

OREGON CAVES, HISTORIC CHATEAU HELP BOOST JOSEPHINE COUNTY

CAVE JUNCTION For 100 years, tourists have traveled through the Siskiyou Mountains in Southern Oregon to explore the Oregon Caves National Monument. For the past 75 years they could stay at the Oregon Caves Chateau, a National Historic Landmark. These remote attractions are more than historic sites — they bring tourism dollars to a county continuing to struggle with the loss of timber revenues.

More than 70,000 visitors travel to Josephine County each year to tour the Oregon Caves, a series of marble caverns several miles long that open at an elevation of 4,000 feet. According to the monument's superintendent, the caves attract \$2.6 million a year in direct spending and \$4.6 million in indirect spending, supporting about 84 jobs. Last month, Rep. Peter DeFazio and Sen. Ron Wyden introduced legislation to expand the Oregon Caves National Monument by more than 4,000 acres to protect natural resources and increase recreational and economic development opportunities.

"The caves impact the county; there's no

question about it," says Steve Dahl, Grants Pass economic development coordinator. "Tourists come for the caves and then take a jet boat ride on the Rogue River or visit one of the local wineries." Some of these tourists also spend their vacation money at the Chateau. The lodge hires 40 seasonal employees, buys local produce and wine for its restaurant and has sold \$150,000 worth of local art since 2002.

Scott Taylor, owner of Taylor's Country Store and Restaurant in Cave Junction, says the Oregon Caves improve his business. "If people are traveling from afar trying to see the redwoods, the caves are a side trip," says Taylor.

In Josephine County, tourism dollars are an important aspect of the economy. The leisure and hospitality industry is one of the largest employers. But revenue from top employers isn't enough to replace the timber industry. The county closed all public libraries two years ago and has the fifth-highest unemployment in the state.

"I don't think tourism has totally replaced



The lodge employs 40 seasonal workers.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OREGON CAVES CHATEAU

timber revenues," says Bob Schumacher, executive director of the Illinois Valley Community Development Organization, the lodge's nonprofit concessionaire. "But the Chateau has brought a flow of outside money into the community."

Even if that flow doesn't surge like the Rogue River, on hot summer days it refreshes the local economy.

JENNY FURNISS