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Annual Cross-Channel Swim Announced by Hood River County Chamber Unique Event Captures the Spirit of Hood River

At 91 years old, Roy Webster was still cheering on friends and family as they participated in the Hood River County Chamber's annual Cross County Swim. Webster, a local orchard owner, was the originator of the event 67 years ago when he challenged himself to swim across the Columbia River between Washington and Oregon at Hood River. Today 550 brave swimmers cross the 1.1 mile stretch in the early dawn on Labor Day at the annual Columbia River Cross Channel Swim, and the exceptional event draws people from around the world.

On the day of the swim, participants board the famous Sternwheeler paddleboat on the south shore of the Columbia at the Hood River Port to be ferried across the river to the Washington shore. When signaled, swimmers jump off the Sternwheeler into the "refreshing" Columbia and head back for Hood River. To help them find their way, a special swim lane lined with volunteers in sail boats, kayaks, and paddle board are there to guide, encourage, and protect swimmers as they cross the channel.

"This experience is unlike anything you'll see elsewhere. It has grown from a yearly challenge among friends to an annual mecca for swimmers of all ages," said Mary Closson, Executive Director of the Hood River County Chamber of Commerce. "We draw groups, friends, families, and teams to this swim—we even have one person who has taken part in the event for 37 consecutive years."

As for Webster, his local orchard has evolved into The Fruit Company, now owned by his children and grandchildren who still carry on the tradition of support for the Cross Channel Swim by sponsoring the event. The swim is also sponsored by the Best Western Hood River Inn and Providence Memorial Hospital.

"Critical to the success of the event are the more than 150 volunteers," commented Chamber President Mark Brown. "We also rely on the invaluable help of the Army Corps of Engineers, the Coast Guard, the Hood River County Sheriff's Office, the Port of Hood River, Intertribal Fisheries, the Hood River Yacht Club, Gorge Master Swimmers, and dozens of kayakers and support staff who help swimmers from registration all the way through to the end of the swim. It is truly a community effort—and a whole lot of fun."

The Columbia River is the largest river in the Pacific NW of the United States and the fourth largest river (by volume) in America. The river's basin includes territory in seven states (Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, Wyoming Montana, and Utah) and one province in Canada. The most significant environmental force in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States, the Columbia runs for more than 1,200 miles from the base of the Canadian Rockies in southeastern British Columbia to the Pacific Ocean at Astoria, Oregon, and ILWaco, Washington.

Those wishing to swim in the annual event are encouraged to register early as the Cross Channel Swim has become one of the county's most popular attractions. To sign up online, visit <http://www.active.com/swim-meet/hood-river-or/columbia-river-cross-channel-swim-2010> and for more information call 541-386-2000 or 800-366-3530.

The community of Hood River welcomes the summer and visitors to the event with a Labor Day weekend full of activities, and the area offers exceptional dining, lodging, wineries and pubs, farm stands along the Fruit Loop, shopping, and a host of other outdoor sports—including windsurfing, rafting, paddleboarding, kiting, and biking.

The Hood River County Chamber supports economic and tourism development for the region and provides promotional programs to its 425 members. As a county-wide organization, it supports businesses, organizations and governmental agencies in Cascade Locks, Hood River, Parkdale, Odell, Pine Grove and Mount Hood.

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Join us for our 68th annual Cross Channel Swim, Monday September 6. Sign up at <http://www.active.com/swim-meet/hood-river-or/columbia-river-cross-channel-swim-2010>