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**Central Oregon Community College (COCC)** announces that students **Anthony Alegria, Kris Kent** and **Jordan Taylor** have been selected to represent the college on the Oregon Community College Association's (OCCA) 2024 All-Oregon Academic Team. Additionally, Kent was chosen as a national Coca-Cola Academic Team Bronze Scholar recipient by the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society.

The students were honored at the OCCA's All-Oregon Academic Team luncheon event on April 19 at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, with state Rep. Tawna Sanchez, D-Portland, providing the keynote address.

To earn the team distinction, students must demonstrate academic excellence and intellectual rigor combined with leadership and service. A minimum 3.5 cumulative GPA and completion of at least 54 credits is required. Nominated by a faculty member, finalists undergo a review process by the college's committee for academic excellence.

An aviation student, Alegria of Washington state is earning a professional airplane pilot degree while attaining a 4.0 GPA and conducting a work-study position with COCC's veterans department. Alegria is a former U.S. Marine sergeant whose airbase service inspired him to become a pilot. He plans to initially become a flight instructor locally and then attend the



Oregon Institute of Technology for a bachelor's degree in operational management, with the goal of working for a major airline carrier.

Kent, originally of Ravena, New York, is an aviation student earning a degree as a professional helicopter pilot. The dean's list student, with a 4.0 GPA, is a U.S. Army veteran and former EMT and firefighter. Kent was recently named a 2024 Coca-Cola Academic Team Bronze Scholar — one of just 50 in the country — by the Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation, a scholarship administered by the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. He aspires to serve as a helicopter flight instructor in Central Oregon and eventually transition to aerial pilot work in forestry or agriculture.

Taylor of Bend is a natural resources student who hopes to work in the field of wildlife conservation, contributing to the protection of endangered species and habitats. The dean's list student, with a 3.9 GPA, is planning to transfer to Oregon State University for a bachelor's degree in natural resources. She envisions a career working closely with organizations and agencies dedicated to preserving biodiversity and finding sustainable solutions to environmental challenges.

The All-Oregon Academic Team is part of the All-State Community College Academic Team program that started in 1994 in the states of Mississippi and Missouri. Today, 38 states host All-State Academic Team programs each year, focusing on two-year colleges and recognizing exceptional students. The OCCA sponsors the annual event, in partnership with the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, which awards some \$37 million in scholarships nationally to community college students.

**Newport Avenue Landscaping** has announced that **Ryan Nopp** has joined our team as a commercial business developer. As we have expanded into the commercial landscaping market over the past four years, Nopp's appointment is instrumental

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# Businesses Serving Community

**VISIT CENTRAL OREGON**

Visit Central Oregon has announced that 15 recipients will be awarded a total of \$450,000 in grant money as part of the Central Oregon Future Fund. The grant program to support local tourism projects benefiting both visitors and residents is in its second annual cycle. Visit Central Oregon selected the 15 recipients from a total of 26 applications requesting more than \$1 million in funding.

The recipients represent a wide range of tourism-related projects — from a new and innovative series of exhibitions focusing on diverse stories and cultures, including those of Indigenous and Latinx communities at the High Desert Museum to supporting rural Antelope with a catalytic hub for travelers to use restrooms, refill on water, and to be use as a multi-use outdoor event space for their community.

Each has at least one thing in common: Every project awarded a Central Oregon Future Fund grant emphasized sustainable tourism programs and enhancements in line with the Fund's pillars of promoting accessible adventure, cultural tourism, and stewardship. The 26 applications included seven access adventure projects, 13 cultural tourism projects, and six stewardship projects. The 15 applicants being awarded include four access adventure projects, seven cultural tourism projects, and four stewardship projects.

The 2024 Central Oregon Future Fund Grantees include:

**Antelope 3, LLC — Antelope Pavilion (\$50,000):** The Antelope Pavilion project will provide a safe and inclusive "stopping place" for travelers looking to use restrooms, refill on water, and/or relax. It will also serve to kickstart the local economy by providing a multi-use outdoor event space.

**Asterisk Astronomy — Astronomy Education (\$16,155):** This project will enhance the visitor experience at Asterisk Observatory — an astrotourism site hosted at The Spot at Smith Rock, which provides astronomy outreach and education.

**Bend Endurance Academy — Enhancement and Accessibility Project (\$13,200):** Event outreach and adaptive climbing enhancements that aim to increase capacity and successfully draw climbing competitions, camps, and clinics during non-peak seasons.

**Central Oregon Trail Alliance — Cline Butte Mountain Bike Trail Enhancement (\$45,900):** The project will build 2.5 miles of well-designed and sustainable new trail at Cline Butte, mitigating the impact for years to come. The trail system is already popular with residents and travelers due to its proximity to resort destinations and the communities of Tumalo, Redmond, Bend, and Sisters.

**DarkSky Oregon — Beautiful Oregon Night Skies Educational Outreach (\$24,500):** "Beautiful Oregon Night Skies" seeks to halt and reverse the disappearance of our starry night skies in Central Oregon through educational outreach with creative public service announcements that encourage voluntary change of outdoor lighting.

**Ensoterra — Improving Adaptive Water Sports and Accessibility in Central Oregon (\$21,865):** Marketing and outreach strategies of Ensoterra's programs for improving accessibility and knowledge for anyone with a disability to enjoy the best fishing, kayaking, and standup-paddleboarding locations throughout Central Oregon.

**Explore Prineville — High Desert Moonfest (\$28,725):** The High Desert Moonfest is a Harvest to Heritage celebration. Set for late October, this event celebrates an end to the farming season that has historically driven the Crook County economy since its founding.

**The Father's Group — Juneteenth Jubilee (\$14,000):** Juneteenth 2024 is a powerful, culturally rooted, Black-led event welcoming 15,000-20,000 visitors. The event invests in the local economy and celebrates the diaspora of African, Caribbean, and Black American culture, one of the largest celebrations in the U.S.

**Gamma Roses — Accessibility Project (\$20,000):** Accessibility enhancements to increase the total interior square footage available to utilize

for the petting zoo and visitors with disabilities.

**High Desert Museum — Diverse Stories Exhibition Series (\$50,000):** The High Desert Museum will produce a series of new, innovative exhibitions and programs focused on diverse stories and cultures, bolstering cultural tourism and helping to make Central Oregon a welcoming and inclusive tourist destination.

**Kah-Nee-Ta Resort — Artwork Design Project (\$22,431):** Kah-Nee-Ta Resort will enhance the cultural experience of the Resort by partnering with a local artist for authentic artwork designed and painted on the exterior of its 20 new teepees.

**Onward Project — AdvenChair AdvenTours (\$44,650):** The Onward Project and Wanderlust Tours will provide AdvenChair AdvenTours, a series of guided trips in natural areas of Central Oregon, designed for people with disabilities.

**Oregon Equestrian Trails — Cline Buttes Trail Signs (\$28,510):** The Cline Buttes Trail Signs project will take place over 50 square miles of BLM land between Bend, Redmond, and Sisters. The trails are a short distance from all three communities. In addition, some of the project's trails are immediately adjacent to Eagle Crest and Thornburgh Resorts.

**ScaleHouse — Accessible Bend Design Conference Project (\$28,000):** The Bend Design Conference will expand the Design Humanity project in October 2024. The project includes investment in leaders, speakers, and artists from Warm Springs to attend and be included in the artistic program.

**So. Wasco Alliance — Simnasho Tribal Market Project (\$42,064):** The Simnasho Tribal Market, located in the northern tribal lands of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, will create opportunities for tribal members and travelers to meet each other, and be a welcoming space that is rich in cultural experience for all ages.

To be eligible, winning applications had to be aligned with three program pillars: Stewardship, cultural tourism, and expanding access to outdoor adventure. In all, The Central Oregon Future Fund awarded \$450,000 in grants in what is the program's second year. The grants are entirely funded by revenue generated from the region's transient room tax that is dedicated to tourism programs.

**SLEEP IN HEAVENLY PEACE**

The Bend Home Depot store was busier than usual on April 20 when hundreds of volunteers gathered to build beds for children who don't have their own.

Home Depot donated their parking lot, plus \$12,000 in donated materials to build the beds. Albertson's provided lunches with water and beverages.

The bed build was in honor of Trinity Reinhardt, a local 20-year-old airman who served in the USAF and died last year. Many military people and veterans turned out to help build 200 beds.

The local chapter of Sleep in Heavenly Peace (SHP) coordinated the build.

**BEND-REDMOND HABITAT FOR HUMANITY**

Bend-Redmond Habitat for Humanity received its largest gift ever from a single donor. The donation of \$521,000, from the estate of Denise Sullivan, comes as Bend-Redmond Habitat is planning to build over 100 sustainable, affordable homes in the next five years.

A truly remarkable woman, Deni Sullivan was an artist at heart, specializing in graphic design and the printed word. She lived and loved it here in Central Oregon for more than 20 years, and sadly passed away after a long fight with Parkinsons and Alzheimer's in 2021. Prior to passing, she left a large portion of her estate to Bend-Redmond Habitat for Humanity.

Since 2020, Bend-Redmond Habitat has focused on sustainability, building efficient homes with solar power and to achieve either partial or full net-zero certification. Working with the executor of her estate, Habitat created the Deni Sullivan Sustainability Fund to ensure these sustainable building practices continue.

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to our growth in this segment. With over 25 years of experience specifically in the commercial landscaping realm in Central Oregon, Nopp will be crucial to our ongoing development. His proactive approach to joining our team underscores his commitment to the local landscaping industry, and we are very fortunate to have him join our fast-growing team.



**Total Real Estate Referrals, LLC** announces the addition of **Dawn Potts** to its referral-only licensed real estate team. As a Central Oregon native, Potts strives to use her knowledge of the area to help people achieve their real estate dreams.

Dawn Potts

**RE/MAX Key Properties** welcomes **Tessie Cummins** to its esteemed group of real estate professionals. Cummins is a dedicated member of the Bend community and has a commitment to serving people and fostering genuine connections. Specializing in residential real estate, she approaches her work with a compassionate touch, prioritizing the experience and satisfaction of her clients above all else. Her commitment to fostering positive experiences for her clients is deeply rooted in her desire to help them navigate the home buying and selling process with confidence and ease.



Tessie Cummins



The **High Desert Education Service District (HDES)** board of directors announced that **Sara Johnson** will be the organization's next superintendent. Beginning in July, Johnson will lead the HDES team in the delivery of Central Oregon's early childhood education (0-5 years), special education (0-21 years), mental/behavioral health, substitute teachers, driver education and other specialized programs. Johnson, who served as superintendent for Crook County School District from 2018 to 2023, brings more than 25 years of experience as a K-12 educator, and was named Superintendent of the Year in 2023 by the Oregon Association of School Executives and the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators. HDES's current superintendent, Paul Andrews, is retiring in July after 25 years with HDES.

Sara Johnson

Prior to leading Crook County School District as superintendent, Johnson served as director of assessment, equity and school improvement for Klamath County School District.

Johnson holds an education administration certification from Lewis and Clark College (Portland, Oregon), a bachelor's and master's of teacher education degree from Eastern Oregon University (La Grande, Oregon), a doctoral degree of education — education leadership from George Fox University (Newberg, Oregon) and a doctoral degree in school psychology from George Fox University (Portland, Oregon).

In a significant milestone for the marketing and advertising industry, **zö Agency**, a trailblazing firm based in Bend, has announced its certification as a Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) by the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC). This prestigious certification underscores the agency's unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as its dedication to empowering changemakers across the United States in an

industry where women-owned agencies are severely underrepresented.

According to a 2019 study by the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), a mere one percent of advertising agencies in the United States are owned by women, despite women making up nearly half of the advertising workforce (ANA, 2019). zö Agency, founded and wholly owned by Sonja Anderson, is breaking barriers and challenging the status quo in an industry that has historically been dominated by men.

zö Agency's diverse team, spanning a wide range of ages, genders, identities, and ethnicities, brings a wealth of perspectives and experiences to every project, ensuring that each client receives tailored, impactful solutions. The agency's client roster boasts an impressive array of organizations tackling some of society's most pressing issues, including homelessness, addiction recovery, unemployment, senior care, rural development, LGBTQ rights, women's rights, and youth of color empowerment. By leveraging its expertise in marketing, advertising, and strategic communications, the agency helps these organizations expand their reach, engage their target audiences, and drive meaningful change.

The WBENC certification is the gold standard for women-owned businesses in the United States, affirming that a company is at least 51 percent owned, controlled, operated, and managed by a woman or women. This certification not only validates zö Agency's commitment to women's entrepreneurship but also opens doors to new partnerships and opportunities with corporations and government entities that prioritize supplier diversity.

In the first part of 2024, the **Latino Community Association (LCA)** hired four new employees to strengthen its teams in Bend and Madras.

New development manager **Lucia Barragán Rodríguez** was born in Mexico City and moved to Bend in 2022 with her husband and daughter. She studied political sociology at the José María Luis Mora Institute and collaborated with organizations that promote social justice and rights: Simone de Beauvoir Leadership Institute (ILSB) and Controla Tu Gobierno in Mexico City, and the anti-trafficking project at J Bar J in Bend. She has worked as a grant specialist, developed and evaluated social projects, and worked on inclusion programs for homeless individuals and those who have experienced labor trafficking. She views LCA as a platform to change the narrative about Latin American migrant people. She will work to ensure the organization's financial sustainability, so it can offer quality services and programs and optimal working conditions.



Lucia Barragán Rodríguez

Carmina Morgado Alonso

Samuel Vázquez Morales

Jeisis Mejía González

**Carmina Morgado Alonso**, client services coordinator in Bend, came here from Puebla, Mexico, in 2020 to tutor children during the pandemic. She loved the area and returned in 2022 to make her home in Bend. She studied psychology at the Public University of Puebla and photography in Mexico City. For more than ten years, she worked in arts and culture in Puebla, where she launched a women's community art collective in an abandoned factory. While she misses the art scene and museums in big cities, she likes to hike, explore, and take pictures of beautiful landscapes in Deschutes County. In her new role, she hopes to create photography projects and other cultural activities.

**Samuel Vázquez Morales**, client services coordinator in Madras, was born in Oaxaca, Mexico, and moved to Oregon with his family in 2007. He excelled in school, joined the National Honor Society, and graduated with honors from Culver High School in 2010. Vázquez Morales' parents did not have the means to send him to college, so he worked in agriculture, fast food, and manufacturing. He embarks on his new role in the shoes of a client: his family came to LCA for dental clinics and to apply for energy assistance and the Oregon Worker Relief

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Fund. He described the job as a way to give back to the community. He lives in Metolius with his wife and daughters.

**Jeisis Mejía González**, client services assistant in Madras, was born in El Salvador and studied business administration at the Technological University of El Salvador. In 2022, she joined family members in the U.S. and earned her GED from Central Oregon Community College. Currently, she is enrolled in the computer systems program at COCC and studying intensive English online. Since arriving in the U.S., she has worked in hospitality and tourism, where she enjoyed meeting people of different nationalities and sharing life experiences. She believes education is the best investment in oneself. She is proud to use her skills and enthusiasm to engage with Latino community members,

especially older adults.

With the successful launch of **AP Equipment Financing's** fleet and mobility division, the company is strategically expanding its team with the recent addition of **Geliene Ovsak** as VP of strategic alliances and sourcing. Ovsak brings over 30 years of experience in the fleet industry, specializing in strategic sourcing and managing supplier relationships, making her a valuable asset to Alex Coveney's team.

AP's new fleet division is geared towards achieving ambitious expansion in the lease, mobility, and client support product offerings this upcoming year. The team is developing innovative programs aimed at elevating customer value and building loyalty, going beyond conventional financing services such as full maintenance lease programs, national rental programs, and large fleet leasing solutions.

With Ovsak's onboarding, AP is poised for continued expansion into the Fleet and Mobility industry, guaranteeing a successful year of targeted growth and enhanced customer offerings.

## Every Child Central Oregon Celebrates Cheers to the Year Event

by **MELISSA WILLIAMS, Executive Director — Every Child Central Oregon**

Every Child Central Oregon (ECCO), the Redmond-based 501(c)3 nonprofit that fights relentlessly for the well-being of Central Oregon children and families impacted by foster care, recently hosted its annual Cheers to the Year event, recognizing outstanding contributions within the region's foster care community.

The recent event took place on a beautiful weekend afternoon, the highlight of which was its presentation of awards to exemplary families providing foster care and foster care caseworkers. Every Child Central Oregon announced the Foster Parent of the Year award to two deserving families, one nominated by the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) and one nominated by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs (CTWS). These families were celebrated for their dedication, compassion, and unwavering support of children in need.

In addition to honoring foster families, ECCO recognized outstanding caseworkers from both ODHS and CTWS with the "Caseworker of the Year" awards. These individuals were commended for their tireless efforts in advocating for the best interests of children in the foster care system and their commitment to building strong, supportive relationships with families. Katie McGown received the Volunteer of the Year award. Furthermore, ECCO also presented its "Partner of the Year Award" to Hayden Homes. As a recipient of this prestigious award, Hayden Homes was acknowledged for this company's meaningful partnership with and dedicated support of Every Child Central Oregon's mission.

Deborah Flagan, Hayden Home's vice president of community engagement, expressed gratitude on behalf of the entire company, stating, "We are honored to

receive Partner of the Year from Every Child Central Oregon. Partnering with local nonprofits in meaningful ways allows us to bring our Give As You Go philosophy to life. We are proud to have worked alongside Every Child Central Oregon for the past several years to bring support to those touched by foster care and to help build a strong community."

Beyond the awards ceremony, ECCO showcased its new 2,000-square-foot warehouse space, giving tours to community members, partners and foster resource parents. The event also featured a ribbon-cutting ceremony, with representatives from the Redmond Chamber of Commerce in attendance, plus food and drinks provided by Bennington Properties.

"The energy that afternoon was just so heartfelt and exciting," says Melissa Williams, ECCO's executive director. "Having the chance to not just honor these community members and partners but do so in our warehouse — the hub of our services and support — helped people to see more of what ECCO is all about and what we do, and understand how we've evolved in four fast years. On behalf of the ECCO team, I extend my heartfelt thanks to all who attended and contributed to the success of the Cheers to the Year event. It's really exciting to see how, together, we're making such a difference in the lives of children and families in Central Oregon, amplifying our mission of mobilizing community to uplift children and families impacted by foster care in Central Oregon."

[everychildoregon.org/centraloregon](http://everychildoregon.org/centraloregon)

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