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Good day to our valued subscriber Allen Weissenfluh of La Grande

Construction of Baker City townhomes debated by community

By Jayson Jacoby

WesCom News Service
A Baker City couple wants to create a subdivision near Sam-O Swim Center that would include 28 two-story townhouses in seven separate structures.

Kevin and Kimberly Luckini, who own Marble Peak Construction, have submitted an application to the city for the Park Springs subdivision.

The development is proposed on a 2.83-acre parcel the Luckinis bought earlier this year just south of Sam-O, the city-owned swimming pool.

The property is between Baker and Broadway streets, and is in a medium-density residential zone.

At least one longtime resident of the neighborhood has submitted a letter to the Baker City Planning Commission expressing his concerns about the amount of traffic the development would create and urging the Commission to limit the number of homes allowed to match the current, lower density in the neighborhood.

The Planning Commission, which has the authority to either approve or deny the proposed subdivision, has scheduled a July 18 public hearing and work session regarding the Luckinis' application.

In the application, Kevin Luckini wrote that the subdivision would consist of seven structures, each containing four 1,344-square-foot, two-story townhouses.

Each building would have two pairs of side-by-side townhouses.

Each of the 28 townhouses would be available for sale, and each would be considered a single lot, even though each structure would contain four townhouses, said Eva Henes, senior planner with the Baker City/County Planning Department.

Luckini wrote that each of the seven structures would have a "foundation footprint" of 2,640 square feet (30 feet by 88 feet)."

See Homes / Page 5A

Riverbend Youth gain life lessons fighting fires



Cherise Kaechele / The Observer

Four young men in the Riverbend Youth Transition Facility's firefighter crew recently went through training, where they learned how to deploy fire shelters, dig lines, and use hoses, among other skills.

By Alyssa Sutton

The Observer

Carson has been the squad boss of a firefighting unit for three years. He started when he was 18. His squad? Part of the RiverBend Youth Transition Facility firefighting crew.

"I had to grow up really fast that year," Carson said. "I didn't really have a job before that. Being a (squad boss) taught me a lot."

That's the goal of the facility, according to RiverBend Camp Director Troy Fuller. He said they work to provide the young men who stay at the facility with the tools to succeed in the workforce.

"This isn't really rehabilitation," he said. "This is 'habilitation.' A lot of these guys weren't given the tools to be successful before. We're giving (these young men) those tools and opportunities to grow."

The firefighting crew has the ability to do just that.

Carson is a Type 1 firefighter. He assists with resource training—such as deploying shelters—and volunteer work.

"I think my favorite thing is how much respect you get for the work

you do," he said. "When you're (doing the work) you don't realize the impact you have on people."

Carson told the story of a time when he was helping dig a line around someone's house to protect it from a fire.

"The guy kept coming out all eight days (we were out there) and kept telling us how thankful he was and how much he appreciated it," Carson said. "At the time I thought, 'I just dug a line,' but it was great to know that we were appreciated."

Brett Dunten, RiverBend's fire instructor and crew boss, trains the young men, who complete an 80- or 90-hour training, undergo testing and earn their certifications as either Type 1 or Type 2 firefighters.

He said the skills the young men are gaining will come in handy later in their lives.

"They're learning respect and responsibility," Dunten said. "And they're building a good rapport for themselves here."

Taysean, who is in his first year of the program, said that firefighting is the closest thing he's had to a "real" job.

"You have to work as a team," he

said of learning responsibility. "It's fun when a job is done the right way. If we mess up we have to redo it."

Taysean, along with Ogugua and Justin, who are also working fire for the first time, recently went through training where they learned how to deploy fire shelters, dig lines and use hoses, among a number of other skills.

They also had to complete a three-mile walk in less than 45 minutes carrying 45 pounds — which, Dunten said, is a national standard for wildland firefighters.

Ogugua, who said he enjoys the hikes and the conditioning that working on a fire crew brings, finished a fire training drill that required running hoses and ending in a fire shelter in 2 minutes, 8 seconds — the quickest in the group.

Dunten said that the average time for the group ranged between 2:35 and three minutes.

"It's a good trade. It's fun and it's good money," Ogugua said. "I look forward to getting a job (as a wildland firefighter)."

All four young men plan to pursue See Youth / Page 5A

From the Grande Ronde Valley to ends of the Earth

Foreign exchange program hopes to gain more community involvement

By Audrey Love

The Observer

Traveling overseas can be terrifying. Contrary to jet-setting movie montages, boarding a plane and flying across thousands of miles of open water or across unknown countries and continents can oftentimes feel overwhelming and leave your mind buzzing with a litany of questions and expectations and unknowns. But it can just as equally be the exact opposite — overwhelming in the best kind of way with culture and newness, different foods and ways of life that begin as unknown but quickly become an adventure.

The La Grande Rotary Club has provided these opportunities for more than 65 high school students since the late 1920s, when the short-term Youth Exchange Program was established. The program grew to include long-term exchanges in 1972 when Rotary International officially adopted the program. Today, one to three students are actively participating in the program per year depending on the available number of host families, and the club is eager to expand the number of both students and hosts involved.

"Rotary itself is one of the few true exchange programs, meaning for every student we send out we receive a student in," said Chris Taylor, Youth Exchange officer and Eastern Oregon Coordinator of District 5100, which stretches across the state to Portland and Salem and all the way up to the Washington border.

A "true" exchange takes place during the short-term program, which is non-academic, lasting between four to six weeks during the summer months. High school students ranging from freshmen to seniors are matched with an international family with a teenager similar in age and gender. One student will travel to the other student's home

See Rotary / Page 5A

Baker City youth's life made better by hot tub donation

La Grande business donates hot tub to two-year-old

By Max Denning

The Observer

Thanks to the generosity of strangers, two-year-old Augustus Macy has his very own hot tub.

While he may seem quite young for such a gift, the hot tub functions as a therapy pool as well as a playground.

Born with a birth defect known as spina bifida, Augustus doesn't have the use of his legs. He had five surgeries before he was 10 months old. Prior to this summer, Augustus was going to Baker Valley Physical Therapy once a week to do exercises in a warm therapy pool.

Augustus' therapists recom-

mended he use the warm therapy pool several times a week for short periods of time. That, coupled with the fact that he was quickly using up the allotted yearly amount of physical therapy sessions covered by his insurance, led his mother, Karla Macy, to search for another option.

"We were looking for something that we could have at home that would work for him," Karla said.

At the beginning of May, Karla began writing letters about her son and his need for warm water therapy to stores that sold hot tubs in Boise, Idaho, and one in La Grande — Claudson's Sew and See Macy / Page 5A



Max Denning/The Observer

Four-year-old Henry, left, and two-year-old Augustus Macy, right, play in the hot tub donated by Claudson's Sew and Soak of La Grande at their home in Baker City. Augustus, who has spina bifida, uses the hot tub for at-home physical therapy.

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