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Good day to our valued subscriber Larry Knoop of La Grande

Local solar company sees small step back due to end of tax credit

By Max Denning
The Observer

Since 1977, nearly 600,000 Oregonians have participated in the Oregon Residential Energy Tax Credit program, which gave tax credits of up to \$6,000 for solar photovoltaic systems, heat pump water heaters, ductless heat pumps, furnaces and other select energy-efficiency devices. The program ended

in 2018, when Oregon legislators failed to extend the program in 2017. Now, owners of the local solar company Blue Mountain Solar said they are feeling the effects.

Kent Osterberg, who owns Blue Mountain Solar with his wife, Kay Firor, said their business has been hurt by the loss of the tax credit, but has seen more enthusiasm in recent years.

"There's certainly been more interest (in solar energy) than there was 15 years ago," Osterberg said. "Things slowed down because of (the ending of the state tax credits for solar) but it hasn't come to a standstill," noting the company has projects going up this year in La Grande, Enterprise and other locations in Eastern Oregon. Blue Mountain Solar spe-

cializes in "the consulting, design, and installation of utility-connected or remote solar electric systems," its website states.

Presently, Osterberg said, it takes about 18 years for people to make their money back in reduced energy costs to pay for what solar panels cost up front. When the tax credit was in place, he said, it would take more like 8 to 11 years to make

your money back.

"Losing the state tax credits has put a damper on installing systems," Osterberg said, noting with the tax credits, solar was "a no-brainer to invest in."

The Energy Trust of Oregon reports more than 11,000 homeowners in Oregon make their own solar power.

Just before the tax credit program ended, Steve

Bartell began a new solar project at his cabin in Union County. Bartell, who owns Bubbles Laundry in La Grande, has used solar panels at his cabin for approximately 30 years and also utilizes solar power at his home and the laundromat.

Bartell said he uses solar panels because of environmental and economic reasons.

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Steven K and the Bounty Hunters rack up five Josie Award nominations

By Audrey Love
The Observer

Steven K and the Bounty Hunters had their sights set on the bright lights of Dollywood. The local country music band drove cross-country to Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, to attend the Josie Music Awards in hopes of bringing home up to five awards.

"This is our first time (being nominated), and we're pretty excited," said lead vocalist Steven Kidwell. "We have high hopes. We're one of only a couple of bands that got five nominations, and the other bands weren't in our genre."

The Bounty Hunters have played together as a band close to three years, mostly across Eastern Oregon and the Tri-Cities, Washington, area, and in that time produced two albums — 2016's "Smoke and Fire" and their latest album, "This Road We're On," which will release following the Josie Awards.

Kidwell describes the band's sound as ranging from folk to traditional country, with their

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New Oregon State Police crime lab being built in Pendleton

By Phil Wright
East Oregonian

The fight to keep the Oregon State Police crime lab in Pendleton is over.

Fortis Constriction Inc. of Portland began foundation work of the new lab at 612 Airport Road, directly south of the local state police command. The city of Pendleton on Aug. 31 issued Fortis a building permit for the foundation work of the 9,515-square-foot facility with a total value just shy of \$1.25 million.

Oregon State Police Forensic Services Division operates labs in Bend, Central Point, Pendle-

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REELING 'EM IN

■ Eastern Oregon Film Festival announces special guest, hosts trailer viewing party

By Audrey Love, The Observer

The night of Sept. 1 proved a successful turnout for Chris Jennings and the rest of his Eastern Oregon Film Festival crew, as they previewed a barrage of film trailers and sold the first batch of 2018 festival passes at their Sneak Peek and Pass sale at hq.

"In the past, we've usually combined our fundraiser and the first day (of pass sales) and this is the first year we've split that," Jennings said. "(This event) gave us a chance to release information a lot earlier and now we've got lots of time to market each film."

Pizza and beer were available in abundance as attendees took their seats to preview a sampling of the 12 feature films to be screened at this year's festival, Oct. 18-20, as well as Jennings' awaited announcement of EOFF's special guest — actor and filmmaker Bruce Campbell.

"We're honored that we were even considered," Jennings said of snagging Campbell for the festival. "I reached out (to him) through his website kind of on a whim, and he got back to me. I hear he's a pretty wild character on his own, so I'm not sure what we're going to get."

In conjunction with the event, EOFF also released trailers to accompany their previously released list of official film selections, an online portal to watch 14 films via Filmmaker Magazine's website during festival time, as well as the musical lineup for their after parties — from La Grande rock band Catskills to the "electro-soul" sound of Chanti Darling,

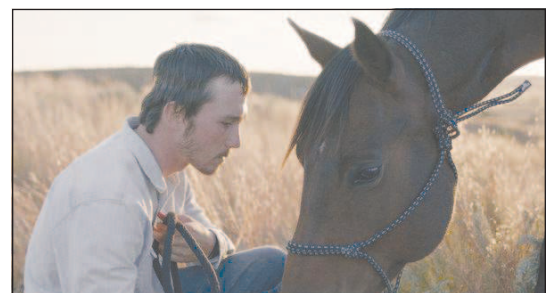
Portland-based band Máscaras, Blood Sun Stories out of Boise and, finally, LA's Healing Gems.

"Now that we've sold the first wave of passes, it's all about getting the word out," Jennings said. "Our job is connecting people with the films that are going to resonate with them the most. There's definitely a film in there for everybody."

Festival-goers can expect to view a number of the 16 short films before each of the feature films. Jennings plans to release a tentative day-to-day schedule for EOFF sometime this week, with finalized times and lineups issued closer to the festival dates. He's also pushing to coordinate panels or conversation pieces after some of the films and a walking tour of the Liberty Theatre so attendees can get a sense of the space the festival hopes to occupy in the future.

EOFF will host "Brunch with Bruce" the Saturday morning of the festival, allowing members priority and passholders on a first-come, first-serve basis the chance to listen to Campbell share insight from his 40-year film career and how technology and distribution mechanisms have impacted the business and craft of inde-

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Courtesy photos

From top to bottom: Clara's Ghost, Anote's Ark and The Rider are three of 12 feature films that will be screened at this year's Eastern Oregon Film Festival in La Grande, October 18 - 20 at the Granada Theatre.

Oregon senators question drought monitor, misses important information

By Jayson Jacoby
WesCom News Service

Oregon's U.S. senators are asking federal officials to review the criteria for rating the severity of drought, arguing the current process misses important measurements.

Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Democrats, co-signed a letter Thursday to Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross and Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue.

The official U.S. drought monitor, which federal officials use to determine such things as declaring drought disasters and making federal aid available to affected farmers and ranchers, is produced weekly at the National

Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska.

Both the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, part of the Commerce Department, and the Agriculture Department contribute to the Drought Monitor, which was established in 1999.

In their letter, Merkley and Wyden note that the Drought Monitor factors in rainfall, but the senators wrote they have had constituents ask whether the officials who produce the weekly drought map are also considering such factors as heat waves or scanty winter snowpacks.

Hank Stern, a spokesman for Wyden, wrote in an email

to the Herald that "Senator Wyden's staff has heard about the need for newer and better measurement tools from Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett and officials in other rural Oregon counties as well as from climate science officials at Oregon State University."

In their letter, the senators wrote: "In the western US, extreme temperatures exacerbate drought by increasing demand for water in the summer and limiting important mountain snowpack in the winter. In addition, the Drought Monitor heavily favors reservoir storage and capacity in the western US, but not all users are served by reservoirs."

Brian Fuchs, who works at the Drought Mitigation Center and is one of the authors of the weekly maps, said he and the authors already review many of the measurements that are listed in the senators' letter — including snowpack and temperatures.

"In any given week we're looking at several dozen pieces of data to produce the drought monitor map," Fuchs said. "Pretty much everything in that letter we're already doing."

As an example, Fuchs said snowpack data collected by a network of remote sensors called "Snotels" — there are more than a dozen in Northeastern Oregon — are "vital" to producing the

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
45 LOW
Mainly clear



Tuesday
67/41
Partly sunny

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