

YOUTH

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wildland firefighting after leaving RiverBend.

"It's my chosen career," Carson said. "I'll do it as long as I can."
Carson has two different contractors hoping to hire him in the future.

"I've made a lot of good relationships with people, and I've been here long enough that they know I'm a good worker," Carson said.

Dunten echoed the squad boss' sentiment.
"A lot of (guys) get jobs (as firefighters)," he said. "They're taken seriously."

Taysean noted that when the youth from RiverBend work with other crews they are treated just like everyone else.

"I didn't think they knew (where we were from)," he said. "I enjoy working with them."

Dunten said that the RiverBend fire crew is available to fight fires

across four counties.

"We have two engines," he said, "but if they don't need water we turn into a hand crew."

Though the manual labor can be dangerous, Carson said it's worth it.

"I've watched it change lives for the better," he said.

ROTARY

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abroad, and at the end of the first four to six weeks, both students will fly back to the states for an equal stay at the other's home. Both students remain together for the entirety of both stays. To date, the La Grande Rotary Club has either sent or received students from Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Chile, Czech Republic/Slovakia, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Peru, Switzerland, Russia, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey and South Korea.

The long-term exchange program is academic, requiring students to have a 3.0 GPA or higher, remain abroad for a full academic year — roughly 10 to 11 months — and travel solo. Typically, students will arrive in August and remain until July of the following year, living with up to three host families three months at a time during their stay. Long-term exchange applicants must be entering into their sophomore year of high school, as training unfolds throughout that year, with the students leaving to study abroad their junior year.

"Our goal (is three host families) during the year instead of the traditional one, mainly because we feel that it gives the students a much better cross-section of the culture when they spend three and a half months with three different host families," Taylor said. "It's also a little easier on the host family, or if things aren't perfect with your first host family, then in a month or so you're going to be moving anyway. Especially in the U.S., the family dynamics are so much different. Parts of the culture they participate in are going to be different."

A vetting process is in place for potential exchange students, which includes separate student and parent interviews, home visits and training sessions throughout the year. Both long-term and short-term students undergo 18 days of training, meeting with other exchange students across

the district as well as local Rotary officers and country officers from partnering countries. These trainings cover topics such as what to expect, adapting and culture shock, how to handle homesickness and garnering independence. During this time, Rotary officers are also monitoring and learning about each individual student, assessing which country would best suit each one.

Rotary provides most of the funding through donations and fundraising and gives the student an allowance for their stay. Families of students are required to pay a portion of the total cost, mainly for airline tickets and travel expenses, according to Taylor. However, Rotary handles all other details and expenses and will help students raise additional funds, if necessary.

"Our district (5100) is one of the most active districts in the world with Youth Exchange," Taylor said. "We send out roughly 40 students each year and receive 40 students in each year, so we touch about 1 percent (of total Rotary exchange students worldwide), and yet we're just this tiny sliver of Oregon."

All Rotary Club members and host families operate on a volunteer basis, and hosts need only provide room and board.

"It's been hard to garner interest. I've been struggling getting host families for our incoming student from Columbia," said Michelle Long, president-elect of the La Grande Rotary Club and Host Club Youth Exchange officer. "We're looking for host families right now. If we could, in the future, have more interest we could bring in more students and send more out."

Ideally, host families will have a high school student, as it makes the adjustment process, navigating the school environment and traveling to and from school a bit easier for the exchange student.

"It's nice to have someone you can recognize when you're feeling a little panicked," Taylor said.

However, having school-age children isn't a necessary requirement for becoming a host family.

"I love to have host families that



Chris Taylor, top right, Youth Exchange officer and Eastern Oregon District 5100 coordinator, poses with some of the students involved in the La Grande Rotary Club's Youth Exchange program in 2012.

are empty nesters. They're experienced. They've had teenagers before," Taylor said.

Retired couples are also great candidates, according to Taylor, as one or more can provide greater supervision during out-of-school hours.

The lasting benefits of the Youth Exchange program don't just affect the students, but have a profound impact on the families that host them.

"There's not only the obvious (benefit), that they get exposed to another culture," Taylor said. "I'd say half the host families, five years after the students have been gone, they still consider that student as one of their children. They've gained a child who doesn't look like them (and) who, when they've arrived, doesn't talk like them. They end up with another child who thinks of them as mom and dad through choice."

In the past, some families have even chosen to extend their student's stay beyond the allotted three months because of the relationship and attachment forged between host and student. "You're not just hosting them as a guest. They're supposed to be part of your family," Long said. "Another daughter or another son, another brother or sister. There's a bond that's developed. It's priceless on both ends."

For the students involved, the learning, relationships and experi-

ences the Youth Exchange program provides them is invaluable.

"There's so much growth. Their whole life changes, their whole outlook changes," said Long. "They realize that if they can go to a different country with people they don't know, they can probably be okay anywhere, could conquer just about anything."

Forging a greater sense of connection and understanding is a goal both set and achieved by the program.

"We break stereotypes," said Taylor. "The best way to break stereotypes is through example. What better example than having somebody who's actually from that country in your home. Teaching or letting them know that just because they speak a different language or see things on TV, that may not be what is truly representative."

Rotary's goal of garnering more volunteer host families and student involvement within the community will offer these opportunities to more students and families across the community. Interested students or potential host families are encouraged to contact the La Grande Rotary Club or Michelle Long at 541-910-5137 or mlong@lagrandecpa.com. Additional info can also be found on the program website at www.youthexchange5100.org.

MACY

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Soak.

Greg and Sandi Gross, owners of Claudson's Sew and Soak, received the letter and were immediately impacted by it.

"As soon as I got the letter, I showed it to Greg, and he said 'Let's do this,'" Sandi said.

"I just read the letter and it just touched me," Greg said.

Greg and Sandi have a son, Joey, now 30, who was born with a heart defect and had to have open-heart surgery at seven weeks old. Both Greg and Sandi said the experience with their son made them more empathetic to the situation the Macys were in.

"Little kids with medical issues kind of touch us more, you could say," Sandi said.

The Grosses quickly decided to donate a hot tub to Augustus.

"I could tell they really wanted to help us because they've been through a similar situation," Karla said.

Since getting the hot tub, the Macys were able to cancel all of Augustus' pool therapy sessions for the summer. This has allowed the family to take Augustus to Portland for monthly physical therapy sessions at Shriners Hospital for Children in July and August. Augustus sees therapists there twice a day for a week at a time.

Karla and Levi, Augustus' parents, help him through stretches and exercises in the hot tub several times a week. Sometimes Augustus' four-year-old brother, Henry, gets in the hot tub with him.

"He's doing really well. He's got a bunch of different mobility devices and he tears around in all of them," Levi said.

Karla said Augustus was excited to get the hot tub at home.

"It's also just nice that he can move around in here and play a little bit more like a typical kid would," Karla said.

Even when he's not in the hot tub, "he's a super happy kid," Karla said.

HOMES

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The seven proposed structures are "staked out on the property for review by any interested party," Luckini wrote.

"We believe the proposed development will enhance the area of vacant land, complement the surrounding neighborhood and help to promote infill of existing lands within the urban growth boundary," Luckini wrote in the application. "By developing land within the UGB and accessing nearby pre-existing utilities, we believe we can provide an attractive, efficient and affordable housing option for the Baker community."

Luckini said in a phone interview with the Baker City Herald Thursday that he has not estimated prices for the townhouses, but he is confident that there is a market for such residences. He said he and his wife, who have owned a home in Baker City since 2007 and have lived here full time since 2016, had been looking for a property that was suitable for a townhouse development.

The couple bought the property in May for

\$80,000, according to records from the Baker County Assessor's Office.

Luckini said he has talked with a few residents in the neighborhood, and he recognizes that any development — and in particular a type that's new to Baker City, as the townhouses would be — will provoke concern among some people.

"I understand that anything that's different can meet some resistance," Luckini said. "But we feel like we're doing the best we can to preserve the character of the neighborhood, and to improve on it if we can. We are doing our very dead level best to be good neighbors."

To that end, he said the proposed subdivision includes a 12-foot-wide "greenbelt" with trees around the entire perimeter to preserve the privacy of existing neighbors as well as people who would buy the townhouses.

Luckini also said he has proposed to build the townhouses as far from the property lines as the city's

development code allows to increase the buffer from existing homes.

He wrote that the townhouses would be "designed to attract all types of prospective homeowners, from starter families to retirees," and that the homes "will be built to the highest standards."

He also said the subdivision would have a "very, very strict" set of codes, covenants and restrictions that would, for instance, require that residents keep their yards well-maintained and their garage doors closed when they're not entering or exiting.

George Keister is one of the current residents who has talked with Luckini.

Keister and his wife, Linda, who have lived for 23 years at 630 Broadway St., just south of the proposed subdivision, said one of their chief concerns is the sheer number of homes and the resulting increases in population and traffic.

"I'm very sympathetic with people being able to do what they want with

their properties," George Keister said on Thursday afternoon. "But this is just over the top as far as what anybody expected. Traffic is a big concern."

He said he has talked with several of his neighbors who, like the Keisters, presumed that eventually the vacant, nearly 3-acre lot in their neighborhood would be developed.

But Keister said he anticipated that single-family homes would be built rather than townhouses. That would limit the number of homes, because in the medium-density residential zone, single-family detached homes must be on lots of at least 7,500 square feet.

Single-family attached homes, however — which is how townhouses are designated in the city's development code — can be on a lot as small as 2,500 square feet per unit.

That allows the higher density of units per acre, which Luckini said makes the development more financially feasible.

If the property were developed with single-family detached homes, it would be limited to about 12 homes, according to the Planning Department.

Keister said he thinks the medium-density residential standards are too broad, and that the housing densities allowed seem to him more aptly described as high-density.

Keister said he is concerned about the subdivision reducing the value of his and other homes in the neighborhood.

He also wonders, as he points toward the white soil that indicates a concentration of alkali in the southwest portion of the Luckinis' property, how well grass and trees will grow there.

The Luckinis are proposing to build a street to access the subdivision. The street would curve through the property, connecting Baker and Church streets.

Because Church Street is not a through street in that area — segments of the street between Birch Street

on the west and Well Street on the east have been vacated — access to the subdivision from the south would be via Well Street, which connects to Church Street.

Luckini wrote that maintenance of the greenbelt, common areas, benches and street lamps would be paid for by a governing homeowners association.

In terms of specific requirements in the city's development code for the medium-density residential zone:

- The code allows up to 20 units per acre. The proposed Park Springs subdivision would have a density of 9.89 units per acre.
- The code limits building height to 35 feet. The proposed townhouses would be about 28 feet tall.
- The code requires at least 7 percent of the property to be landscaped. The Luckinis are proposing 34 percent, including common areas (16 percent), front yards (5 percent) and a greenbelt area (13 percent).



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