



THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896



Follow us on the web

WEDNESDAY • August 29, 2018 • \$1

Good day to our valued subscriber Betty Bohnenkamp of La Grande

Rock quarry to resubmit application

■ Commission denies request due to incomplete information

By Cherise Kaechele
The Observer

A proposed rock quarry application will need to be completely resubmitted after the Union County Planning Commission deemed it incomplete.

On Monday night, the commission listened to Curtis Shuck, of Universal Exports Limited, and locals Steve West and Laurie Hines, who submitted the application for a 250-acre rock quarry expansion near Perry.

The commission decided to waive the one-year waiting period for a new application and requested the applicants come back with listed items requested by the commission — and those requested by the community members who testified.

According to Shuck's presentation to the commission, the total property would be located on 4,974 acres of land approximately two and a half miles west of La Grande near Perry, just off the interstate.

The rock will be taken away via train — approximately 50 to 60 cars per week, according to Shuck.

He said they see this as beneficial to the public, the environment and the developer.

West, who owns Steve's Outdoor Adventures, of La Grande, said he wants to make the larger acreage surrounding the quarry into a conservation area for wildlife.

"That is a critical range of habitat," West told the commission. "We will not subdivide the land or make it into windfalls. It'll be protected forever."

West also said the location of the quarry will not obstruct the view of the hillside.

"(The quarry) won't be visible from La Grande ever," he said.

Community members weren't so sure about that.

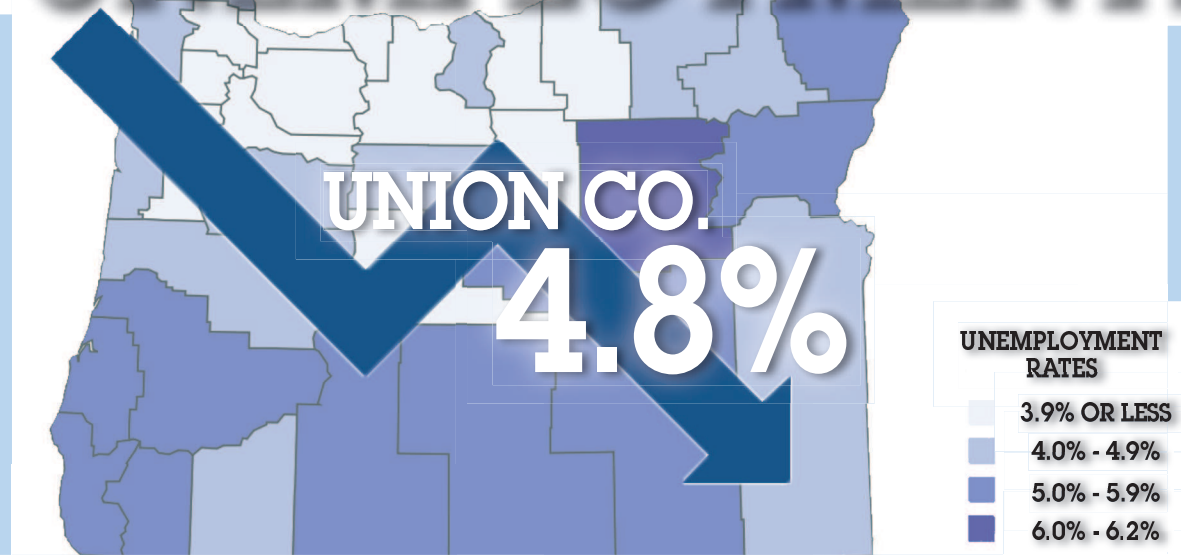
Many of the residents from Perry testified the quarry will not benefit their town and complained about the dust from transporting materials via trains.

One resident said his wife is on oxygen and the amount of dust this project will create will impact the way she breathes.

David Moyal, a La Grande resident, said this is a "completely inappropriate" site for this project. He also said the application, which was available to the public before the meeting, was incomplete and needed an environmental impact statement, among other

See **Quarry** / Page 5A

UNEMPLOYMENT:



RECORD LOW IN UNION COUNTY

■ Rural Oregon counties have not regained as many high-paying jobs, nor as many manufacturing jobs

By Max Denning
The Observer

In July, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in Union County dipped to 4.8 percent — the lowest rate the county has seen since the Oregon Employment Department began tracking unemployment in 1990.

The unemployment rates in Union County, Oregon state and in the U.S. have been dropping since the county peaked in 2009. Seasonally adjusted unemployment rates in the U.S. dropped to 3.9 percent, which was mirrored in the state of Oregon.

Chris Rich, regional economist for Eastern Oregon for the Oregon Employment Department, said Union County lost roughly 550 manufacturing jobs from 2007 to 2009 during the recession. As of 2017, Union County had gained back 270 of those manufacturing jobs. Rich said while some of the remaining jobs may return to the county, some are permanently lost as manufacturers closed or left the area.

"It's tough to say now, with the manufacturers

See **Unemployment** / Page 5A

Employment vacancies difficult to fill

In July 2018, Gail Krumenauer, senior economic analyst with the Oregon Employment Department, wrote an article about challenges filling job vacancies in 2017. According to her analysis, 64 percent of vacancies were considered difficult to fill across the state.

The Portland Metro area had the smallest ratio, with only 51 percent of vacancies considered difficult to fill.

In Eastern Oregon, 62 percent of job vacancies were considered difficult to fill. The most prominent reason for vacancies being difficult to fill was lack of applicants and lack of qualified applicants.

In a report on the same topic compiled by Chris Rich, regional economist for Eastern Oregon for the Oregon Employment Department, there were 1,424 difficult-to-fill vacancies in Eastern Oregon in 2017. Registered nurses were the hardest position to fill in Eastern Oregon, with 197 vacancies.

The industries with the most number of difficult-to-fill vacancies were health care and social assistance, manufacturing, wholesale trade and leisure and hospitality.

— Oregon Employment Department

Wallowa County commissioner-elect dies of apparent heart attack

■ Long-time forester Bruce Dunn advocated for active management on public lands

By Katy Nesbitt
For The Observer

Commissioner-elect Bruce Dunn died suddenly last week of an apparent heart attack while touring the Lower



Dunn

Joseph Creek Restoration Project in northern Wallowa County. According to John Williams, retired Wallowa County natural

resource extension agent, on Aug. 21 members of the Wallowa-Whitman Forest Collaborative had just finished a lengthy discussion regarding a particularly contentious timber sale unit when Dunn collapsed walking back to his pickup a couple hundred feet away.

Kris Stein, Wallowa Mountains Office District Ranger, said Forest Service staff and members of the Forest Collaborative and the Wallowa County Natural Resource Advisory Committee had spent about an hour and a half at the site.

"We got out of the truck and we started talking about things — we were having a free flow of ideas and questions and Bruce was right in there," Stein said.

Dunn, a forester for nearly 50 years — the last 32 years with RY Timber — has a long history of pushing the Forest Service toward increas-

See **Dunn** / Page 5A

Union County will have five contested city council races

By Dick Mason
The Observer

City council elections will be lively in La Grande, Union, Elgin and Imbler this fall.

The four municipalities will have a total of five contested city council races. Races for city council positions are now set, since Tuesday was the deadline for cities to submit their candidate filings to the Union County Clerk's office for the Nov. 6 election.

La Grande

La Grande had one contested race, incumbent Justin Rock will be challenged by Ashley O'Toole for Position 7. Rock is completing his fourth year on the city council.

Position 7 is one of four La Grande berths up for election, including the mayor's seat. Incumbent

Steve Clements has filed for reelection. Clements is completing his second two-year term as mayor. He served as a La Grande city councilor from 1998 to 2010.

Position 5 incumbent Gary Lillard is also running for re-election. Lillard has served on the La Grande City Council for more than 10 years.

Position 6 is up for election and one candidate, Jim Whitbeck, filed for it. Incumbent Troy Pointer will not seek re-election.

The following is a look at the city council filings in Union County cities outside La Grande.

Cove

Three candidates, none of whom are incumbents, filed for three at-large positions up for election — Shawn Parker, Lana Shira and Matt McCowan.

No candidates filed for the open mayor's position. Lyndon Rose, who has served as mayor of Cove for several years, is the incumbent.

Elgin

The city's election will feature the lone contested race for mayor in Union County. Incumbent Allan Duffy will be challenged by Jon Rutherford. Duffy has served as mayor for four years.

Three at-large council seats are up for election and three people have filed for them — two incumbents, Rocky Burgess and Risa Hallgarth, and Ryan Martin, who served as student representative on the council in 2017-18. Martin graduated from Elgin High School earlier this year.

The City of Elgin's administrator-recorder po-

sition is also up for election. Incumbent Brock Eckstein filed for reelection and will run uncontested. Eckstein is completing his fourth year as administrator-recorder.

Island City

Candidates will run unchallenged in four races up for election in Island City.

Robb Rea is the single candidate who filed for mayor. Rea, a city councilor the past 16 years, is running to succeed Delmer Hanson. Hanson, Island City's mayor since 2014, did not file for re-election. Hanson recently experienced a health issue and the council then appointed Rea to serve as mayor pro tem in his absence.

Incumbents who will run uncontested are Stan Terry, Position 1, and Don Starr, Position 6. Donald

Longacre is the one non-incumbent running, he filed for Position 4 and will also run uncontested. Position 4 incumbent Sharon Vermillion did not file for re-election.

Imbler

Six positions are up for election in Imbler, one of which is contested. Teressa Dewey and Terry Clinkenbeard, both non-incumbents, will vie for Position 5.

Incumbents who will run uncontested are Mayor Mike McClean and councilors Jason Berglund, Position 1, Joan Harding, Position 2, and Rick Vick, Position 3. Non-incumbent Bob Trotter will run unopposed for Position 6.

North Powder

Three candidates filed for the North Powder City

See **Election** / Page 5A

INDEX

Business.....1B Horoscope.....6B Sports.....7A
Classified.....4B Lottery.....2A Sudoku.....3B
Comics.....3B Obituaries.....3A Wonderword.....3B
Crossword.....6B Opinion.....4A
Dear Abby...10B Record.....3A

WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
52 LOW
Party cloudy



Thursday
77/50
Party sunny

CONTACT US

541-963-3161

Issue 101
2 sections, 20 pages
La Grande, Oregon

HAVE A STORY IDEA?

Call The Observer newsroom at 541-963-3161 or send an email to news@lagrandeobserver.com. More contact info on Page 4A.



FRIDAY

COMMISSIONERS TALK ABOUT PILT LAWSUIT

Online at lagrandeobserver.com