Oregon State
CAPITOL
FOUNDATION

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2026

Message from the Chair

By Gary Wilhelms

The Foundation is a dynamic organization, "positive in attitude and full of energy and new ideas." There's a lot going on, and it is my honor to serve as the current Chair.

First, we welcome three new Board members—former State Rep. John Watt and legislative members Tom Andersen and Kevin Mannix who have been appointed to the Board by House Speaker Julie Fahey.

Then, following her many years of service on the Foundation Board, Jane Cease has been honored with Emeritus status.

In December we presented the Foundation's Bell Award to two deserving individuals, Margie Courtney and Rick Metsger, for their early and continuous support.

We are very pleased, after three and a half years, to be participating in a variety of reopening activities in the Capitol. While there might still be some work to be done, the renovated building, including the new Concourse Level, is beautiful. I encourage you to take the time for a visit. It's worth it!

We are pleased to partner with the City of Salem and others in the annual Cherry Blossom Day celebration on March 21st. It's a great opportunity to enjoy the splendors of spring on Oregon's own Capitol Mall. This event is growing and would be another enjoyable addition to your calendar.

And finally, I can't say thank you enough for your interest in and support of the Foundation. The Board and staff appreciate your comments and, of course, your contributions. If your future financial planning might involve legacy giving, please consider the Foundation.

A belated wish for a happy and successful 2026!

Pictured top to bottom: Rep. Kevin Mannix, Sen. Deb Patterson and Gary Wilhelms presenting Margie Courtney with the Bell Award at a luncheon in December; Rick Metsger accepting the Bell Award at the Old Timers luncheon with former Governor Barbara Roberts and Gary and Gail Wilhelms; Attendees and performers at the Cherry Blossom Day celebration.

Photos by: Joel Zak

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Civics Education Awards Go to Fifteen Oregon Non-Profit Organizations in Its Fifth Round

More than $250,000 in Civics Education Initiative funding from the Oregon State Capitol Foundation has been awarded.

The awards will support programs that help Oregonians learn how our local and state governments work and how to get involved in decision-making.

> *"The awards support hands-on experiences for students and other Oregonians to learn how democratic governments make decisions and—most importantly—how to be an effective participant,"* said Gary Wilhelms, Chair of the Capitol Foundation.

Recipients of the 2026 awards are:

- Boys and Girls Club of Salem, Marion and Polk Counties
- Center for Women's Leadership
- City of Sisters
- Civics Learning Project
- East County Rising Community Projects
- Hatfield Futures Program
- International School of Beaverton
- Next Up
- Oregon Business and Industry Research and Education Foundation
- Oregon Humanities
- Oregon YMCA Youth and Government
- Politisit
- Portland Urban Debate League
- Rural Development Initiatives.
- Young Leaders Program *(pictured above)*

This year's awards sponsor state Capitol visits by students from urban and rural areas, multigenerational civics leadership programs, simulated legislative sessions for youth groups, after-school learning about constitutional issues and training on effective citizen participation at all levels of government.

> *"The Capitol Foundation sponsors civics education efforts and promotes strong citizen involvement throughout our state,"* said Wilhelms.
>
> *"We know there is no substitute for voters who understand how governments work and how to make their voices heard."*

The next CEI award round opens July 1 through September 30, 2026. For more information or to apply, click here.

Remembering Those Who Added to the Capitol Story

BG (Ret.) James "Mike" Caldwell, military and public service, died November 27, 2025, age 74.

Hon. Avel Gordly, former member of the Oregon Senate, died February 16, 2026, age 79.

Ellen Lowe, former lobbyist, died February 7, 2026, age 95.

Hon. Rod Monroe, former member of the Oregon Senate, died February 20, 2026, age 83.

New Capitol Press Offices Named for Peter Wong

On January 14, nearly two hundred people crowded into a refurbished Room 50 of the Capitol to honor long-time reporter Peter Wong. Governor Tina Kotek and other state leaders paid tribute to Peter, who is retiring. Former State Senator Ginny Burdick, a former reporter herself, spoke about Peter:

> *"When I was asked to speak, it made me think about the attributes that make a good reporter—qualities that existed when I was here and remain relevant today. The qualities I came up with were: strong communication skills, curiosity, fairness, rigorous accuracy, fairness, persistence, compassion, integrity, and most importantly, commitment to truth and accountability. It would be really nice to post those qualities on the door. But better yet: boil them all down to two words: Peter Wong. Yes, our own Peter Wong, who encompasses all of those qualities and probably more that I haven't thought of."*

After the tributes to Peter, the crowd moved down the hall to watch Senate President Rob Wagner and House Speaker Julie Fahey cut the ribbon to open the new Peter Wong Press Offices.

We Are Excited to Share the Oregon Capitol Welcome Center Has Reopened

A visit to our Capitol is just the beginning — that's why we call these programs and projects a "gateway." Whether you are a history buff, a parent looking for family-friendly activities or looking for a way to create positive change for Oregonians, you get a glimpse here and find out where you can go to learn even more.

The Oregon Capitol Welcome Center boasts digital touchscreens that allow Capitol visitors to immerse themselves in Oregon's history and culture, heritage sites, the historic building and getting involved in our democracy. The self-guided experience sparks interest in visiting other parts of our state to learn more about what makes Oregonians unique. This project has won awards. We hope you will visit to learn why.

Information in the Welcome Center is available in English and Spanish languages. New programming continues to be added, recognizing and honoring the diverse culture, ethnicity and heritage of Oregonians. It's important to see our shared history from different perspectives to understand the whole picture, understanding our past, and better navigate a rapidly changing world.

Thanks to Capitol Foundation's donors, purchasers of Pacific Wonderland license plates and community partners for making the Foundation's largest single investment to date possible. Together, we are creating community connections and memorable experiences for all who visit our Capitol.

This visitor experience is free and available to the public during normal business hours. Before you visit the Capitol, check the Oregon Capitol website for hours of operation. The building is currently affected by CAMS construction. *Photos below by: Joel Zak*

Is the Cultural Tax Credit Right for You?

If you donated to an arts, heritage, or humanities nonprofit in Oregon this year, you may qualify for the Cultural Tax Credit. This unique program allows you to direct a greater portion of the taxes you are already paying to support cultural projects across Oregon.

Here's how it works:
To be eligible, you must donate to a qualified Oregon nonprofit in the same tax year that you make a matching donation to the Oregon Cultural Trust.

The Oregon State Capitol Foundation qualifies for the Cultural Tax Credit. When you file your Oregon state taxes, report your donation to the Oregon Cultural Trust—and you will receive 100% of that donation back as a tax credit.

For more information and to maximize your impact and invest in Oregon's cultural future, please scan the QR Code below.

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He has won every trivia competition at our annual reunion lunches. Now a new room in the Capitol bears his name on the door. Who is he? See inside for the answer.

Pictured below: Capitol Alumni Reunion lunch attendees working hard to answer the trivia questions. Photos by: Joel Zak