

## Bridges Foundation rewards nonprofits' hard work

By Megan Otto  
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### KATHY BRIDGES

TURNER – Having worked for nonprofit organizations for nearly 20 years, Kathy Bridges knows what it's like to seek out funding.

As manager of the Bridges Foundation, she's glad to help those she once worked with.

"This is something I've always wanted to do," Bridges said. "Being able to help other people. It's a source of a lot of enjoyment for me."

Bridges is the executive director for the Bridges Foundation, a private foundation that provides financial contributions to organizations around the nation and here at home in the Santiam Valley.

Jack and Nancy Bridges started the Bridges Foundation in 1987. A good deal of the money they work with every year comes from Jack Bridges' investments. He started a national annuity agency in 1973, after years as an insurance industry executive.

"Instead of spending it on himself he put it into a fund to help other people," Kathy Bridges said.

Kathy manages the foundation. Her work with nonprofits started with the Oregon Coastal

Zone Management Association, which raised funds for coastal land-use planning and projects.

She and her husband tried to find farmland in the coastal area but eventually ended up outside of Turner on their working farm.

In the valley, Bridges set up the Mid-Willamette Valley Children's Guild, which she ran from 1982-94, after learning the difficulties facing disabled children and their parents when her first son was born with cerebral palsy.

Over the years, this group has established physical, occupational and speech therapy, mental health programs and pre-school opportunities for children with autism and disabilities.

In the middle of all this, her father started the Bridges Foundation, and Kathy was named executive director in 2000.

"It's kind of my calling," Bridges said of her work with nonprofits and the foundation.

Her long history with non-

profits makes her especially sympathetic to those first starting out.

"I know what's it like to start something like that," Bridges said. "The most difficult time is the first five years.

"When someone comes in and helps you, it's incredible," she added.

The Foundation has given money to a lot of start-up projects, including funding the purchase of an adaptive vehicle for a rehabilitative driving program through the University of Washington Foundation.

"That's now become a really good program," Bridges said. "And it really began because we gave the first \$5,000."

Bridges has given in the past to deserving area organizations like the Santiam Heritage Foundation, which received up to \$10,000 for design work on the garden and preservation of the Charles and Martha Brown House, a 1903 Queen Anne-style



Photo courtesy Kathy Bridges

**The Bridges Foundation** provides funds for a variety of projects state- and nationwide, including providing \$16,000 for ski equipment for the Shriner's Hospital Ski Program.

house on First Avenue in Stayton.

Other projects the Bridges Foundation has sponsored include the Cougar Foundation, which supports Turner schools. They've also been generous with the Friends of Opal Creek group in Mill City.

All in all their donations over 10 years have totaled more than

\$600,000.

The Foundation's current project is a memorial for Wilbur E. Ternyik, a lifelong volunteer in Oregon and a recognized leader in land-use planning, port development, wetlands conservation and wildlife restoration.

Bridges said Ternyik was a force in bringing the coastal cities and governments together

with the idea that, "If people could cooperate locally, we could exert our goals on the federal government," Bridges said.

The foundation is helping to sponsor a life-sized bronze bust at the coast north of Seaside.

In the future, one project Bridges really wants to see the foundation tackle is preserving the agricultural way of life in the Santiam Valley.

"Agriculture in the Santiam Valley is an incredible resource to the U.S. and to Oregon," Bridges said.

Only 12 miles from Salem, a city of 150,000, the agricultural environment is surprisingly intact, and Bridges said she wants to see it stay that way.

"That's why people live out here," she said. Her own 140-acre farm is located just outside of Turner, and she raises warm-water fish, sheep, and crops, and has 19 duck hunting ponds. She said that her goal is to maintain the farmland and the canneries in Salem that support the agriculture.

No matter what the future goals are, Bridges is excited to continue passing out funds to nonprofits.

"Being able to do the foundation is one of the greatest joys of my life," Bridges said.