The Observer

## Don't let the Greenway money leave our community

The proposed Grande Ronde River Greenway is a collaborative community project that involves members and organizations from La Grande, Union County and Island City. The funding comes from allotted state funds awarded through a competitive process, Island City was fortunate after several attempts to be awarded a grant. If not used for this project, the money will revert to the state funding pool and be used in a different community within Oregon, Our community is just as worthy of these state funds as any other community in

#### My Voice **ABOUTTHE AUTHOR**

Anita Metlen has worked, raised two children, is a business owner and volunteered for several clubs



and organizations in Union County over the past 42 years. My Voice columns reflect the views of the author only. My Voice columns should be

500-700 words or as space allows. Submissions should include a portrait-type photograph of the author. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We do not fact check. We reject those published elsewhere. Send columns to La Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande, Ore., 97850, fax them to 541-963-7804 or email them to news@ lagrandeobserver.com.

Oregon. We might as well benefit with the good fortune of receiving the grant.

I have used bike/pedestrian trails in several states and communities in Oregon. An established trail such as this is an asset. A trail contributes to the health and well-being of those who live locally and is a contributing factor to those who choose to visit or relocate. I have observed retired groups and individuals, family groups with children, grandparents with young grandchildren, dog walkers, commuters and individuals who live near the trail who regularly walk, run, stop to enjoy nature or ride bicycles use similar community trails. Hard-core cyclists will not be the primary users of the trail. Many communities have successfully used trail development to clean up and reclaim areas that were dangerous or unsightly. They made lemonade out of lemons.

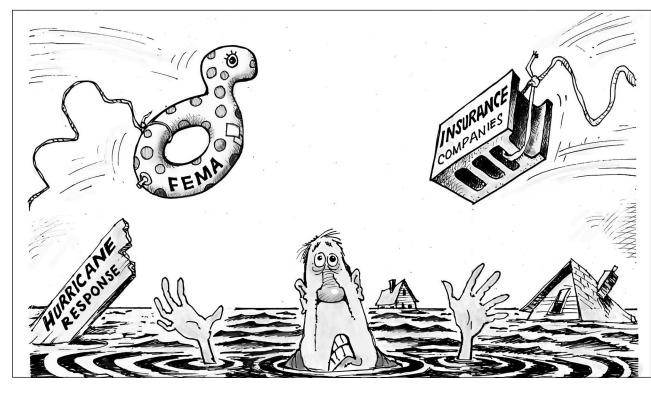
Trails such as the proposed Grande Ronde River Greenway attract home buyers. My friend relocated to a city where she could ride her bike to city services or ride for exercise. My son recently purchased a house next to a bike/ped path so that he and his children had the opportunity to walk or ride their bikes to school, to work or for recreation. His property is located adjacent to the trail. There is a boundary fence with vegetation for privacy and beauty that includes an access gate that can be locked or not. Both of these examples chose to locate near a path because of the benefits. The trail was the deciding factor in each purchase decision.

On Sept. 24, the Island City City Council will meet again to make a decision about the greenway. The council needs to know how or if residents in the area support this project.

The proposed routes for Phase II have easement, cost and construction issues. Each of the routes have supporters and non-supporters. I propose building only on currently publicly owned rights-of-way, which would include the right-of-way beyond the proposed park that ends at Highway 82. The plan states the trail will be constructed wide enough for access by maintenance crews, public safety and health organizations. Service vehicle access may eliminate the need to create any alternate access points.

In addition, I would like to propose a Phase III for the development of non-publicly owned trail portions at a later date. Phase III would allow more time for planning and opportunities for additional funding for items such as bridges and/or additional riverbank stabilization.

In conclusion, I support the proposed greenway but believe developing only publicly owned land is the best route at this time with a plan for a Phase III for the remaining unfinished development. The grant funds will be spent in this state — so let's spend the money in our community.



## Your views

### **Birnbaum: Wes** Williams has right qualities to be judge

To the Editor: I support Wes Williams for circuit court judge.

I have known Mr. Williams for almost 25 years, since he first came to Eastern Oregon to practice law. Our contact has been primarily professional, since I was then the Administrator of the Indigent Defense Consortium for Union and Wallowa Counties and later the Union County District Attorney. Wes and I faced each other in a number of trials, so I've had lots of opportunity to observe him.

Wes has a set of qualities that really suit him to be judge. He works hard and is always prepared, arrives early and leaves late. He has a deep love for the law and for ethical standards. Most important, he is a true gentleman. He treats everyone with respect — not only judges and lawyers and court staff, but also his opponent's witnesses, even those who look as though they haven't bathed.

I believe those traits are part of his character, and I'm confident he'll carry them with him when he's elected. Wes Williams is uniquely qualified to be a circuit court judge in Eastern Oregon.

> Martin J. Birnbaum Retired Union County District Attorney La Grande

#### **Hunt: Wes Williams** is a judicial candidate who knows the law

To the Editor: As a psychiatric nurse practitioner in Northeast Oregon since 1991, I have testified as an expert witness in court numerous times. The courtroom can feel like a hostile environment but I believed I could rely on the honesty and integrity of lawyers and judges, assuming that said professionals operate within the law. I had

assumed that honesty and justice would prevail.

In two criminal cases, defendants were charged with several felonies that could have resulted in substantial prison time. Neither could afford a jury trial. In both cases the district attorney offered a plea agreement in which the defendants agreed not to enter any part of Wallowa County for the duration of their probation (three years in one case). They were unable to even gather personal belongings. Both cases ended with divorce and financial ruin. It is my understanding that this method of "justice" has been used numerous times.

I learned Wes Williams was running for circuit court judge and met with him to share this and other concerns. Wes told me, and gave me examples, that this practice is not legal. As far back as 1987 (State vs. Ferrre) and as recently as 2011 (State vs. Donahue), this practice was struck down. It is quite likely a violation of the First Amendment to the Constitution. Wes wrote a draft to the court concerning this practice for one of his private clients and he prevailed. Mr. Williams is a judicial candidate who knows the law.

I am extremely concerned about the divide between law enforcement and citizens. The best way I know to bridge this gap is for people to have greater faith in the legal system and their ability to be heard and treated fairly. I am absolutely convinced Wes Williams is our best and most immediate step in that direction. He is approachable, knowledgeable and honest.

Both candidates for circuit court judge for Union and Wallowa counties have the last name of Williams. I will mark my ballot for WES Williams and encourage you to do the same.

> Russel A. Hunt Summerville

#### Write to us Letters deadline

The Observer does not run endorsements of more than 350 words.

The Observer will institute a deadline for letters to the editor, so we can be fair with all the letters we receive and allow for responses before Election Day if necessary. Please submit your endorsement letters to the editor by noon Friday, Oct. 26. You can email them to news@lagrandeobserver.com, drop them off at our La Grande location, or mail them to The Observer. We will publish our last letters on Friday, Nov. 2. Election Day is Nov. 6.

Email your letters to news@lagrandeobserver.com or mail them to La Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande, Ore., 97850.

#### **Cimon: 'Justice for** All' is Wes Williams' motivating principle

To the Editor:

I am writing to endorse Attorney Wes Williams as a candidate for Union and Wallowa Counties Circuit Court Judge seat. Over the past 20 years Wes has practiced law for clients in La Grande and our Eastern Oregon communities. He and his wife, Jen, are raising two children and on occasions when I have been out to lunch with Wes, people from all parts of our rural communities have approached and shaken his hand. The warmth was palpable.

My husband, Norm, and I were foster parents for over a decade. At times, one of the frustrating things in our judicial system was the inability of a judge to utilize empathy and flexibility in assessing justice — a flexibility that could help promote real change for a person or a family while also imposing justice. Conversations about the foster care system made me realize that Wes Williams has a fire for protecting children and the insight to help promote change in the application of law. He fundamentally believes and respects that everyone has the right to liberty and due justice.

Some years back, I bumped into Wes and Jen,

quietly celebrating a victory on a federal case that had taken Wes about eight years to successfully bring to closure. He tenaciously continued pursuit of justice, even though the client had unfortunately passed away. That client's estate would have the satisfaction of a wrong righted. I was deeply impressed.

This is, for me, a clear window into how Wes Williams sees himself, his role as attorney and his obligation to seek justice for the rights of everyone. It is evident that "Justice for All" is a motivating principle for how Wes views his practice of law. It is also a testimony to his moral backbone. I believe him when he says everyone has the right to fair representation and due justice.

Vote for Wes Williams for circuit court judge. He has my vote.

> Shelley Cimon La Grande

#### Cooke: Ethan Shaw column is appreciated

To the Editor: Thanks for introducing Ethan Shaw to us. His first column, "A Haven for Hemlocks," is awesome. Keep up the good work.

> Mary Cooke Cove

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A division of Western Communications Inc.

An independent newspaper founded in 1896

(USPS 299-260)

The Observer reserves the right to adjust subscription rates by giving prepaid and mail subscribers 30 days notice. Periodicals postage paid at La Grande, Oregon 97850. Published Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays (except Dec. 25) by Western Communications Inc. 1406 Fifth St., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

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# 541-963-3161

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www.lagrandeobserver.com Street address 1406 Fifth St., La Grande

POSTMASTER Send address changes to: The Observer, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande, OR 97850 Periodicals postage paid at: La Grande, Oregon 97850

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