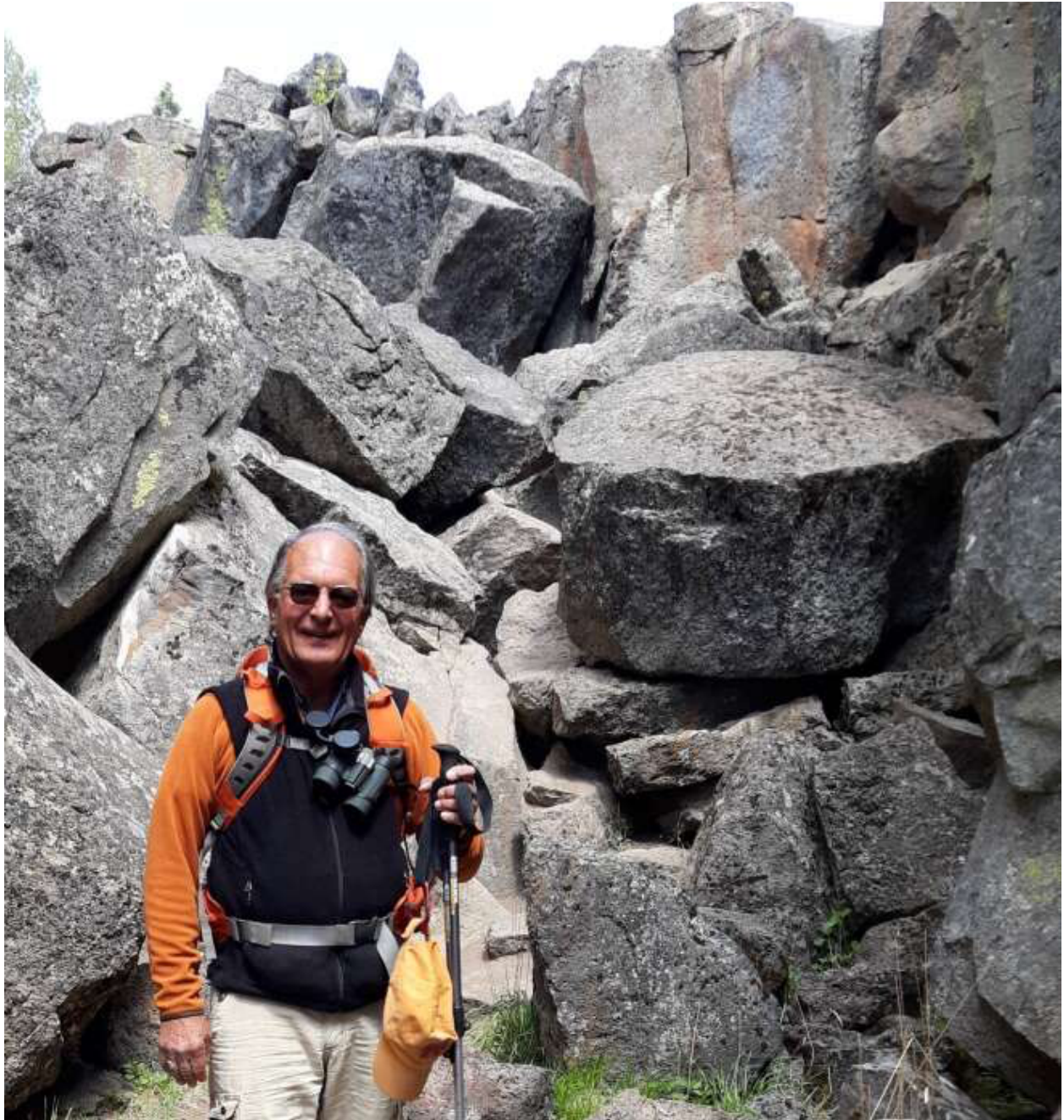


# Learning never ends for Rogue Valley historian

By Laura Simonds  
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Jeff LaLande recently traveled to these volcanic features in eastern Oregon to continue learning more about our natural world.

Since last Fall, this Lifelong Learning column has either been written by or has featured instructors or students of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Southern Oregon University.

The topics and viewpoints have varied widely, and hopefully been of interest to Ashland Tidings readers.

Jeff LaLande, a historian and long-time Rogue Valley resident, recently chatted with me about his experiences, interest in, and passion for lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is the ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional reasons.

A definition of “renaissance man” is a man who has acquired profound knowledge or proficiency in a wide range of fields. I can honestly say that Jeff is a renaissance man. As such, he certainly demonstrates lifelong learning in action.

When asked what lifelong learning means to him and why it is important, Jeff replied that he considers himself a lifelong learner and in fact is still learning many things.

For example, right now he is acquiring knowledge about birding, and is traveling to learn more about our natural world. He has been learning about birds since he was a young kid, but some things came along in adulthood that discouraged further learning. However, he is fortunate to have kept that interest and passion for learning.

He also mentioned his fascination with some odd topics, such as some remote islands in the South Pacific and Caribbean that became U.S. territory in the 1850s because they contained valuable deposits of bird guano (mined for fertilizer); and, on a totally different topic, a particularly flamboyant Italian World War II general.

After a short laugh, Jeff acknowledged how “weird” he is.

Jeff’s formal experience with lifelong learning began when he was an adjunct professor at SOU, where his first SOU course was also offered as an Extension non-credit course. He also taught with Elder Hostel which led him to OLLI. With all these adult-program experiences, he’s been pleased to teach to over-50-year-olds, noting that they are there simply for the pleasure of learning.

He said he enjoys these motivated people, and he enjoys not having to grade papers and exams! That allows him the “pleasures of teaching without the pains of pedagogy.”

Jeff’s professional career started when he moved to the Rogue Valley in the late 1960s after college graduation, yet couldn’t find a decent job. He lucked into one — and a 31-year career — with the U.S. Forest Service as an archaeologist and historian. During that time, he went back twice for graduate degrees —again demonstrating lifelong learning. He’s also been very involved as a volunteer, including serving on several boards.

According to Jeff, you can’t live in the Rogue Valley without hearing about OLLI. He started receiving the course catalog and other marketing information. In 2016 he started teaching OLLI

courses, surprisingly being an instructor before being a student. His OLLI courses were courses he had taught at SOU, finding it easy to repackage them for an older student.

Fortunately, he was able to reuse his previously created PowerPoint presentations. Again, being a “renaissance man,” his course topics included architectural history of the region, Southern Oregon history, and an Oregon history sampler.

What keeps Jeff involved with OLLI is his passion to be a teacher. Admittedly some of it is selfish because he enjoys it so much. In conclusion, he added, “We have this thing between our ears, and it’s a shame not to use it to the best of our ability.”

It’s obvious that Jeff clearly is a “renaissance man.” It’s also obvious that lifelong learning is a vital component for older adults to thrive, stay connected, and appreciate aging. OLLI offers all of this and more. Check out [inside.sou.edu/olli](http://inside.sou.edu/olli) to “come for the classes, stay for the connections.”

Laura Simonds, a former marketing and sales professional in the publishing industry, volunteers on the OLLI Communications and Community Outreach Committee.