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From the backcountry to the state board

Mt. Vernon pilot represents all of Eastern Oregon

By Sean Hart
Blue Mountain Eagle

“I’m just trying to give back to something I love.”

pilot Doug Ferguson

Local pilot Doug Ferguson may fly a small, two-seat plane, but he carries a massive load in terms of the area he represents on the Oregon State Aviation Board. The engineer from Mt. Vernon was appointed to the board for a four-year term in July, replacing Larry Dalrymple of Pendleton, as the sole voice from Eastern Oregon. “I represent everything east of the Cascades, and that’s what they want me to do,” he said. “We need some representation out here.”

After attending two meetings, Ferguson said the Oregon Department of Aviation staff are “go-getters” and he enjoys working with the other board members. He said his goal is to promote

general aviation and services in rural areas.

A 2-cent aviation fuel tax increase approved in 2015, with the funds earmarked for aviation improvements, may help rural air projects get off the ground. Ferguson said the tax is expected to generate \$3.5 million to \$4 million each year, with about 25 percent slated for rural air service enhancements, 25 percent for maintaining state airports and 50 percent for critical airport relief grants for improvements, such as helicopter landing pads at the Grant County Regional Airport in John Day.

Ferguson said a feasibility study for establishing commercial flights in rural Oregon has been planned, and he looks forward to seeing the results, though he admitted establishing commercial services in places such as Grant County would be “a big order.”

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Doug Ferguson, who was appointed to a four-year term representing all of Eastern Oregon on the State Aviation Board, shows off his 1959 model Cessna 182, which weighs about 1,000 pounds and travels about 150 mph.

Eagle photos/Sean Hart

New, returning Prairie City officials take oath

Phippen joins city council

By Rylan Boggs
Blue Mountain Eagle

Prairie City City Council welcomed a new face Wednesday.

New City Councilman Joe Phippen took the oath of office, along with returning councilors Frank Primozic and Georgia Patterson. Mayor Jim Hamsher was also sworn in for a third term.

Phippen is a retired lumberjack and long-haul truck driver. He and his wife have been living in Prairie City for seven years. They previously



The Eagle/Rylan Boggs

From left: Prairie City City Councilors Frank Primozic, Joe Phippen and Georgia Patterson, City Recorder Taci Philbrook and Mayor Jim Hamsher take part in a city council meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 11.

lived in Seneca.

“I got tired of plowing so much, and I got tired of the really cold winters,” Phippen said.

He ran for city council be-

cause he loves the town and the people.

“I thought maybe I could make a difference,” he said.

While on the council, he wants to address the issue

of dogs running loose and to work toward a new sewer system for the city.

He knows many in the community and takes pride in helping people by plowing snow with his tractor and donating food from his garden to the food bank.

Patterson served as the city’s public works director for 25 years and is beginning her second consecutive term as a city councilor. She was raised in Portland but has been a Grant County resident for 36 years. She said this will be her last term as a councilor, and she is looking forward to working on long-term projects such as the sewer system upgrade.

Primozic served one term as a city councilor, took a one-term hiatus and is now beginning his second term as a city councilor. Primozic volunteers at the Dewitt Museum in Prairie City and is looking forward to helping with projects like the new sewer system and other water projects. He was born in Wise River, Montana, and moved to Prairie City in 2004.

During the meeting, Public Works Director Chris Camarena informed the council one of the city’s main water lines had frozen, cutting off water to one resident. The resident has family nearby with access to running water and has been supplied with

bottled water by the city, he said.

The council also heard a request from Dewitt Museum Director Bob Shive for more hours to be granted to the museum to help keep up with maintenance during the off season. Shive also informed the council of the continued need for volunteers at the museum.

The city will soon be seeking a new clerk to work 35 hours per week. The posting for the job may go up as early as February and will seek someone with a solid grasp of social media.

The council concluded the meeting by unanimously voting to pay the city’s bills.

Rivers may rise with warmer weather, rain

Flooding not expected

By Rylan Boggs
Blue Mountain Eagle

Warmer temperatures and rain may cause water levels to rise this week.

The National Weather Service does not anticipate flooding in Grant County but has warned of rising snow levels, with lower-elevation rain, until the snow levels begin gradually receding Thursday. The agency also issued a Winter Weather Advisory for a “wintery mix of precipitation” for

Dayville, Mt. Vernon, John Day and Canyon City, and a Winter Storm Warning for the rest of the county, in effect until 6 a.m. Thursday.

“The potential impacts from the snow-melt and rainfall runoff include ponding of water where storm drains or ditches are clogged with snow and ice, ponding of water in low lying areas with poor drainage or frozen ground, and possible ice jams on small creeks and rivers that have frozen over,” a National Weather Service outlook states. “While no major

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Grant Union alum named county veteran service officer

Former soldier looks forward to serving veterans

By Rylan Boggs
Blue Mountain Eagle

An Army veteran who graduated from Grant Union High School has been hired as Grant County’s new veteran service officer.

Jeff Wilcox enlisted twice in the Army and once in the National Guard, served during Operation Desert Storm and started in his new role representing and help-



The Eagle/Rylan Boggs

Jeff Wilcox, Grant County’s new veteran service officer, stands for a picture with his fiancée, April Petty.

ing county veterans Jan. 9.

“I think he’s going to be great,” Grant County Commissioner Boyd Britton said.

“I see a lot of enthusiasm there, and I’m glad to have

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