

FILM

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pendent film.

"It's an opportunity to ideally just have fun with him," Jennings said, "and that comes with a lot of built-in fun because of the nature of his characters and the roles he's played. We want to make it a great, intimate experience."

Campbell is best known for his 1981 low-budget horror film "Evil Dead," in which he starred and co-executive produced, and its Starz network spin-off series "Ash vs. Evil Dead." Campbell has a connection to Oregon — he bought ranch property in Ashland's Applegate Valley in 1998.

Despite Campbell's mainstream success, Jennings hopes to underplay his appearance at EOFF to maintain the intimate nature of the festival's events and its low-key, "hometown feel," as well as foster a conducive atmosphere for future guests.

"We want people to want to come here," he said.

With EOFF just over a month away, Jennings' anticipation is rising for the festival's ninth year in the valley.

"I'm excited for another variation (of the festival). Every year there's something unique that comes out of it," Jennings said. "There's usually one or two people who walk away with some sort of magical experience or impressionable moment, and to me that's awesome. If (a few) people can walk away with moments that change their life, their behavior, their thoughts about something, opens their eyes to a new idea — that's what it's for."

Passes can be purchased online or at the La Grande Farmers Market on Saturdays. For more information, head to eoffilmfest.com.

MUSIC

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newest album shifting to a more modern country sound. The band writes, composes and produces all of their own music at Osmosis Studios in Boise, Idaho.

Recognition on such a public stage is an unexpected, yet welcome surprise for the band.

"I guess it's kudos for what we've spent so many years putting together," Kidwell said of their five nominations. "We've been working hard toward it, with the albums and everything that we do. This isn't something we just started doing for the fun of it. We've all been professional musicians our entire lives."

Three of the four band members are La Grande natives: Steve Kidwell, lead vocals and rhythm guitar; Earl Davis, bass and vocals; and James Franklin, lead guitar and keyboard. Chuck C. Smith, drums and vocals, hails from Walla Walla, Washington.

Though musicians, they've kept their day jobs. Kidwell works as a glass smith at La Grande Paint and Glass, Davis and Franklin are both retired military personnel and Smith drives heavy equipment.

Though they're content with their current success and standing within the music industry, the Josie Awards will be fertile ground for self-promotion.

The event will be televised, and the band will walk the red carpet and conduct television and radio interviews, not to mention the potential recognition by record labels and promoters.

"We'd love to be able to break into the bigger market, but we're pretty happy with what we do," Kidwell said.

Since its inaugural celebration in 2015,



Courtesy photo

Local country music band Steven K and the Bounty Hunters traveled to Pigeon Forge, Tenn., to attend the Josie Awards at Dollywood Theme Park, where they were nominated for a total of five awards.

the Josie Awards has become the largest all-genre music awards show of its kind, honoring those in the independent music industry. In other words, it recognizes music produced independently from major commercial record labels or their subsidiaries. This year's ceremony was held Sept. 8 at the Celebrity Theatre inside Dollywood Theme Park.

Steven K and the Bounty Hunters were nominated for a total of five awards: Group of the Year (Modern Country), Entertainer/Band of the Year (Modern/Pop Country),

Album of the Year for "This Road We're On," Song of the Year (Modern/Contemporary Country) for "Under Your Spell," and Vocalist of the Year for Kidwell. Though the band didn't snag a Josie Award that night, Kidwell is grateful to those who have supported the band throughout their career.

"We've had a lot of local support from the community, and it's been wonderful," Kidwell said. "We love the area, and it's been great to be in a town where people still believe in other people's dreams and help them out with that."

SOLAR

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When purchasing his solar panels, Bartell utilized federal and state tax credits to offset costs, which allowed him to make back the money he spent in 10 to 12 years. At Bubbles Laundry, solar constitutes 20 to 25 percent of his daily energy intake, while at home he said 80 to 100 percent of his daily energy is powered by solar.

Bartell's environmentally conscious actions don't end at solar panels. He and his wife also own two electric vehicles — the Th!nk City car. The Th!nk car was produced by a Norwegian automobile maker. Bartell said he received a

\$7,500 tax credit when he bought a new Th!nk car, which brought the cost down to \$8,500.

"I don't know of (any other) car that costs \$8,500 brand-new," Bartell said.

Bartell uses the car as his commuter vehicle for traveling between his home outside Imbler and his job in La Grande. He's also interested in wind power and, in the near future, would like to install a wind turbine at his home.

Bartell said the end of the tax credit program won't stop him from continuing to use solar energy.

"I doubt it will deter me," he said, "but I'm sure it's going to impact a lot of people here in Oregon."



Observer file photo

Steve Bartell, owner of Bubbles Laundry, sits on the roof of the building where the solar panels are installed. Solar constitutes 20 to 25 percent of his daily energy intake, while at home he said 80 to 100 percent of his daily energy is powered by solar.

DROUGHT

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weekly drought maps.

"That's how we measure snow drought," Fuchs said.

Wyden and Merkley's letter also mentions snow drought, writing that their constituents are concerned the Drought Monitor fails to include this measurement.

Wyden and Merkley wrote that they have constituents who believe the Drought Monitor should also include other measurements in addition to temperatures and snowpacks, such as when irrigation water is shut off even to landowners with the oldest water rights, increased irrigation demand due to high temperatures, soil moisture levels, lack of water for livestock, ecological stress on forests and wildfire activity and danger.

The senators also ask in their letter whether the list of authors of the Drought Monitor includes "sufficient attention to including scientists from the Western United States. Is there a system for vetting the e-mail list serve of contributors to ensure the right expert voices are being amplified?"

Fuchs said Drought Monitor authors are always seeking to add new data to their calculations. When the program started in 1999, officials used just four or five measurements, compared with three or four dozen now, depending on the season, he said.

"We do incorporate new tools and data as they become available," Fuchs said.

He noted, however, that new data sources aren't automatically added to the suite of statistics

that Drought Monitor authors can use. For instance, new sources don't have a historical record, so current conditions can't be compared against the past to determine severity, he said.

"We have to scientifically vet the sources, and it does take time," Fuchs said.

Wyden and Merkley's letter isn't the first such inquiry regarding the process used to develop the weekly Drought Monitor, Fuchs said.

He said questions have become more common since 2008, when the federal Farm Bill added a program that includes cash payments to ranchers who suffer losses due to drought. The amount of payments through the program is based on the Drought Monitor.

Fuchs said it's common for ranchers in one county to ask why an adjoining county is at a more severe drought level, even though conditions seem to be similar between the two counties.

According to the most recent Drought Monitor map, issued Thursday, most of Baker County is in a severe drought, on a five-level scale that starts at "abnormally dry" and continues through "moderate drought," "severe drought," "extreme drought" and "exceptional drought."

In early August U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue declared a natural disaster in Baker County due to drought.

The designation makes farmers and ranchers in both primary and bordering counties eligible for federal aid, including emergency loans through the Farm Service Agency.

Perdue's announcement followed two earlier drought declarations.

On June 6 the Baker County Board of Commissioners asked Oregon Gov. Kate Brown to declare a drought emergency for the county following a winter with a below-average snowpack and a relatively dry spring — normally the wettest period in the county.

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LAB

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ton, Portland and Springfield, but the Pendleton lab has been on the state budget chopping block for years. The facilities at 405 S.E. Eighth St. are cramped, cannot handle all types of forensic work and have a gnat infestation.

State police in 2014 reported it was seeking a fully functional lab in Pendleton for the 2017-19 biennium. The conceptual

plan for the new lab includes work space for physical evidence, fingerprint analysis and chemical work. The plan also calls for scientist offices and a vehicle bay. Pendleton permit technician Julie Chase emphasized those plans could change at this early stage.

State Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena helped lead the fight in the Legislature to keep the lab in Pendleton. State police did not want to close or move the lab, he said, and Eastern Oregon

lawmakers and district attorneys made the case for the lab to stay.

"Eastern Oregon will continue to have a crucial component of our criminal justice system," Hansell said, which means investigations and prosecutions can avoid delays that would come with shipping evidence across the state to other labs.

Umatilla County District Attorney Dan Primus was also part of the effort to keep the lab in Pendleton.

He said the need for the lab was a common topic among his fellow prosecutors in Eastern Oregon.

Primus also said the new, improved lab could entice forensic talent to consider careers in Eastern Oregon, which has been another obstacle for the forensic division.

Lora Elliott, Pendleton permit technician, said the city will issue a second permit when Fortis is ready to start putting up the building.

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