



INSIDE

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Weekend

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Good day to our valued subscriber Stephen Koza of Cove

Tree rescue a multi-agency effort

■ Hunter finds victim upside down in tree, unusual rescue calls for creative thinking

By **Cherise Kaechele**
The Observer

A multi-agency effort rescued one hunter down from a tree in what was a very unusual — and dangerous — situation.

Edward Voelker, of Prineville, is still alive, according to Umatilla County Sgt. Dwight Johnson, who also serves as sergeant for the county's Search and Rescue group.

Voelker was found dangling 20-30 feet in a tree north of Highway 244 on Tuesday morning

after he had fallen from his tree stand two days earlier. He had become so tangled in his safety harness he was unable to get down.

Voelker, who is approximately 70 years old, was found by Steve Royston, of Salem, and his son Joseph, of Stayton, who were hunting in the area.

"We didn't stumble on him — he was hollering out," said Steve Royston. "We were hunting about a mile or so from his location and I heard someone yelling. I knew

we needed to do something."

It took Royston and his son about an hour and a half to pinpoint Voelker's location. Since Voelker's yelling was echoing throughout the forest, Royston and his son drove around in their vehicle so they could cover more ground.

"My son honked the horn, and we knew we were getting closer to him (because) once he heard the horn he started yelling louder. He kept it up so we could find him."

It took the hunters some time

to find the man since they were looking at ground level.

"He said, 'I'm up in the tree,'" Royston recalled. "Holy smokes. He was about 30 feet above and tangled in the ropes from his tree stand. His head was straight down, (and he had) no way to get himself down. We knew we needed to get him help right then."

Royston said he and his son had to leave Voelker to find cell-phone reception. They came upon a vehicle and flagged it down

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County joins in PILT lawsuit

■ Commissioners also lift complete burn ban

By **Cherise Kaechele**
The Observer

The Union County Commissioners voted to join other Oregon counties in a lawsuit against the federal government to recover three years' worth of payments in lieu of taxes (PILT).

At Wednesday's meeting, the commissioners spoke in open session about the PILT lawsuit, which 29 of the 36 Oregon counties — including Baker, Wallowa and Umatilla — have decided to opt in, joining other states across the country.

Payments in lieu of taxes help local governments carry out such vital services as firefighting and police protection, construction of public schools and roads, and search and rescue operations, according to a Montana Association of Counties website.

According to the Department of Interior website, the payments are made annually to offset losses in property taxes due to non-taxable federal lands, such as lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (all bureaus of the Interior Department), the U.S. Forest Service (part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture) and for federal water projects and some military installations.

PILT payments were not received for 2015, 2016 and 2017. Those states with federal lands have filed lawsuits, wanting the money the counties are owed.

The Union County Commissioners had until Sept. 14 to decide whether they wanted to join the lawsuit.

According to the packet given to the commissioners, opting in to the lawsuit will not cost the county money, nor will the county be required to pay any out-of-pocket attorney's fees or litigation expenses.

Administrative Office Shelley
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JOSEPH RESIDENT INSPIRES OTHERS TO 'BGOOD' THROUGH HOMEGROWN BUSINESS

By **Audrey Love**
The Observer

To define Judy Goodman as a "one woman show" wouldn't be an understatement — from designing the logo on her BGood Artisan Chocolate Energy Bars to tempering chocolate in her kitchen and hand-delivering orders to her distributors — she takes care of business. Her business, to be exact.

Though she officially started BGood in 2014, the series of events leading to hundreds of batches made and sold started on a backpacking trip in the Eagle Cap Wilderness in 1984. Taking a break from graduate school, Goodman packed some of her homemade energy bars on a trip to Ice Lake — 34 years later, she's returned for good, living and running her business in Joseph.

Before transitioning into her entrepreneurial endeavors, Goodman spent the first 20 years of her professional career as a fisheries research biologist, working mainly for Idaho Fish and Game in Stanley, near the headwaters of the Salmon River.

"Occasionally they would want me to go out and do a spawning ground survey, so that meant getting dropped off and walking eight miles up river," she said. "So I would have to pack all my food — usually it was nuts, dried fruit, chocolate — and that's what I

would nibble on all day. That was the general idea behind the bars."

After a job near Joseph fell through, Goodman found work at Arrowhead Chocolates in 2011, where she was trained as a chocolatier — an experience that would later influence her business.

"In some ways (it) really worked for me because working with the chocolate and making confections is almost like a science," she said. "I think I liked it for that reason, and also (I really enjoyed) making something beautiful (and) artful."

It was only later, when the owners' daughter, Erica Reininger, suggested Goodman start making energy bars to accommodate the influx of hikers and outdoor recreationalists who frequented the area, the experimentation on her first four bars began. Goodman made small batches for her coworkers to taste test, tweaking her recipes for what would later become Chia Blueberry, Peanut Ginger, Nutty Fruit and Pistachio Cherry.

"I just used what we had — nuts, seeds, dried fruit, honey, chocolate — things sitting on the shelf, (and) we just kinda tested," Goodman said. "Some of it was intuitive."

Despite the energy bars' initial in-store success, Goodman eventually left the chocolate shop to

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Courtesy photo
Judy Goodman, founder of BGood Artisan Chocolate Energy Bars, prepares a batch in her kitchen in Joseph.

Improved veteran program adds zip to health care process

By **Dick Mason**
The Observer

The days of long waits are ending for veterans who want to see doctors outside of VA hospitals and clinics — at least for veterans in Northeast Oregon, Southeast Washington and Western Idaho.

Currently, after a veteran calls the VA to arrange an appointment, the average wait to see a doctor outside a VA hospital or clinic in this region is eight days. This is a considerably shorter wait time than the 2016-17 average of 124 days in the Walla Walla VA Medical Center's

service area.

"It has been a phenomenal improvement," said Steven Fleury, chief of the VA Care in the community program for the Walla Walla VA, at a veterans town hall on Wednesday in La Grande. "Four months was too long for anyone to wait to see a doctor."

VA Care in the Community is an improved version of the Veterans Choice Program, which makes it possible for veterans to see outside doctors and have the expense covered by the VA. The VA Care in the Community Program, which was cre-

ated by the VA Mission Act of 2018, is now being phased to replace the Veterans Choice Program.

The new program is speeding things up because, unlike Veterans Choice, it does use private contractors to set up appointments with outside doctors, said Keith Allen, acting director of the Walla Walla VA Medical Center. Instead, the money spent on contractors is being used to hire more VA staff to arrange the appointments.

"We are cutting out the middleman," Fleury said. "We have a direct relationship (with) health care

providers."

He said the process of phasing in Care in the Community is continuing. This means the Walla Walla VA is still adding and training more staff for the new program.

Fleury said the success of the Care in the Community Program is increasing the number of veterans being served by the VA. The increase is boosting call volume and the number of requests for travel voucher payments received by the Walla Walla VA. This is making it harder for veterans to get through on the phone to the Walla

Walla VA and lengthened the time it takes to process travel voucher payment requests, officials said at Wednesday's town hall.

"There is a ripple effect (caused by) more people using the system," Fleury said, adding that these issues are being examined and will be addressed.

It was also announced at Wednesday's town hall that the La Grande VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic will soon be receiving an additional nurse practitioner. Until now, the clinic has had one in-house nurse practitioner and one telehealth nurse

practitioner. The clinic's telehealth nurse practitioner, who communicated with patients from Boise, Idaho, will no longer be serving now that a second in-house NP is coming on board.

The new NP will join the clinic in the next two weeks, said the clinic manager, Sarah Gregg. The clinic also has two registered nurses and two licensed practical nurses. It has not had a physician for about two years.

The clinic will continue offering other telehealth services with health professionals including doctors and

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Friday 44 LOW Clear and chilly
Saturday 77/40 Sunny; pleasant
Sunday 80/44 Mostly sunny

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page 4A.



MONDAY

TRANSIENT TAX LAWSUIT ON HOLD

Online at lagrandeobserver.com