Meet your neighbors at the tree lighting

The annual tree lighting, with Santa arriving on the fire truck parade, will again be held on the first Saturday of December, Dec. 5 this year, starting at 5 p.m., in the Rio Dell Community Resource Center, 406 Wildwood. It's always a good time to gather with friends and neighbors, so mark your calendar.

This is also the chamber's annual meeting, so between Santa arriving and the lighting of the tree, there will be a couple minutes spent highlighting what the chamber has done this year, and a table to sign up to volunteer, make a donation, or join/renew your annual membership to be part of the many projects, new and ongoing, that the chamber is working on. (See the separate story on membership drive.)

The chamber thanks the many who make it possible to hold this event: the fire department for assistance with stringing lights on the bridge and the fire truck parade itself; the City of Rio Dell which contributes to the expansion and maintenance of the lighting display each year; Aqua Dam, Humboldt Redwood Company and RH Construction which all offered use of their lifts to enable the decorations to be placed; the California Conservation Corps volunteers who show up to assist in the decorating; Wes Nally and his family who donate two full days per year to manage traffic control on the bridge; the Community Resource Center for hosting and providing refreshments and crafts during the lighting event; Debra Loyd and others for the expanded decorations (see article this issue); Humboldt Redwood Company for the donation of the tree; and of course Santa.

Chamber launches annual membership drive

Dues are due for the Rio Dell-Scotia Chamber of Commerce, which has annual memberships by calendar year. The price remains the same - just $35 for individuals, $40 for a family – and was reduced to just $50/year for any sized business or organization. Additional levels of Bronze, Silver and Gold are also available for those who want to go all in on supporting the chamber, perhaps by donating needed goods or services.

Members along with sponsors (people hosting ads in the newsletter or on the Avenue of the Giants sign, for instance) are listed with website and other contact information on the chamber's website, riodellscotiachamber.org.

Chamber events are open to all, as are the chamber's monthly board meetings on the first Monday at 6 p.m. in the Community Resource Center, 406 Wildwood. Posting American flags on federal and other holidays, hosting the Wildwood Days parade, and putting up the holiday lighting display each year from mid-November to mid-January, are among years-long chamber activities, designed to increase community pride and a sense of place as well as to act as a draw, bringing people to the community. New activities this past year were the two-day Fiesta del Rio celebration and work towards getting a highway billboard encouraging tourists to take the Rio Dell exit and a travel website featuring local attractions.

Watch your email for renewal notices from the chamber's email, rdschamber@gmail.com, if you are on our monthly email list, or get ahead of things this busy time of year by mailing your check now, payable to the chamber to PO Box 95, Rio Dell, CA 95562. Questions? Call 707.506.5081. Thank you for continuing to support the chamber as we support our communities.

Sign up now for the 6th annual decorating contest!

Sign-ups are open until Dec. 11 for the chamber's 6th annual holiday decorating contest for homes and businesses. As before, it is open to all homes and businesses in Rio Dell and Scotia; judging will be online by popular vote; and the fire department is again offering some handsome cash prizes, always useful this time of year. Voting takes place Dec. 15 to 24. You'll have a list of the participating homes and businesses on the site, and a chance to vote for your favorite in each of the two categories. The winner is named Christmas Eve.

So "like" the Rio Dell-Scotia Chamber Facebook page if you have not done so already, and go to the events page to list your home or business, or sign up from the link on the chamber's web page, riodellscotiachamber.org. Then have fun decorating, and checking out the other participating contestants after the addresses are posted Dec. 15.





Happy Holidays



December Holidays

- 4 Hanukkah begins at sundown
- 21 Winter solstice
- 25 Christmas Day
- 26 Kwanzaa begins
- 31 New Year's Eve

Rio Dell - Scotia News is free of charge, published monthly by the Rio Dell - Scotia Chamber of Commerce and the Rio Dell Community Resource Center.
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Copies distributed in Fortuna, Rio Dell, and Scotia and archived at riodellscotiachamber.org

Deadline for January newsletter is December 4th.
Call the Rio Dell-Scotia Chamber of Commerce at 707-506-5081 to advertise.

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Resource center volunteer of the month:

Designing decorations for the community

Crafting is one of Debra Loyd's superpowers. She enjoys doing crafts with the children in the First 5 playgroup she leads at the Rio Dell fire hall and adjacent park, for children five and under years old. And she's been seen in second-Wednesday evening crafting groups at the Resource Center with son Lincoln. But her artistry really took off last year, and expanded this year, with a series of wooden, painted, seasonal cut-outs that decorate the median through Rio Dell in the holidays.

"It started when Sarah asked me to make two skulls to represent the Day of the Dead," she said, referring to resource center coordinator Sarah Reback, who named her December volunteer of the month. "I got into it, and wanted to do more, and people donated wood," she says. Fortuna High handled the cutting. Soon bats, pumpkins and more were showing up, and popped up again this past October. Loyd is quick to share the credit for the work. "Judith Frost is an artist and touched up some of the pieces," she said, as well as painting the other side of each so they can be seen by traffic from both directions. "It was an amazing job," she says, and having both sides painted made it "really nice." Other volunteers got into the act as well.

Meanwhile, "the chamber of commerce wanted some cut outs for the Christmas display, and bought wood and paint," she says, and so she started expanding the existing selection of median cut-outs that appears during the winter season as well. Most of the designs Loyd got from Google, but what stands out is the degree of specificity she has undertaken to match the designs to the areas where they will be displayed.

"Nick likes Snoopy so we did one for him," Loyd says of Nick Angeloff, who has an office on Wildwood. There's one for the fire department featuring Sparky, the dog mascot one sees associated with fire protection displays; one for the library showing Santa reading a book to children; and one for the police station showing the chief's truck which Loyd photographed to work from, with a Christmas tree in the back.

Again, others got in on it, with volunteer Piedad Velasco's husband, Juan, doing the cutting out of the pieces, and people taking a few moments here and there to paint a section of whatever item was laid out.

At home the crafting continues, with Loyd teaching herself crocheting from You Tube videos and helping Lincoln make holiday ornaments to sell in his school's holiday fair.



Loyd with son Lincoln



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Finding joy making others laugh

"I love to make people laugh," Shannon Foster says. The 56-year-old Rio Dell woman recalls having a bucket list in the 5th grade that included getting on the stage and telling jokes but she never really got the chance until six years ago when she went to a comedy club in Eureka having an open mic. There were about 30 other comedians there, due to a local competition happening.

She remembered it was just before her birthday and she decided to give it a try; afterward someone said she was funny but "spoke too quickly and was hard to understand." That was part of her decision to quit drugs; she recognized it was the cause of her fast speech and stood between her and success in this new venture she found that she loved. She's now four years sober.

What followed were two consecutive "North Coast Journal Best of Humboldt" comedy awards: Foster says she's the first woman to win back-to-back in this category. Rio Dell mayor Debra Garnes was among those who came to see her when she won the award, an occasion for which she was headliner.

Today she carpools with other comedians to comedy clubs in places like Redding, Laytonville and Oregon, where a booking agent from an organization called Humboldt Comedy signs them up, for which the pay is $75 for 30 minutes. "They call me Nasty Grandma," she says. The stories she tells are things that really happened, that she tweaks a bit to get the humor from it. Hecklers have not been a problem. She has also headlined some events and recently took a three-month improv class, which was a very different experience in using humor.

Foster has four grandchildren and two dogs, and lives in the home of her grandmother, whom she cared for her last five years, who died a year ago at age 97. Disabled and unable to do a regular job, she is pursuing a new goal, online marketing, which she found out about from a niece and is learning through a course. It entails making videos about products with her smartphone and posting them online; if someone clicks on the ad, she gets paid. That will keep her busy at least until comedy clubs open again in the spring.



Foster, center with comedy award, and friends Michelle Daetwiler, left, and Cassandra Campbell, right.

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Duo serves community, fire department in multiple roles

Kirt Morrill grew up in Fresno, spent time in the Air Force as a medic, and is now retired from a decades-long career as a paid firefighter. He met the former Shannon Brashear at an event at Redwood Acres and the couple, married last May, are seldom apart. "We have a heart for the community," he says of their feelings for Rio Dell. He enjoys being on the volunteer fire department, which he joined just over a year and a half ago, because of the focus on the people being served and not the pay. He is an engineer in training; after a life of wanting to be in the thick of things he sees a time when past injuries may catch up and require him to focus on tasks such as driving and working the pump rather than more physical roles.

Shannon moved to Rio Dell 24 years ago from San Diego with a friend who later moved on. She stayed, noting the town is perfect – "A mile long and no traffic lights." She is the president of the Fire Auxiliary, an organization she joined five years ago. It fulfills a variety of support functions, from assisting in community projects like Trunk or Treat, the Wildwood Days auction and the Mother's Day pancake breakfast to putting on the department's Christmas party.

But it also means going on fire calls lasting more than four hours, where auxiliary members refill air tanks worn in the fire, and ensure firefighters have sufficient hydration. They provide breakfast on fires that run all night, call the Red Cross to assist when a family is burned out of its home, "and stay out of the way." A focus is ensuring the auxiliary members are trained and consistent in their roles. A new project this past year is providing supper at the monthly fire department meetings, which formerly was done by the firefighters and ranged from a cooked meal to ordering pizzas.

Faith is important to the couple. Kirt is an ordained minister who manages maintenance at Journey Church and preaches at Faith Chapel in Weott, which is associated with Journey. Shannon is the church secretary, a job she has held for eight years, and staffs a room where donated food, clothing and household items are given away, as well as helping people with job applications and other tasks through a function she calls the resource center. "It's like the Community Resource Center," she says, noting the two organizations work closely together, "but I can put God in it."

Yet another area in which the couple donates time is the Kiwanis, where Shannon has been president of the local chapter for four years. The couple has five children between them, the youngest still in high school and living with her mom, the others grown. One daughter, living in Eureka, is an ordained minister who performed the couple's wedding ceremony.



Fire runs for October 2026:

Medical – 39
Traffic collisions – 3
False alarms, billable
Residential 3
Commercial 3
Hazardous conditions – 2
Public assists – 11
Mutual aid, structure fire – 1
Vegetation fires – 3
Debris fires – 4
Meetings – 1
Drills – 2
Special events/work details – 1

Total: 73

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