

# Holiday trees raise mental health funds

By Edith Decker  
of the Daily Courier

The area's three major mental health organizations in December will celebrate the 12th Rogue Winterfest, an event that began as the Festival of Trees to raise money for Options of Southern Oregon.

"We changed the name in 2006 when I was hired by Options," recalls Ellen Johnson, Options executive director. "And we brought in SOASTC (now Kairos) and Family Friends (now Family Solutions) to partner with us on the event to create more of a community awareness about mental health."

The original Festival of Trees was the idea of Kim Miller, then the executive director at Options, who attended a convention where the idea was discussed. Miller hired Cathy Dahl to organize the first event, and relied on the Options staff and volunteers to make it happen.



Held at the Josephine County Fairgrounds for the first several years, the festival brought in more than 30 trees right from the start, sponsored by local businesses and decorated by volunteers, just as they are today. The trees are auctioned to raise money at a gala event.

Different special events have been added and tried along the way. But the gala and the week-

end viewing for people to see the trees have been steady highlights of the event.

Despite bad weather during the weekend of Winterfest, the 2013 fundraiser made about \$65,000 for the three organizations.

Three Rivers Medical Center and Evergreen Federal Bank have been major sponsors over the years.

"In 2006 Three Rivers want-

Rogue Valley  
**GATHERINGS**

Rogue Winterfest  
GRANTS PASS  
Dec. 4-8, 2014  
[roguewinterfest.org](http://roguewinterfest.org)

ed to make sure the event survived and offered a sponsorship to ensure the success and continuation of the event," Price says. "It was at that time that the other two mental health agencies were brought on board to share in the enormous amount of time and work it takes to put Rogue Winterfest on. We hired event coordinator Sue Price to oversee Rogue Winterfest, and every year it continues to get better and better."

In 2007, Evergreen Bank offered the then-new Bear Hotel as a venue, which is where the 12th Winterfest will be held later this year, Dec. 4-8.