

Goldendale's Eventmaster

Lorraine Reynolds banks on hometown friendliness to book diverse attractions and repeat visits

By Jeanie Senior

Since Golden Event Planning owner Lorraine Reynolds first contracted to be the city of Goldendale's events planner in May 2004, she has put together four Festivals of Wheels, two Fiddle Around the Stars bluegrass festivals, a street luge competition on the Maryhill Loops and arranged for an astronaut to come to town.

"A real, true blue, up-in-the-sky astronaut," she says of Steve Robinson, an astronaut since 1994 who flew on three space shuttle missions.

While planning the bluegrass festival last year, Lorraine noticed it fell on the blue moon—the name given to an irregularly timed full moon. She decided an astronaut would be a great help in celebrating the blue moon, as well as showcasing the Goldendale Observatory.

"We called NASA and said, 'we need an astronaut,' and they said OK," Lorraine says.

NASA paid for Robinson's visit. He made presentations at all three of the town's schools, and enjoyed the music so much he didn't want to leave.

"Come to find out, he's a bluegrass at heart," Lorraine says.

Astronaut Bonnie Dunbar was supposed to attend this year, but she had to cancel. However, Lorraine expects an astronaut will be back for the 2009 festival.

When Lorraine took the consultant job, it was late spring and she didn't have a lot of time to plan for that summer's activities, but she



The office grease board behind Lorraine Reynolds, owner of Golden Event Planning, lists a host of events she plans for the city of Goldendale, and a message from her grandkids.

was able to launch the city's first Festival of Wheels in September.

"People in this area like their wheel events, so I came up with the Festival of Wheels, including every single wheel event we could find to come to Goldendale at that time," Lorraine says.

It has been repeated each year since. The 2008 festival, which will run from September 19-21, incorporates a diversity of happenings: from a show and shine car show to a motorcycle rally, outlaw lawn dragsters, rock crawls and a music camp and jamboree.

Lorraine says the lawn dragsters promise a particular kind of excitement, including souped-up

lawnmowers performing like dragsters on a raceway.

"Right there on Main Street," Lorraine says.

Pine Springs Resort is sponsoring the "Surrender the Teddy" motorcycle rally—a drive to collect teddy bears that will involve motorcycle participants from across the county.

Other events have included gathering of the Washington State Mounted Shooters—a group that pairs marksmanship and horseback riding.

"Each year, they're bigger and better," Lorraine says, noting they love Goldendale.

The mounted shooters plan to

expand their visits next year.

Street lugers from the International Gravity Sports Association (IGSA) so loved skateboarding the Maryhill Loops that they are holding their world championship in Klickitat County in August next year.

It will be the first time the IGSA has held the world cup in the U.S. The competition should attract challengers from at least a dozen countries, and lots of spectators and international television coverage.

"We have so many cool events coming to town," says Lorraine, who is a board member of the Columbia Gorge Visitors Association and the Washington Festival and Event Association.

She works from an office in her home, sometimes into the small hours.

"People have no idea the number of hours I spend on the Internet searching for fun and exciting things" to invite to town, she says. "Now people are contacting me."

Among them is a vintage RV club, which wants to hold its annual Northwest region rally in Goldendale, and the Gold Wing motorcycle club.

"We're just having too much fun in Goldendale," Lorraine says. "People love coming to a small town. They don't want to be in the city, but in a small rural American community, and just have a good time."

She expects next year's bluegrass festival to grow.

"I even had a band contact me from Kentucky and I said, 'Oh my golly, we can't afford you guys,'" she says. "They said they

hoped they could be a pass-through—that their band would be playing somewhere else the weeks before and after the festival and in Goldendale our week."

The genuine warmth offered to visitors by people in Goldendale is definitely part of the attraction, Lorraine says.

"The small-town friendliness is something that everyone comments on," she says. "Whoever comes is so impressed that the people in the grocery stores talk to them, the people on the street wave to them.

"I think Goldendale is starving for attention and company to come to town. And 98 percent of the people here are just thrilled to have guests come to town."

Visitors are taken aback to find that business owners list their cell phone numbers so they can be contacted outside business hours.

"They will come down and open their store," Lorraine says. "That's the difference between small towns and big towns."

Lorraine doesn't have figures on how much extra business the various events are bringing to town, "but I do know motels are full, restaurants are busy and grocery stores usually have to bring more people on. Gas stations have a line."

Before taking the events job, Lorraine worked for Klickitat PUD for three years. Before that, she worked on the Hanford Reservation, and also worked as an events promoter.

Now, she says she feels like she has come full circle, doing something she really enjoys. ■

A calendar of events is posted on the city of Goldendale's Web site at www.cityofgoldendale.com/events.shtml.



City major events sponsor Jim Allyn discusses upcoming activities with Lorraine.