fingers, nose bleeds, and bronchial pneumonia with coughing hard enough to break ribs and cause lungs to hemorrhage. Cases beginning with pneumonia usually ended in death within 48 hours.

Although known as the Spanish Influenza, the flu apparently originated in the United States. A milder version had appeared in March 1918 when a young soldier named Albert Gitchell checked himself into the post hospital at Fort Riley, Kansas, for treatment of cold symptoms. Other cases soon trickled in that morning, and by noon 107 patients had been admitted for the same symptoms. By week’s end, there were over 500 cases.

Soldiers like Gitchell carried the disease with them when they crossed the Atlantic to reinforce the Allied troops on Europe’s Western Front. The crowded conditions and poor hygiene common to troop ships and military encampments provided an ideal breeding ground for the disease. The sickness swept through the front lines, and the terrible physical conditions and mental stresses of trench life lowered the natural immunity of troops on both sides, allowing the virus to become a pandemic.

Within a few months it spread across the globe—but in a more deadly mode, exacerbated by the shortage of trained medical personnel who had enlisted in the war effort.

There are several versions of the story why Spain received the questionable honorific for this lethal flu strain. Spain was the first country where the pandemic was widespread among the general population, and the significant mortality rate resulted in the true virulence of the disease being recognized. Spain was also a neutral country in the war and didn’t censor its press, while other European countries ordered their newspapers not to print anything negative. When Spain’s press published the truth, it had the dubious honor of being awarded this terrible namesake.

But the flu was no respecter of borders.

Medford had escaped the first phase of the flu. The second phase, however, proved to be much worse than the first. There was no vaccine available so those who became infected with the virus were told simply to get plenty of rest, eat nourishing foods, and observe basic hygiene.

(continued on page 9)
order a quarantine of all flu sufferers. Any residence where someone was afflicted with the flu was required to post a prominent blue sign with the words “Contagious, Influenza,” and all apartments, rooming houses and homes that had had any influenza were to be fumigated.

People tried every suggested preventative or cure, however outrageous or contradictory: take castor oil, don’t take castor oil; exercise, rest; don’t worry; keep your feet warm; inhale turpentine fumes; wear a neck pouch containing asafetida (which smelled like dirty socks). One Portland mother dosed her daughter with onion syrup and buried her in raw onions for three days. The daughter survived (both the flu and the onions).

Despite these actions, influenza continued to spread. When Mayor Gates learned that critical patients in Hilt, California, were taking the train to Medford for treatment, he asked Hilt to quarantine them instead, sent any who arrived back home, and asked the Southern Pacific Railroad not to sell tickets to Medford to anyone known to have the disease. Then Gates set about seeking space for influenza patients.

In 1912, the Sisters of Charity of Providence had opened their new Sacred Heart Hospital, “equipped with every device known to modern science.” In 1918, the entire top
Gates immediately reinstituted the ban on public gatherings. And after a very stormy session, the City Council also passed a highly controversial ordinance requiring “all persons conducting business in, or persons riding or walking the streets of Medford...to wear a mask.” Violators were fined five dollars.

Until Red Cross volunteers could sew proper masks, downtown Medford looked like a fancy-dress ball. Women covered their faces with everything from handkerchiefs to bridal veils. One man even put a mask on his horse. It’s not known whether it was to protect the horse or mock the ordinance. A traveling salesman was quoted in the paper as saying he “could die happy, having seen the end of the war, the churches closed, the saloons of San Francisco reopened, and the women of Medford ‘muzzled.’”

Despite the irreverence, the ordinance was taken seriously and rigorously enforced. Five businessmen were cited for violations on the first day. Opponents of the ordinance, including 40 businessmen and Christian Scientists, appeared at Medford’s December 17th City Council meeting to protest. According to the Tribune “Heated remarks made by some of the combatants of both sides burned holes through their flu masks and a lot of flu germs lurking about.”

Particularly vocal were Dr. James Madison Keene, a local dentist and city councilor, who compared mask supporters to “Bolsheviks” and accused the City Council of being a “Bolshevik body.” John Mann, owner of a local department store, complained that wearing the masks gave his clerks sore throats. He had been fined $5 for not wearing a mask, a sum equal to a day’s wages.

But the pro-maskers prevailed. Within 10 days the number of new flu cases dropped from 81 a day to (continued on page 11)
four. Either the masks did their job, or the pandemic had run its course. The Board of Health lifted the requirement that masks be worn on the streets and in stores, although they were still required at public gatherings. By the first week in January, even that ban was lifted.

By mid-February, “enza” had left the Valley—but not without taking its toll. The Sisters of Providence had cared for over 150 patients, 12 of whom had died. The flu cases and deaths in the general community were unreported.

Ashland did everything that Medford did but didn’t require the masks. They fumigated the Masonic Hall and banned public gatherings. Funerals were moved outdoors, and pregnant women were barred from attending. In total, ten people in Ashland died during the 1918 epidemic. Ashland Mayor C.B. Lamkin attributed the low numbers to the town’s pure mountain water, fine climate, and right-living residents not prone to drinking alcohol and living impure lives.

The country as a whole did not fare as well. By the time the disease had run its course in early 1919, over 650,000 Americans had died. In just a few months, casualties exceeded 10 times the number of individuals lost to the U.S. in two years of war. In the Great War, more men in the military died of the flu than were killed on the battlefield.

Scientists estimate the worldwide death toll between 50 and 100 million. That’s equivalent to all the people now living on the West Coast. There has never been another epidemic like the Spanish Flu, and we hope there never will be!
What’s in a Name?

“LITHIA: ASHLAND’S FAMOUS FIZZY WATER”

by Jeff LaLande

It’s likely that most readers of this column have drunk from Ashland’s Lithia Water Fountain, on the downtown Plaza. (Because the fizzy, pungent-tasting water is definitely an “acquired taste,” perhaps many of those readers have imbibed it only once.)

But, just why is it called “Lithia Water”? The name is due to the fact that the local mineral spring’s water contains, among other things, a relatively high portion of lithium bicarbonate—a compound of lithium, hydrogen, carbon and oxygen. What is lithium? It’s one of Earth’s elements. Classified as a metal, it is Number 3 on the atomic chart, so it’s a very light metal indeed. Discovered in 1817 by Johann Arfvedsen, lithium has a variety of uses. As part of an alloy containing other metals, lithium makes for very strong, lightweight aircraft parts. It sees use in special glazes for ceramic manufacture, as well as in extending the life of alkaline batteries. Lithium carbonate has a proven track record in treating mental conditions such as chronic depression and the manic-aggressive stage of bipolar disorder.

During the late 1800s, lithium bicarbonate from natural mineral springs came to be considered a physical and mental health tonic, one that was bottled and sold widely. One of the earliest such endeavors, dating to the 1880s, began at Lithia Springs, Georgia, near Atlanta. Carbonated “Lithia Water”—bottled at these mineral springs in the foothills of the southern-most Appalachian Mountains—is still available for purchase. During the early twentieth century, lithium bicarbonate was even one of the many ingredients added to commercial beverages such as 7-Up and Coca-Cola.

Obviously, Ashland’s lithia water is not piped all the way from Georgia. Still, it does flow to the Plaza from some distance away.

Many people incorrectly assume that Ashland’s lithia water originates from someplace within Lithia Park or elsewhere in town. Not so. Its source is situated well to the east, at mineral springs located along the lowest stretch of Emigrant Creek (i.e., at the present site of the Ashland Gun Club, on Emigrant Creek Road). From that (continued on page 13)
location out in the foothills, lithia water flows four miles, through a small-diameter pipeline, to the Plaza’s fountain. First discovered in 1906 by Ashland’s Harry Silver, this local source of bubbling, lithium-rich mineral water led Silver to begin development of (an ultimately ill-fated) “health resort” at the place on Emigrant Creek soon dubbed Lithia Springs.

The Ashland vicinity already possessed other, developed mineral springs, and the little town’s business boosters saw the presence of local mineral water as a way to create tourism-based prosperity. Billing itself as the “Saratoga of the West,” Ashland passed a bond issue in 1914 to pipe lithia water all the way into town from the springs, as well as to develop a beautiful city park at the pipeline’s terminus.

Several lithia-water fountains soon served health-seeking visitors and residents alike in new Lithia Park, as well as at the corner of Granite and Nutley streets and at the city’s new library. One of the town’s several cheerful mottos was “Ashland Grows while Lithia Flows.” The stout granite fountain on the Plaza that currently dispenses lithia water was not installed until 1927 – not long after the grand opening of the big Lithia Springs (now Ashland Springs) Hotel on East Main Street.

The name Lithia proliferated for business enterprises in Ashland over the years: Lithia Grocery; Lithia Travel; Lithia Park Shoes (still selling footwear, directly across First Street from the former Lithia Springs Hotel); and Lithia Sound, on A Street, which sells audio equipment. When the Oregon Department of Transportation turned Ashland’s Main Street (Highway 99) into a “one-way south” street in the late 1940s, the newly built street that carried one-way northbound traffic received the name Lithia Way.

A much more recent appropriation of the name Lithia is the new “Lithia Springs Resort,” situated at the north end of Ashland where North Valley View Road meets Highway 99. Alas, a more historically accurate name for this new business would have been Jackson Hot Springs Resort because it is located barely a stone’s throw away from those well-known, long-used thermal springs. (In addition, the new resort lies over five miles from the real, historical Lithia Springs that still bear that very same name.) The fact that the Jackson name had already long been in use by a neighboring establishment doubtless played a big part in the resort owners’ naming decision. (A trivial matter perhaps, but, at least from this cur-mudgeonly writer’s standpoint, the name of this resort will inevitably sow further confusion about the location of the real, original Lithia Springs—the actual source of Ashland’s historic lithia water.)

The name Lithia has spread even further across the local landscape since World War II. Not too many years ago, Talent’s long-lived Lithia Drive-in Theatre (built in the 1950s and located at the southeast corner of Highway 99 and Creel Road) finally met its doom at the hands of residential development – albeit many years after it had shown its last picture show. Since then houses have popped up where Detroit-made sedans and station wagons once parked beneath the stars. Because of its location close to the south/uphill edge of the old drive-in theater’s parking area, it seems quite probable that one of Talent’s newer streets—Lithia Way—thereby got its name. (Apparently just to make things more confusing, there is also a Lithia Avenue elsewhere in Talent.)

How did the name Lithia Motors make it all the way to Medford? That business’ founder, Walt DeBoer, opened his Lithia Chrysler-Plymouth dealership in 1946. Located at the corner of Ashland’s East Main and Water streets, the showroom sat directly across the Plaza from the entrance to Lithia Park. Like car dealerships all across the country, the DeBoer family’s enterprise benefited dramatically from America’s postwar love affair with the automobile.

In 1970, two years after Walt’s death, son Sidney DeBoer moved the operation to Medford. Renamed Lithia Motors, the business went public in 1996, embarking on major expansion that included offering many other makes of cars and acquiring numerous dealerships all across the country (which currently total over 180). Now one of the nation’s biggest car dealership entities, Lithia Motors ranked 294 in 2018 Fortune magazine’s “Fortune 500.” Quite a success story from Walt DeBoer’s original operation in Ashland, just a few hundred feet from the town’s Lithia Water Fountain.
Windows in Time 2020
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This free lunchtime lecture series, cosponsored by JCLS and the Southern Oregon Historical Society, features well-known writers and historians and brings to life the people, values, and events that shaped our Southern Oregon heritage.

First Wednesdays at the Medford Library, 12:00–1:00 p.m.
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January 8 & 15 with Chris Chambers
Medford lecture is 1/15 due to New Year’s holiday.

SOUTHERN OREGON UNIVERSITY:
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February 5 & 12 with Roy Saigo

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ITS HISTORY AND CONSERVATION
April 1 & 8 with Skip Geear

SCIENCEWORKS: HOW THE ROGUE VALLEY GOT A WORLD-CLASS SCIENCE MUSEUM
May 6 & 13 with Dan Ruby

THE LIFE OF GEORGE WRIGHT:
RANCHER, PHILOSOPHER, FRIEND
June 3 & 10 with Pat Harper

THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIALISM IN THE EARLY 1900s IN THE ROGUE VALLEY
July 1 & 8 with Jan Wright

OUR SEARCH FOR HISTORIC MARKERS IN JACKSON COUNTY
August 5 & 12 with Linda and Peter Kreisman

THE ROGUE RIVER WARS: NEW PERSPECTIVES
September 2 & 9 with Ben Truwe

OREGON CAVES: OUR UNDERGROUND TREASURE
October 7 & 14 with Sue Densmore

HISTORY OF BEAR CREEK:
FROM SALMON STREAM TO OPEN SEWER AND BACK AGAIN
November 4 & 18 with Jeff LaLande
Ashland lecture is one week later due to Veterans Day.

PERSISTENCE: CHINESE LABOR AND THE SOUTHERN OREGON RAILROADS
December 2 & 9 with Larry Mullaly

Learn more at jcls.org/programs/wit or sohs.org.
SPOTLIGHT ON
RON BROWN
by Pat Harper

For several years, the SOHS Board of Trustees has included three dedicated, supportive members who happen to be good friends who grew up together in Gold Hill. They are Ron Brown, Linda Turner and Greg Applen. Linda and Greg recently shared their stories about Ron.

Greg, a close friend of Ron Brown since they met in the first grade, described Ron as “always curious,” and “always adventurous.” Greg remembers their Rogue River escapades, floating the Rogue on inner tubes, jumping off the Gold Hill bridge, and taking hikes in the hills. Ron's two sisters occasionally shared in adventures such as stealing pumpkins and launching hot air balloons they made with dry cleaning bags. Linda Turner commented, “Growing up in Gold Hill, we had to create our own adventures.” Greg added, “Our parents all gave us a lot of rope, but not enough to hang ourselves.”

Ron spent his college years at Brigham Young University in Utah, driving back to Gold Hill when he could in a 1949 Packard. Greg, Ron and their friend, Dave Force, continued their adventures during college breaks and summers. During the ‘64 flood, the three of them used Greg's father's ‘52 Studebaker pickup to help people ferry their belongings to higher ground. One summer, they took inner tubes from Gold Ray Dam to Gold Hill, submerging at Lyman Falls, now known as the Nugget, but surviving.

Greg believes that Ron’s curiosity and sense of adventure contributed to his journalism skills. After being drafted during the Vietnam era, Ron served in communications in Vietnam and Germany. Then in 1980, Ron was hired as news anchor for KRWQ radio in Gold Hill. He joined KDRV as a reporter in 1986, tackling assignments that took him around the world, including to Vietnam and Russia.

Ron became news anchor of Newswatch 12 This Morning when it launched in the 1990s. When he retired from that position in 2015, he was the longest-serving TV news anchor in Southern Oregon.

Greg refers to Ron as “our hometown Walter Cronkite. Because of Ron's disarming personality, people were always glad to talk to him.” Greg also cited Ron’s integrity, kindness and dedication. In fact, Ron was so dedicated to his work that when he learned his own home was on fire in 2005, he made sure others were in control of the situation, then completed a video edit before leaving the station.

Ron received numerous awards for excellence in broadcasting, including an Oregon Heritage Award for his “Oregon Century 1.5” series commemorating the state’s sesquicentennial. That series evolved into the popular “Oregon Trails” series.

Mark Hatfield, Newswatch 12 Vice President and General Manager, said, “Ron has made a tremendous contribution to the profession beyond the stories he presents every day. He has been a mentor to the many reporters and anchors who’ve started their careers here at NewsWatch 12. Ron has helped shape generations of journalists who are doing great service in communities all over the country.”

During his career, Ron produced hundreds of stories chronicling the people, places, and events that have shaped the history of our part of the Pacific Northwest. The SOHS Library volunteers and staff know Ron best for his visits there to do research and take photos for the shows.

Even in retirement, Ron has stayed busy. He continues to do special reports for Newswatch 12. He has led history tour cruises, serving as lecturer and tour guide. One of his projects has been teaching OLLI classes. Paul Helmer, who took Ron's class twice, was delighted and impressed by Ron's “deep knowledge of Southern Oregon history.”

Ron is also in his third term as a Southern Oregon Historical Society Trustee. Greg and Linda agreed, “He can always be counted on for his quiet support and encouragement.”
Our “Do It Yourself History” series proved so popular that we’re offering our classes again in January! Sign up now at sohs.org/diy-list or call 541-773-6535 x 200.

If you like to do research but wish you could go deeper than what Google turns up, or don’t want to sign up for a year’s subscription to a website to access one piece of information, join us for one or more of the SOHS classes that introduce you to our extensive library and archival resources and show you how to get the most out of them! Each class will be offered twice at 5:30pm on Wednesday and 10am on Friday. Here’s the line-up:

January 8 & 10—Finding Facts in Historic Newspapers—Ben Truwe

January 15 & 17—Using SOHS Archival Resources—Kira Lesley

January 22 & 24—On-line Resources for Local History—Ben Truwe