

Grants Pass Daily Courier

GP's chamber of commerce celebrates 100th anniversary (Business Buzz)

By Edith Decker of the Daily Courier

The Grants Pass & Josephine County Chamber of Commerce is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2024, kicking off with a special annual awards banquet on Feb. 23.

Tickets are nearly sold out for the banquet, which will include the usual awards, but also plenty of chamber history. All the past chief executive officers of the chamber — that they know of — have been invited.

Josie Molloy, the current CEO, has a box of documents, photographs and even a vintage membership certificate to work through. But she's hoping even more will come in before the banquet.

She's urging anyone with photographs, documents or memories of chamber history to send them in via email to gpcoc@grantspasschamber.org or in person, 1995 N.W. Vine St.

"We would love photos, to share their stories, say how they were involved," Molloy said. "It's such a big milestone."

A slide show will be part of the banquet, and the plan is to have copies of old photos on each table. A historic photo of those attending the centennial will be taken at the banquet as well.

The other celebratory event will be burying a time capsule sometime this summer, Molloy said.

They're working on a more complete history of the organization, including a complete list of CEOs, that they can keep and also pass along to the Josephine County Historical Society, for posterity.

The organization was sparked in 1903 when a few merchants gathered to form a club, she said. A story in the Daily Courier years later gave a basic history of the organization that's been helpful, she said.

"Then, in 1907, the Commercial Club was created," Molloy said. "That basically became the chamber."

Around 1922, a chamber of commerce was founded — around the time work was underway for better roads to the Oregon Caves and to the coast through Grants Pass. In the wake of World War I, more automobiles were on the road and people were traveling on vacations.

The chamber had connections to the founding of the Oregon Cavemen, the booster club that brought attention to the Oregon Caves, in 1922. They also had a hand in putting up the "It's the Climate" sign, and others that once stood astride Sixth Street, though the full connection is a little hazy to Molloy.

They also were involved with the Redwood Empire, a phrase locals might know is on the famous neon sign at the Caveman Bridge.

"It's really confusing, trying to piece it all together," she said.

One thing is clear, Grants Pass' chamber of commerce was incorporated in 1924, hence the centennial celebration this year.

In 1925, the first chamber building was finished in the old Railroad Park at Sixth and G streets. They remained until 1941 and were housed in several places over the decades. The current home is on Vine Street near Interstate 5, a perfect spot to catch visitors with questions about... well, everything to do with Josephine County.

"We still are an information hub for the locals — we get thousands of calls," Molloy said.

The Chamber Ambassadors reach out to other communities about the area, and advocating for local businesses in government is a top priority even now, Molloy said. Members network at Greeters, just as the 1920s members had regular dinners and lunches with guest speakers.



JULIE ANDERSON / Daily Courier
Grants Pass & Josephine County Chamber of Commerce CEO Josie Molloy stands in the lobby of the organization's welcome center on Northwest Vine Street. The chamber is celebrating its 100-year anniversary.

"The awards banquet is our biggest networking event with almost 400 people," she said. The 600 current members are likely far more than the early chamber had.

Educating members about current situations, whether that was recent pandemic regulations or the current paid leave program, has been important work for the organization.

Acknowledging the 100th anniversary may be part of the regular events the chamber organizes this year, including Lemonade Day, Concerts in the Park, Tap Walk and Wine Stroll.

Tickets are nearly sold out for the awards banquet, but check on availability by calling 541-476-7717. Non-members are welcome to attend.

CYBERSECURITY WORKSHOP. A free business workshop, "What's Next in Cyber and Information Security," is set for Feb. 7, 9-11:30 a.m. at the Rogue Valley Country Club in Medford with some top-level speakers.

The free event features presentations and panel discussion, a question-and-answer session and a chance to network with the speakers.

Speakers are Secret Service Special Agent Paul Vanderwulp, security expert with Brown & Brown insurance Ryan Robertson, Lifeline Security's director of information Ryan Fields Jr., and Christina Kaiserman, information security analyst for Timber Products.

Sponsors are Washington Federal Bank, Bank Brown & Brown Insurance, and Frederick Reichensperger, CPA.

Registration is required at eventbrite.co.uk

PEANUT BUTTER DRIVE. Once again, Kelly's Automotive Service is revving up its peanut butter (and cashew, almond, and soy butters) drive to help the hungry.

The public can drop off 40 ounces or more of a butter and 10 ounces or more of jelly or jam and receive \$35 toward new windshield wipers and installation in exchange. Customers who wish to take them up on the bonus need to make an appointment.

The promotion runs through Feb. 16 at both Kelly's Automotive locations, 1661 N.E. Sixth St., Grants Pass, 541-476-6964, and 2990 Biddle Road, Medford, 541-830-4005.

Donations go to the Josephine County Food Bank or Reaching Our Community pantries in Josephine County or the ACCESS Nutrition Program in Jackson County.

OREGON OUTPOST OUT. The Oregon Outpost, Fifth and G streets in downtown Grants Pass, is finishing up its sales of display shelves and furniture to liquidate the business by Feb. 1.

NEW BROTHERS. Ashland's Brothers' Restaurant at 95 North Main St., is under new management. The breakfast and lunch stop has been a favorite eatery since 1976. Owner for 17 years Dan Durant handed over the business to actual brothers Jose and Miguel de la Cruz on Jan. 1, according to social media.

GRANGE CO-OP WAREHOUSE. A 71,000-square-foot warehouse in the 2600 block of South Pacific Highway in Medford is the new distribution center for the Grange Co-op in this area.

The property, including 6 acres of land, was previously used by CDS Publications, which had its printing operations in the space.

FIRST NURSING COHORT. Rogue Community College has received approval to start registration for its first Certified Nursing Assistant 2 program from the Oregon State Board of Nursing.

In addition to classroom work, students will have practical work in supervised clinical training at local healthcare facilities in Josephine and Jackson counties.

The advanced certificate includes 88 hours of work after students have the CNA1 certificate.

— — —

Reach reporter Edith Decker at 541-474-3724 or edecker@thedailycourier.com.

To submit business news online, go to thedailycourier.com, click at lower left on "online forms" and then click on "Business Buzz."