

Master's Annual Address

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State Master

Introduction

Having our annual convention in Florence is another first for us. While we have met in Lane County nine times starting in 1894, all those conventions have been within the Eugene area. We are blessed to be able to move about the State of Oregon, holding our conventions in larger metropolitan areas and smaller towns. I hope that each and every person here will take the time to visit Florence stores and restaurants and let them know you are here for the Oregon State Grange convention.

This year our delegates will be considering some very important matters and the decisions we reach here can have a far reaching effect upon the future of our State Grange and possibly upon the future of our state. I am confident that our members will take the time to deliberate and discuss fully each of the resolutions before us and come up with good and well-reasoned answers. Being diligent in our labors will allow us to take great pride in the results.

Legislative

This legislative session has been focused on trying to close the budget gap in any manner possible. One of the possible new revenue streams legislators are pursuing may have an impact on our organization. That is SB 181. This bill would require that certain recognized charitable organizations would be required to file an information return with the county assessor before April 1st of each year in order to keep their property tax exemption. While the specific target of this bill is organizations that are considered exempt from property taxes under ORS 307.130, and the Grange receives our exempt status under a different section of the Oregon Revised Statutes, nevertheless there could still be confusion on the part of the county assessor's office leading to problems.

Our new Lobbyist, Craig Loughridge, has led the fight against this bill. Many of our members from all around the state have sent letters and emails or have testified in person as to the possible damage this could do to not only our organization, but to other non-profits as well. As a volunteer based community organization, Granges throughout the state have been there to benefit the health and wellbeing of their communities. We have sponsored countless scholarships and youth activities; we have collected food and donated clothing; we have helped veterans and seniors. We have opened our halls to other community groups and individuals to serve as the community gathering place. What we do matters, not just to us, but to the communities we support.

As of this date, SB 181 was still on the table, although apparently there are possible amendments that would remove some of the uncertainty in regards to the Grange. If one of those amendments were to be adopted the bill would narrow the subject non-profits to those who have been in existence for less than five years. I know the State of Oregon is under great pressure to balance the budget, but I do not feel that this is either an effective or profitable way to do so. Community based organizations such as the Grange provide a value that is difficult to measure in dollars and even harder to replace.

Recently the Grange has supported the idea of using lottery dollars to increase funding for Veterans in Oregon. In fact last fall Oregon voters confirmed by a large margin that they were committed to helping our Veterans through this funding effort. Unfortunately, although this passed, when the Governor submitted her budget, she zeroed the amount that Veterans would receive through the State budget, believing that the lottery dollars would replace this budget line item. I'm sure this was not what voters had in mind. Again this is a place where the Grange can make our voice heard. Let your representatives know of our position. We support our veterans.

The Grange is not, nor ever has been, involved in partisan politics. But we can and should take an active interest in the issues facing us as citizens. We can take great pride in the fact that as brothers and sisters we debate issues and arrive at decisions through the use of civil discourse. We do not disparage one another for different beliefs; we talk to each other and try to understand the other's viewpoint. We do not always agree, but at the end of the day we are still a part of the Grange family. If only we could expect the same from our elected officials.

Patriotism

It has been said that America is a giant melting pot, and if we look around our own State we see the truth in that. We cannot fall into the trap of condemning those who differ from us-- those whose political viewpoint varies from ours, those of a different religion, or those who do not share the same life goals. Every day we are seeing news stories that tell an increasingly bleak picture of life in these United States, and we are bombarded with social media stories that do no better.

In the Grange we know better, in the Grange we *are* better. If we are to truly show our patriotism, or in other words our love for our county we should be foremost in promoting the principles of the Grange. We teach respect for county and for our county's flag. We lead by example, and we honor each other by doing so.

Agriculture

When asked to describe Oregon agriculture, the then Director of the Oregon Department of Agriculture, Katy Coba, said: "Incredibly diverse, clean, green, environmentally friendly,

innovative and high quality.” She went on to say that Oregon produces a wider variety of agriculture and food items than almost any other state. Oregon ranks number one in volume of exported agricultural products and our total of processed food exports grew 80% between 2009 and 2013.

Due to Oregon’s quality food and agricultural products our agricultural community has hosted buyers from China, South Korea, Japan, Canada, the European Union and Russia, among others. One of the newer international trade events to start up in Oregon is Feast Portland. This four day trade show has become one of the premier food events in the county. This is just one event that is putting Oregon on the national stage.

But Oregon agriculture is much more than the food products we export. The *Growing Oregon* magazine had a small article on Growing in Harmony. Oregon is also a state that understands agricultural coexistence, and it all starts with two farmers talking, and continuing to talk to work out their differences. Small organic farmers can and do survive next to larger commercial operations as long as those involved communicate. Both sides receive an education in “the other type of farming.” In a state that is so agriculturally diverse, there is a good chance for conflict. In the Willamette Valley, high value broadleaf crops such as wine grapes and blueberries grow adjacent to grass seed and grain crops. Communication between the farms is necessary to a fruitful coexistence.

Water

Although this year suggests that water is plentiful and available to all, we know that lately it has been more of an anomaly than the norm. Thirty five members of a scientific team at Oregon State University just finished a six-year modeling study called Willamette Water 2100. The verdict was that over the next 90 years with the population growth predicted and a warming climate there will be a water shortage within the Willamette Valley. Hopefully the findings of this six-year study will be to mitigate some of these scarcities. They started with a ‘business as usual’ scenario to give a baseline prediction of when and where water shortages would occur. From there they started with “what if” questions. Like what if more farmers wanted to use irrigation, or what if incentives were given to encourage water conservation? Combining human and natural dynamics is rare in a model, but through software designed at Oregon State they were able to determine that the future patterns of water scarcity depend more on the people side, than a warming climate. Population growth, urban expansion, farming practices and conservation measures will have an impact on where and when it will happen as well as the how big of an impact it will have. Tools such as water laws, land use practices, utilities management and environmental regulations will be used to allocate what water there is.

In response to droughts in 2014 and 2015 a dry farming project was set up at the Oak Creek Center for Urban Horticulture at the edge of OSU’s Corvallis Campus. Well known varieties of plants, such as melons and tomatoes, have been planted side by side with crops being irrigated. So far dry farming is showing promise, as taste testing is showing that dry farmed crops have superior flavor. But it is too early to tell if this type of farming would be economically viable as

some of the vegetables produced smaller fruit, and non-irrigated crops are planted further apart to reduce competition for available moisture. But considering that irrigation consumes as much as 70% of the world's freshwater, dryland farming may be a sustainable alternative. The trials are continuing.

Changes in technology and knowledge have given us the ability to predict water scarcity and hopefully to prolong its abundance, but that does not absolve us from our duties to stay informed. We should as Grange members and as individuals take an interest in laws and regulations that restrict or portion water, as well as those that change the use. For those of us who do not live on a farm, and whose water comes from a utility company rather than a well, it is easy to ignore the plight of the farmer who may be dependent on reservoir water for irrigation. A reservoir that may have been drained by others also needing water, or not filled to capacity some years due to low rainfall and snowpack. While I believe that land use laws play an important role in our State, remember that laws that restrict the farmer will have an effect on the food we eat, and what we pay for it.

Education

We all know that education in Oregon has challenges. Whether funding shortages, student drop-out rate, or increased tuition, a lot is going on with our education system. My question is how can our members help? Many volunteer opportunities exist at all levels of education. From being a mentor in a middle school to handing out forms at high school registration, or taking tickets at events, volunteers can make a difference. Interested in getting out of the school room? How about helping with a field trip? Have high level skills in math, science or foreign language? How about tutoring? Love to read and want to instill that in others, help in the library or work in the SMART program (Start Making a Reader Today). Have a GWA group that loves to sew? Make costumes for the local high school drama department. In today's schools there are simply far more jobs and responsibilities than there people to do them. By helping with special events and routine tasks, volunteers allow teachers and staff to focus more on helping children to learn and grow. The school can accomplish more and offer children and families more services with the help of volunteers.

Even if you only have an extra hour or two a week, contact your local school to discuss your interests and what volunteer opportunities are available.

One other way that I know Granges are making a difference is with scholarships offered. I would be very interested to know just how much money is made available each year to students through scholarships offered by our Subordinate, Pomona and the State Grange.

The other way that all of us can be of service to our schools is simply to pay attention to what is going on. No matter what age you are, whether you have children in schools or not, education of today's children will have an effect on all of us. Attend school board meetings and be informed about school policies. If your Grange is lucky enough to have a +1 Junior allow them time to share school stories. Being educated ourselves is the best help we can give our schools.

Conclusion

As I conclude this address I realize that I have only touched on a few of the many matters that are important to our daily lives. I believe that this is a time when organizations such as ours are needed more than ever. Allen Wheeler, Past Master of the Oregon State Grange, said “we can be more effective as we increase our numerical strength. We can increase our numerical strength as a result of being more effective.” Seemingly this is the age old question of “which came first?” We have to work each of these together in order to grow and become more effective. Our members must be dedicated to providing service to their communities, and at the same time they must make known to those outside our gates the work that is being done. Too often I see Granges who are doing good work, but do not take the time to make non-members aware of the work or of the possibility of even greater accomplishments through their participation in the Grange. We have the tools; they are tried and true. For nearly 150 years the Grange has been a force for agriculture, service and family. As we finish the first 150 and start on the next, I leave you with our motto: *In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty and in all things charity.* If we live up to this motto, we will increase our numbers and our standing. *Esto Perpetua.*