

Cammy Warner and Trail Tenders

An Ongoing Relationship with the Interpretive Center

by Sherrie Kvamme
of the Hells Canyon Journal

With each individual who graciously agrees to share their memories of events leading to the opening of the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in 1992, comes a reminder that the project took the dedicated efforts of a tremendous number of people. They point to the fact that it was not about them. And, so it is with Cammy Warner who served as the President of the Trail Tenders for five years prior to the grand opening.

"It took a tremendous number of people whose involvement all mattered to make that wonderful place possible," said Cammy, who now serves as the Commission Chair of the Baker Heritage Museum Commission and retired from teaching about three years ago.

Cammy's retirement came at the perfect time. The temporary move of the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center to the museum for the next few years has brought additional tasks and projects, all of which Cammy is very excited about being involved in.

"My first involvement with the Interpretive Center was when I was expecting our youngest daughter and teaching part time. Dave Hunsaker had put a huge ad in the paper indicating that there was a real need for volunteers to help with the Interpretive Center project, and it really caught my attention. The idea really did interest me, and so I volunteered."

Cammy served as president of the Trail Tenders for five years and enjoyed every moment.

"I worked with Dave a lot," she said. "He was so very good at what he did. We had so many, many people involved during that time. It was like a rebirth in the county and it was all so great."

Trail Tenders was established in 1989 in partnership with the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center. Their goal was and is to enhance the quality of the educational and recreational programs for the benefit of the public within the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center complex, and to further the center's goals throughout Baker County.

"Part of our focus and responsibility during the years I was involved with the Trail Tenders was to organize and open a gift shop. We also helped



Photo by Sherrie Kvamme

CAMMY WARNER served as president of Trail Tenders for the first five years of the organization's existence. Trail Tenders has provided support for the Interpretive Center since its inception, in the form of assistance with interpretive programming, managing the center's gift shop and other behind-the-scenes activities.

with the grand opening, and I do remember thousands of homemade peach cobbler," she laughed. "We helped with and participated in some of the most amazing interpretations and programming; the trail ride was phenomenal, the wagon train encampments and their arrival at the center for the grand opening. It was all so impressive."

"We had countless planning meetings, many of them held at the old Sunridge, and the meeting rooms were always filled with people and their great energy and enthusiasm. Everything stayed so well organized, and it had to be."

In creating, stocking and opening the gift shop, there was a very specific criteria for the items that could be sold. Each piece had to be of high quality and it had to be fitting and appropriate to that time period. Each piece had to fit the criteria set forth by the Interpretive Center.

"I don't recall if Dave managed that overview or if he assigned a ranger to that job but the expectations were set high. Items also had to be American-made. We had some local artisans like Tom Novak whose work was featured in the shop. As I recall, Tom

had also created an Oregon Trail game," said Cammy. "Someone had handcrafted old lanterns. It turned out to be a great place to go Christmas shopping."

The shop was located just inside the center's entrance, where it has remained ever since. There were several people, including Jim Evans and Fred Warner Sr., who would go to the center often after it opened and work as docents in the gift shop. They would visit with people, share information and answer questions.

"We also hired a manager and there were Trail Tenders who volunteered to work in the shop. We were the support to the center wherever they needed us," explained Cammy. "The funds were donated to the center for the interpretive programs, to help with exhibits and also to provide educational materials."

Cammy said the NHOTIC has to have been the biggest county-wide effort ever in this area.

"It was enormous. It is hard to commit yourself to something that big because it was so huge and could feel overwhelming but everyone had regenerated from the down times and believed in

this project though it actually started with just a few people who were behind the scenes at first, but the people in this county made that happen."

"I think Dave was the lead at getting the BLM to see the importance of working with the community to make it the success it was. We were the poster child of having the local community and the national government partnering. The timber industry, mining and agriculture, private citizens and companies all came together. It was impressive to see government and community come together like they did and come away with having made something so wonderful happen."

After the grand opening in 1992, Cammy started teaching full time.

"One of the things I did with my students was to encourage them to be involved with community projects and be aware of the value of our heritage. I could point to the center and tell them that I wanted them to experience that kind of involvement and learn an appreciation for it."

"I have always felt it was important to be involved and care and participate. You have to get involved; it matters. We are all busy and it's harder right now, but we can't let disappointment and obstacles stop us from working to help make things better. We should use that to energize us. There are always ways and workarounds. We just need to care more and try harder. We all have to be part of finding a solution and making things better bigger and brighter. My parents were always involved with community. Fred's parents were always involved with community. We grew up being involved. It's just what we did, and we taught our girls to be involved."

Cammy was born in John Day and lived near Burns growing up. Her dad was manager at Cal-Pac before it became OTEC. When she was a senior in high school her family moved to Baker. In the summers she worked for an optometrist. Fred had graduated from OHSU and had been home for two years when his brother and her brother, who were friends, set the two up on a blind date. It was the summer between Cammy's junior and senior year in college.

"I always used to say I would never marry a rancher and I would never live in Baker County. My mother always used to say, 'Never say never,' laughed Cammy. "Look what

happened!"
The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center and the Baker Heritage Museum are currently in the process of a transition that will last for the next three or four years.

"This co-existence has actually brought my two loves together," said Cammy. "Both of these places are so central to this entire area. The Interpretive Center that became so near and dear to me 30 years ago, is as much now as it was then. And the museum is just as special. I love them both. They are my passion and I am excited about the immediate and next few years. With the revitalization of the center we will see some fun things happening when they open again and here as well, that we can directly attribute to the sharing of this building."

"We are also getting a breath of fresh air in the Heritage Museum. We have so many artifacts upstairs that Bobby [the museum's exhibit specialist] will be able to show us how to give a new light to. The center will be bringing in experts that know how to build exhibits that we do not know how to do and they will be reimagining the Ball Room. We are all volunteers who want to and have done the best we can, but we are not professionals and the learning opportunities will be such a benefit to us. We want to help them, too, in any way that we can."

"We are so pleased that BLM Ranger Casey Taylor will be participating in the First Friday walks in downtown Baker City. He will be talking about the exhibits and events that will be featured here this summer. There will also be a lot of programming across the street at the Geiser-Pollman Park happening this summer. We are in for an event-filled, exciting year!"

The Museum Commission has decided that the Extraordinary Women exhibit will remain in the Central Gallery for another year.

"We do need to start making decisions and implementing plans for our 2023 exhibit," said Cammy. "But we hope people do not miss the opportunity to see the Extraordinary Women exhibit when we open this spring. It's outstanding as are the women who have been nominated and featured."

Cammy also encourages everyone to spend some time at the Baker Heritage Museum this summer and enjoy all of the new and refreshed exhibits.