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The Gardner NEWS

Covering Southwest Johnson County!



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Artist returns to Gardner Junction to begin repeat journey of the OT

Rick Poppitz

Special to The Gardner News

Thirty five years ago Hafis Bertschinger came to Gardner, where the trails divide, and traveled the 2,170 mile Oregon Trail on horseback. He kept a diary along the way that eventually became a book titled 'With a Horse Called George Along the Oregon Trail.' Bertschinger is an artist and native of Helvetia (Switzerland).

Today, less than two months shy of his 85th birthday, he has returned to the USA to do it again - but this time he will undertake the journey by bicycle.

Bertschinger was in the USA for a short period of time in the early 1980's, teaching art appreciation at the Arkansas Arts Center in Little Rock, Ark. He had read a well known book called "Sutter's Gold," published in 1926 by French author Blaise Cendrars. The book details the life of immigrant Johann August Sutter, who immigrated from France to New York in the 1830's, and eventually made his way to California, where he



Thirty five years ago, Hafis Bertschinger, a native of Helvetia (Switzerland), came to Gardner - where the trails divide - and traveled the 2,170 mile Oregon Trail on horseback. Today, less than two months shy of his 85th birthday, he has returned to the USA to do it again - but this time on bicycle. **Staff photo by Rick Poppitz**

claimed land in the Sacramento Valley. When gold was discovered on that property,

Sutter became one of America's first multi-millionaires.

That book inspired Bertschinger to undertake his previous trip on the Or-

gon Trail. He bought a man who sold it to him. On April 29, 1982, he and after the last name of the See **ARTIST** page 8

Roberts appointed to legislative task force

The Joint Legislative for economic growth, livabil- and services nationwide.

Long time postal clerk set to after 33 years...

From **LONG**, page 1
different postmasters during her career.

With the exception of three months at the Edgerton Post Office, where she worked as officer in charge during an interim period, all of her career has been at the Gardner PO.

Chandler grew up in Olathe and remained there for the first six years of her employment. She got married in 1989 and moved to Gardner in 2001. She's raised two kids here, who are now in their mid twenties.

From the beginning, the job at the post office seemed like a natural fit for her.

"I grew up with the post office. My father used to work for the post office, and my brother used to work for the post office until he retired," she said.

She recalls dressing nicely for her original interview. Later, after she had been on the job for a while, she heard that one of the interviewers had noted the nice outfit she was wearing, as well as her long fingernails and had commented that she looked "too girly," and might not be prepared to handle the hard work.

"Here it is 33 years later, so never judge a person by their looks," she says with a chuckle.

Like most every post office employee who has worked as a carrier, she remembers a dog biting her once in the early years.

"He just kind of sneaked up on me while I was talking to the customer and bit me on the calf. I just said, 'uh, he just bit me,' she recalls, adding there was more shock involved than

Working at the post office is harder work than people might assume. Years of standing on hard floors and handling packages accumulates and results in wear and tear on a person's body. Chandler is still wearing bandages from recent surgery on her hand to repair carpal tunnel syndrome damage.

Over the years, she's had to learn how to stay calm with angry customers who sometimes lose their temper, sometimes cursing and calling her names.

Holidays, especially Christmas, add extra stress to postal workers busy jobs - so much so that that it takes away from them being able to enjoy the holiday like almost everyone else. Chandler says one of the things she looks forward to in being able to enjoy Christmas away from the hectic activity at the post office.

On the flip side, one of the best things about her years at the post office has been getting to know regular customers and watching their children grow up.

"I'm going to miss my customers. I've had a lot of customers who come in with their cute little babies that I've watched get older. I've watched them grow up and seen some have kids of their own now. One little girl really touched my heart when she told her mother that when she got older she wanted to come work at the post office with Carole," she says.

She says people come up to her when she is out in public places, like restaurants and the airport, and say "I know you from somewhere but just can't



Vintage Aircraft Fly

Vintage Aircraft Association Chapter 16 held its annual Vintage Aircraft Fly In on June 23 at Gardner Municipal Airport. Around 50 aircraft owners flew their planes in for about 650 visitors to view up close. There were lots of aircraft related activities, food and fun for kids and adults, including the traditional shrimp boil and a movie on the airfield on Saturday evening. Staff photo by Rick Poppitz

Artist returns to Gardner Junction to begin...

From **ARTIST**, page 1
George began the journey just outside of Gardner at the Gardner Junction, where the Santa Fe, Ore., and California trails split.

The Oregon Trail goes through the northeast part of Kansas, into Nebraska and continues through Wyoming, Idaho and Oregon.

"It took me exactly four months to do it and finish it, with a healthy and happy horse at the end. At the beginning, it started with great difficulty, but finally we ended it happily," Bertschinger recalls. "Now as an old man, I've come back to your country, which has changed dramatically in many ways, to redo the whole thing on bicycle."

Bertschinger reveres the human-animal connection he made with the horse on that trip.

There was abundant rainfall

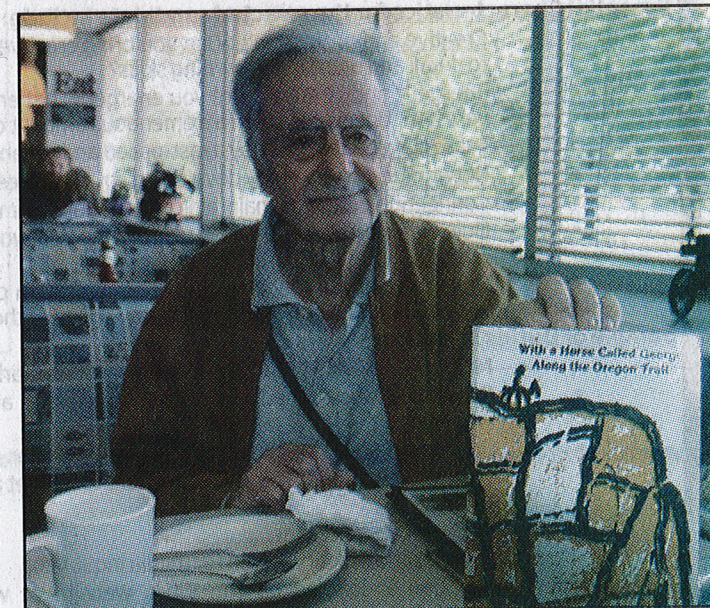
Asked if he'd like a bike with an electric assist motor, he emphatically says no.

"I'm going to really pedal this, every meter of it, and suffer, and sweat. I've been asked 'how will you cope with the heat?' I answered that I'll try to do with it. I'll let it do what it can to me and what I can do to it."

He said he was not sought sponsors or publicity and is unconcerned whether anyone knows about this adventure or not. He wants to do it for his own reasons - partly just because he can.

Although he wishes to travel alone for the majority of the trek, he says he would enjoy having other riders join him at the start, for the first ten miles or so, to kick off the trip.

On Saturday, he bought a bicycle at a second hand store. He still needs some accessories for the bike so he can carry a



Hafis Bertschinger, holding the book he wrote about his experience traveling the Oregon Trail on horseback 35 years ago. He starts his journey on June 27. Staff photo by Rick Poppitz

my dissatisfaction with having been unable to understand anything of what life is. But this [questioning] kind of pushes me on and on and on. I paint in colors, and call it spunk, or sym-

Mara', was made by German filmmaker Mano Khalil and released in 2018. There's a trailer for the film on YouTube and description on IMDb. Bertschinger has a son and two grandchildren in their mid-twen-

on me while I was talking to the customer and bit me on the calf. I just said, 'uh, he just bit me,' she recalls, adding there was more shock involved than pain.

Chandler remembers when her first postmaster had a heart attack and how that scared her. As a result she learned CPR, so she would be ready to help in an emergency situation.

Back in the early days a lot of the work was done by hand. Things have changed over the years, and now almost everything involves some kind of computer work. She says the technology improvements have been really good.

She's seen people mail all manner of things in her three decades of work.

She recalls handling a big box once that had a grown rooster inside, crowing loudly. Another time, a container burst open and a mass of worms spilled out all over the floor, which she had to clean up.

"That was nasty!" she says. "There's just never a dull moment. Just when you think you've seen it all, someone will bring in something else, and you just go... ooo-kay?"

AG Derek Schmidt: Concealed carry license fees reduced effective July 1

The application fee for a Kansas concealed carry license will be reduced effective July 1, Derek Schmidt, Kansas attorney general, said today.

Under the terms of the budget for state fiscal year 2019 passed earlier this year by the Kansas Legislature, the application fee will be lowered from \$132.50 to \$112. The reduced rate applies to applications received by sheriff's offices between July 1, 2018, and June

She says people come up to her when she is out in public places, like restaurants and the airport, and say 'I know you from somewhere but just can't figure out where,' and she just says 'post office' and then it registers with them immediately.

"It's been nice to be able to help people who don't know how to get their packages to where they need to go, especially the elderly, you know, gotta take care of them," Chandler said.

After retirement she plans to travel a little to see relatives and visit other parts of the country.

"I told my husband he can't retire yet because he's got to make money, and I like to spend money," she jokes. Her husband runs his own construction company.

She also enjoys doing party planning for small events, like parties and baby showers, and probably will do more of that now that she will more time.

There will be a retirement party for Carole Chandler on Aug. 3 from 3-7 p.m. at Austin's Bar and Grill, and it is open to the public.

ways, to redo the whole thing or so, to kick off the trip.

Bertschinger reveres the human-animal connection he made with the horse on that trip.

There was abundant rainfall in the spring of 1982 and plenty of grass for his horse to eat along the way. He said many of the farmers he met along the way in 1982 were very generous in feeding him and the horse.

"Most people think this is the biggest thing, to feed the horse and feed yourself. But grass, there was enough. And the farmers tried to feed my horse too much. I had to stop them. I had to learn that on the way. More than half a pint of barley was fantastically dangerous - the horse became crazy, too much energy, he wanted to run and was full of farts," he says with a laugh. There were many difficulties - his horse got stones in its shoes several times and was spooked by snakes on the trail at other times.

Bertschinger says he learned that easier is not necessarily better and a steady pace of about 20 miles a day was what was best for him and the horse.

He also remembers the many people he met along the way on that earlier trip and says he hopes he will find some of the same farmers still living and where they were 35 years ago. He hopes some will remember him.

He has traveled the world in his lifetime and experienced many things in many places, but the journey alone on the Oregon Trail holds a special meaning to him.

"All my life I've been a traveler, a nomad. I've visited all the continents, and I've realized that life is nothing but a journey," he says. "But this place, especially because of the horse, became so special to me that I'm repeating it."

Asked why he's chosen to do it by bike this time, he answers, "I want to earn it."

the start, for the first ten times

On Saturday, he bought a bicycle at a second hand store. He still needs some accessories for the bike so he can carry a small tent and some minimal supplies. He says he traveled very light the first time and will do the same again.

"I don't need much. I live on water and perhaps some tea and dry bread. Most people need much more and some security," he says.

He's riding a bike this time instead of a horse, and also will be carrying a cell phone with a camera for taking pictures and some video journaling. He'll spend a few nights in motels where he will sleep in a bed, which he did not do at all the first time, and take a shower - but that's about the limit of modern convenience he will allow himself.

He mentioned a 'lust for life' that propels him. He's says he's still working out the meaning of life.

"I think my lust for life is also

my dissatisfaction with having been unable to understand anything of what life is. But this [questioning] kind of pushes me on and on and on. I paint in colors, and call it spunk, or symphony of life, or something like that. It doesn't really give answers. It's not a happy ending song, it's still a big question mark, but being still at it, asking and wondering, that's why I'm still walking," says Bertschinger.

Hafis Bertschinger, the lifelong artist, sees the most beautiful art in the the landscapes and nature, which he finds everywhere he looks on the Oregon Trail. It's special to him. He looks forward to the trip and seeing things that may have changed, as well as things that will always be the same.

"The most beautiful part is Wyoming and Idaho, the fantastic landscapes there", he says.

After 50 years together, his wife Mara died seven months ago. A documentary film about the couple, titled 'Hafis and

Mara', was made by German filmmaker Mano Khalil and released in 2018. There's a trailer for the film on YouTube and description on IMDb. Bertschinger has a son and two grandchildren in their mid-twenties.

While discussing his plans at the Old 56 Family Restaurant in Olathe, he orders apple pie a la mode.

"Hot apple pie with ice cream, this is the best American something I can remember," he says as he takes the first bite.

Hafis Bertschinger will turn 85 on August 12, 2018 and should be somewhere near the western end of the Oregon Trail on his birthday.

After he completes the trail again, he plans to celebrate by visiting Yellowstone, which he has been to several times before and calls "the most striking park in the world."

Bertschinger will start on this journey from the Gardner Junction historical park at 9 a.m. on Wednesday, June 27.

Community Picnic & Fireworks Show



Tuesday, July 3 • Martin Creek Park

Picnic and entertainment begin at 6:00 p.m.

Fireworks begin at 9:45 p.m.

Join the fun! Celebrate our nation's Independence Day at Edgerton's annual Community Picnic and Firework Show! Guests can enjoy the park with a free picnic, music by DJ Phil Davis, inflatables, face painting, yard games and our famous firework show!

Due to limited parking at the event, there will be an event bus shuttle operating from 5:30 p.m. - 11:00 p.m. Bus stop locations will be located at City Hall (404 E. Nelson) and Edgerton Elementary School (400 W. Nelson).



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