

Election Day to offer few new local candidates

November 3 is Election Day, with early voting opportunities starting this month. Ballots will be mailed Oct. 5 to all registered voters. Oct. 19 is the last day to register to vote on-line. On Oct. 24, a voting center opens in Fortuna.

Locally, new faces on the ballot occur only in Rio Dell, where three city council seats are up for re-election and only one incumbent, Debra Garnes, who serves as the current mayor, is seeking re-election. Veteran council member Julie Woodall and more recent member Robert Orr are retiring from the board.

Running for those open seats are Jeffrey Berry and Brett Barsanti.

Woodall, 2025 Grand Marshal of the Wildwood Days parade, has lived in Rio Dell 45 years, and was on the city council for 28 of them, including two terms as mayor. She is known for the flowers she buys and tends along Wildwood, watering them from a tank on her truck, a project that has grown to 40 pots over six years.

Orr, a former Marine and businessman, has lived in Rio Dell nearly 10 years and teaches, holding advanced degrees in education. He is married and dad to 10 children, from junior high to adult, and notes he chose not to run for a second term due to the need to spend more time with family.

Garnes was first elected to the Rio Dell City Council in 2014 and has served as mayor since 2019. "I want to see the city keep getting better," she says, so that it is near the top of places people want to be, citing efforts like the gateway and river trail projects that can boost the pride of residents. She speaks of "Rio Delight," to counteract worn tropes she hears like "Rio Dull."

She is excited about the city's chance to be named an Opportunity Zone, a designation for which communities with high levels of poverty and other economic setbacks can apply. It is part of a federal program launched a decade ago and now in its second round, that provides tax incentives for investment of capital gains. The census bureau determines which communities are eligible to compete. Garnes and others on the council and staff sought letters of support as part of the package they submitted and are waiting to hear.

Barsanti, a native of Rio Dell, has been on the school board for a couple decades, including serving as its president for "quite a while," he notes. He planned to step down in January when he will be sworn in as council member, but the school board wants him to stay on, and he is seeking an opinion if he can hold both posts at once. "It will be a lot, I give 100 percent to everything I do," he says.

His interest in the council comes from a wish to see more businesses, and more jobs, in the community. He thinks Cal Fire coming to town is a good thing and will draw additional traffic, to spur the local economy. "They're doing good now," he says of the current council, but notes it seems "they pave the same streets every year and leave the ones on First, Second and Third streets, particularly, in need of work." He cites a house on Monument that burned six or more years ago and is still standing as an example of improvements to the city that could be made.

With his wife, Kelly, he operated a dollar store where the Community Resource Center stands now but closed it in 2008 as the price of inventory grew too high. He moved on to work at Winco and for the past eight years has been an equipment operator for Cal Trans. He served on the fire department for a decade and has coached Babe Ruth and Little League. Dad of two grown children, he lives on four acres with a horse his grandkids ride, and some dogs.

Efforts to reach Berry over the past month were unsuccessful.

In other local races, incumbents Nina Sellen, Delia Arnstad and Paul Newmaker are running for re-election in the Scotia Community Services District; incumbents Jody Harper and Shan Louise Grundman are running in the Rio Dell school district, and incumbents James Barsanti and Joe Timmerman are running in the Rio Dell Fire Protection District. No one has applied to run for the Scotia school board.



Brett Barsanti



Debra Garnes



Community Garden to host plant sale

The Community Garden in Rio Dell will sell fall plant starts in a fundraiser on Sat., Oct. 10 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the garden, 100 Butcher Street.



Vote in Halloween decorating contest

Mark your calendars - voting will be open from Oct. 15 to 29 in the chamber's second-annual Halloween decorating contest. Go to the chamber's Facebook event page when voting starts for a list of participants - residences and businesses in Rio Dell and Scotia which signed up in September - and vote for your pick in each category. The winners will be named on Halloween. First place in each category gets a \$100 cash prize from the chamber.



Witches to ride again

The second annual witches' ride will be held at 1 p.m. on Sat., Oct. 24, leaving from CC Market in Rio Dell. Free and open to all using any kind of mobility device - bicycle, scooter, wheelchair, horse, what-have-you, the ride will go through town, across the Eagle Prairie Bridge, and end at Scotia Lodge. Costumes are of course expected.



Wild Moon to feature live music, fall-themed activities

A harvest event featuring local musicians, vendors, and family-friendly activities like apple bobbing will take place on a farm outside Rio Dell on Sat., Oct. 17 from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. The Wild Moon Harvest Party is the brainchild of local arborist Nathan Nyberg, hosted by his friends Jackie and Mike Emerson, who live on acreage at Belleview and Blue Slide Road. The Native Sons of the Golden West will sell burgers and hot dogs and the fire department will sell beer. The event is open to all, with a display to mark the farm entrance. A donation will be requested in exchange for a pick-your-own pumpkin, with additional pumpkins for sale. Nyberg says "I love Rio Dell and always wanted to do a harvest party. This is a proof-of-concept" of what he hopes will be a regular event.

Meet the team that manages food distribution at the Resource Center

It starts off slow and easy, people arriving mid-afternoon on the fourth Wednesday of the month, exchanging greetings and studying what needs to be moved to make room in the refrigeration units that hum in the Rio Dell Community Resource Center. Long tables are laid out in a horseshoe shape and some canned goods are already set out. But then the box truck comes from Food for People and it's all hands on deck, as pallets of food - cases of canned goods, fresh fruits and vegetables, assorted breads and frozen items - are wheeled in.

A team of volunteers pitches in, unloading the items, cutting away the boxes and cellophane that they come in, and stocking the tables. After a couple hours of this frenzied work, they return the next morning to check in the 120 to 140 people who come on average in any given month, assisting with food selection, being sure there are adequate supplies of each item on hand.

"They can take whatever they want," says Judy Ingraham of Rio Dell who has been volunteering the longest - probably 13 years, she says, pointing to all the compass directions indicating all the places the food distribution has been held - a house in Scotia, a church in Rio Dell - before settling here four years ago. She, like each of the others, cites the wish to give back to the community as her reason for volunteering. She had a cleaning business before she retired and also volunteers at the community garden and the senior brown bag food distribution at the Church of Christ on Second Street in Rio Dell, as well as exercising with a senior group at the resource center.

Sean Pitcairn of Scotia has been volunteering at the food distribution "on and off" for 10 years, pointing, like Ingraham, in all the directions to indicate the many homes the food distribution effort has had.

Michelle Phillips moved to Rio Dell in May from Southern California and is staying with family. "I walked around, saw this, and came in - they haven't thrown me out yet," she laughs about how she got into volunteering, all while loading cases of food onto a hand truck and steering it through the room.

Michael Panus has been volunteering at the food distribution for a couple months. A retired mechanic, he lives in Rio Dell and says, like the others, that he wants to give back to the community.

James Ruff of Rio Dell is there with his dog, Birdog. "I've been coming about a year," he says. "I've seen these people help a lot of individuals."

Michael Lewis drives down from Eureka for the food distribution tasks. A friend was volunteering but could not show up so he came in her place. That was last November and he's been coming since then. The Fresno native has a degree in computer science. He makes time to offer free technology help to people who contact him through the Resource Center and, with volunteer Donna McQueen (profiled in the April issue) also bags up meals for Rio Dell and Scotia school children facing food insecurity to use over the weekend.

Eric Moore was the driver that day of the Food for People truck, a position he's held for three years. "I used to be a chef charging a lot for a little bit of food, and now I can give it away," he says. The food comes from a variety of sources including farms and overstock at big box and other stores in Eureka. (See the two-part feature on Food for People in the October and November 2023 issues of this newsletter, archived at riodelscotiachamber.org, for more about this organization.)

In addition, Resource Center coordinator Sarah Reback gleans surplus food from Safeway in Fortuna and, starting this year, fresh vegetables are being harvested from the community garden.



Judy Ingraham



Sean Pitcairn



Michelle Phillips



Michael Panus



James Ruff



Michael Lewis



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Four new teachers join Rio Dell school district

Allie Griffith is the new kindergarten teacher at Rio Dell Elementary School. Born and raised in Ferndale, she lives there with her husband and their two young sons. She graduated from HSU with a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education in 2011, received her Multiple Subjects Teaching Credential the following year, and has been teaching kindergarten to third grade locally since then. She says, "I'm excited to continue my career in Rio Dell and already love the school community and supportive staff. In my free time I love to travel, work in my garden, read, and spend time with my family. I am always busy watching my kids play sports."



Allie Griffith

Antoinette Moore is the resource teacher at Rio Dell Elementary. She explains, "I work with students who receive additional specialized academic support and help them build the skills and confidence they need to be successful in the classroom."



Antoinette Moore

Originally from Salt Lake City, she graduated from Sonoma State University and spent many years raising three children. "During that time, I also worked in local schools as a paraprofessional," she said, which helped lead her toward teaching.

Moore earned her teaching credential in Special Education along with a master's in Kinesiology at Cal Poly Humboldt and last year taught in Arcata, piloting a program combining students from different programs. She lives in Fields Landing and enjoys hiking, reading and gardening. She says, "Everyone has been so welcoming. I'm really looking forward to getting to know the students, families, and community members. I'm looking forward to a great school year!"

We hope to catch up to new teachers Cassidy Alves and Maddy Cox to introduce them soon.

Meet new Scotia teachers

Three new teachers joined the Scotia school district this fall. Mollie Smith teaches TK, or Transitional Kindergarten, for children who turn five between September and December, serving as the first year of a two-year kindergarten experience. She lives in Fortuna with her husband, two dogs and two cats.



Mollie Smith

Smith graduated from Cal Poly with a degree in child development and her teaching credential and is in her fifth year of teaching. From the Sacramento Valley, she is the daughter of two teachers. Interests include kayaking, scuba diving, making art and travel. Smith played basketball for 16 years and loves all animals, especially sea turtles. "My favorite way of building community is through collaborative art projects," she says.



Anastasia Borissenko

Anastasia Borissenko teaches Kindergarten. She enjoys hiking and camping in nature, things that drew her to college at Cal Poly Humboldt seven years ago, where she completed her degree and teaching credential. She is passionate about making art, and world travel as a way to learn about other cultures. She said, "I believe every child can shine in their own unique way. My goal is to create a classroom where each can feel safe and valued, curious and inspired, encouraged to take risks, excited to learn and supported to be themselves."

Jillian Kennedy, the new Speech Language Pathologist, is originally from the East Coast but has called Humboldt home for 12 years. She lives in Fortuna with her husband, son, and cat, and outside of work enjoys a good book and crocheting. She says, "I'm looking forward to getting to know your students and families this year!"



Jillian Kennedy



Chamber elects new officers

The Rio Dell-Scotia Chamber of Commerce board of directors elected new officers at its September meeting. Wally Coppini, retired rancher and logger, is the new president and Suzanne Maese, founder of Margro Advisors, is the new vice president. Both live in Rio Dell. Nick Angeloff and Jim Brickley, who held those posts previously, remain as board directors.



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Firefighter relishes sense of family in department

Drea Vaughn grew up on a Trinidad ranch among volunteer firefighters, which provided a setting she sought in adulthood. "If I stayed there, I'd have joined the Westhaven department," she says of the group she grew up among, but subsequent moves did not provide the opportunity to connect with a volunteer department, until Rio Dell. She joined when "the big earthquake hit" and saw the "community-driven" department in action. Now she's an engineer-in-training, preparing for a role that includes driving the trucks and running the pumps.

"I like the events," she said of the lighter side of the department, like Touch-a-Truck and Trunk or Treat and of course Wildwood Days where she organizes the fun color run and sat a shift in the dunk tank in August.

Vaughn has a full life outside the department, running EmeraldZ, the gift and game store on Wildwood that she opened over a year ago with Glen Harbour, whom she is marrying this month on the Trinidad ranch, officiated by fellow fire fighter Kirt Morrill. Mom to four children aged 10 to 16, she is homeschooling and glad of her fire family for helping provide the kids with "socialization of the good." An avid horse woman who placed in a world champion endurance competition as a teen, she is glad her oldest daughter is learning from the family that taught her about horses and that the tradition of competition will continue.



Fire runs for August 2026:

Medical - 40
False alarms billable
commercial - 1
residential - 3
Hazardous conditions - 3
Public assists - 7
Vegetation fire - 2
Debris fire - 1
Mutual aid
structure fire - 2
vegetation fire - 2
traffic - 2
Meetings - 2
Drills - 1
Total - 66



October Holidays

12 - Columbus Day,
Indigenous Peoples' Day
31 - Halloween



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