

ENROLLMENT

Continued from Page 1A
enjoying the second-largest enrollment increase in Union County, with a jump of 20 students, 5 percent more than it had in 2017-18. Like Cove, Union Superintendent Carter Wells said the district is also experiencing a surge of young families.
“This is really exciting,” said Union Superintendent Carter Wells.
This fall, Union has 350 students, a population evenly split with 175 pupils in elementary school and 175 in grades seven to 12. The bulk of the district’s increase can be traced to a large kindergarten class of 36. Union’s kindergarten classes typically range from 20 to 25. Wells said a second kindergarten teacher was hired last week due to the size of this year’s class.
Enrollment is also up in the double-digit range in the Elgin School District, which has 407 students, up 13 from 2017-18. The school district now has 177 students in grades seven to 12 and 236 in elementary school.
Elgin Superintendent Dianne Greif said the increase has been spread out evenly throughout the school district’s grades.
Enrollment in the La Grande School District is up by less than 10 from a year ago. The school district now has about 2,370 students, Superintendent George Mendoza told the La Grande School Board a week ago. The previous three years the school district has grown by an average of 65 students a year, according to reports the La Grande School District makes to the state each Oct. 1.
The North Powder School District has 283 students, up two from 2017-18. Superintendent Lance Dixon said the school district, which is a charter school district, is now at or near capacity in all but first, second and 11th grades. These are the only grades in which the school district has room for more students.
“We are in a very good situation,” Dixon said.
He credits part of the school district’s strong enrollment to recently added professional certification programs, including ones for wildfire fighting and certified nursing assistants. Dixon said the school district is focusing on preparing students for both careers and college.
Enrollment in the Imbler School District is 296, down from 309 in 2017-18. Imbler Superintendent Angie Lakey-Campbell said the decline was expected and the school district built its 2018-19 budget in anticipation of it.

ELGIN

Continued from Page 1A
tees, working to draft ordinances and present them to the council at their monthly meetings. If they meet all the position’s requirements, they receive a \$500 scholarship at the end of their term. The position has been vacant since June, when former representative Ryan Martin stepped down. Martin’s experience may serve him well, though, as he hopes to return to the council this year in his run for one of three city council positions.
The ongoing sidewalk project on two blocks of residential streets (S. 14th Street to the front of the high school and from the high school to S. Eighth Avenue), under construction since Aug. 20, is finally complete. In continued efforts to improve the city’s roads and walkways, the city is reapplying for both the small city allotment and Safe Routes to School grants and hopes to receive up to two, \$100,000 grants as a result.
Construction on the Indian Valley Estates subdivision continues with additional construction of utilities set to complete following an order of needed materials. Road design and other construction will commence once utilities are completed.
Union County’s waste management company, Waste-Pro, proposed to the city for approval a 20 cent monthly increase in garbage service to cover recycling costs and possibly implement recycling education. After operating at a loss over the last several months due to the withdrawal of China from the recyclables

EOU

Continued from Page 1A
World War II. When he returned, he attended EOU, known then as the Eastern Oregon College of Education, from 1946 to 1948. After receiving a certificate from Eastern, Denver went on to attend the University of Washington, where he graduated with a degree in mathematics.
After graduation, Denver worked for Wendell Milliman Consulting Actuary, then New York Life Insurance Co., before landing at Johnson and Higgins, one of the country’s largest insurance brokers, where he climbed the ladder to become president of the company’s Washington State Corporation.
Dan said this was not Denver’s first gift to Eastern.
“My father has given to EOU annually for many years, but we found out just how much it meant to him when he said he wanted to do something more,” he said.
Insko said at the announcement he hopes the donation is the start of a trend.
“My hope is that this is the beginning of many more to come,”



Max Denning / The Observer

EOU President Tom Insko gives his annual State of the University address on Sept. 17 in the McKenzie Theater at Loso Hall.

the EOU president said. “We have such a compelling story here at Eastern, and the EOU Foundation is a critical part of achieving our mission: to provide access to excellence for every student.”
Denver, who is 94 years old, began thinking about making the considerable donation five years ago, Dan said.
“He always knew how much he

wanted to give, but didn’t know the best way to do it,” Dan said. “I think maybe he thought he would do it upon his death, but then he wouldn’t be able to see the benefits and rewards of the gift.”
For Denver, EOU means more to him than just the two years he spent attending the university.
“It was the whole La Grande, Oregon, experience,” Dan said. “I

think being rooted here was his moral compass for his whole life, and the university (represented) the progression from him being in the Navy to growing up to starting a family and having to get a job. Because of the individual attention he got here in those two years, it helped him realize what he was going to do with his education.”

URA

Continued from Page 1A
the minimum grant is \$5,000. The URA has \$150,000 to give per grant cycle.
Tsatsos is the owner of The Landing Hotel, located across Adams Avenue from the proposed Texaco Station project. The Landing Hotel previously received grant money from Call for Projects.
During the 2018 Call for Projects meeting, Tsatsos said the Texaco Station project will convert the historic gas station property, preserving its uniqueness, into a for-profit business that will add five hotel rooms, a coffee shop and a meeting room to the downtown area. One of its primary uses would be to give Eastern Oregon University a downtown space to utilize as a classroom or meeting place.
“I think it’s important for us to recognize how much

of an impact the university has on this community,” he said on Tuesday. “I’m in a position to help benefit them. There’s a risk (to the project), but I want to help the university. Things like (the renovated Texaco Station) would make La Grande a bit more inviting to the university and maybe make students want to stay in town to work.”
Tsatsos requested he be able to keep the originally approved grant amount of \$50,000 to be used on a scaled-back project, which would postpone the hotel room portion of the renovation, and possibly come back next cycle to request funding for that additional part. He also said he would consider pulling the request completely and resubmit the project next cycle in hopes of receiving the necessary funding.
URA Manager Robert Strobe said a request for significant reductions to a project has not been made

previous to this and there’s nothing in the policy that addresses such a request.
“We have had projects that did not complete all elements of their (plans) but have not reduced the grant amount as a result. However, none of those had a reduction in scope of the magnitude contemplated in this instance,” Strobe wrote to the URAC in a summation of the request provided in the commission’s information packet.
In previous cases, if an approved project decided not to continue, the money given to that project was dispersed to the other projects during that Call for Projects cycle.
The URAC members said the request to scale back the Texaco Station project changes it so much that the revised plan should be considered as a new request in place of the original plan. Because this was a work session, no decision was made.
However, the request from Tsatsos spurred the URAC to begin a discussion about changing the Call for Projects policy.
Strobe posed a key focal point to consider when modifying the policy: What is the Urban Renewal Agency’s intent with re-

gard to distribution of funding? Is it to fully fund the best projects first or to equally divide the money between all the projects?
Under the current Call for Projects policy, once the applications for the projects are received, the URA and URAC score each project based on a 150 point scale. The points are divided into categories such as job creation, return on investment, blight, etc. Each category has a maximum amount of points that can be given. At the end of the process, the number of points are totaled up and the projects are ranked. In theory, the top-ranking projects receive funds.
However, there have been instances when the \$150,000 was divvied up based on factors other than ranking.
For most of the rest of the meeting, the URA and its advisory commission discussed the flaws in the point system. The members questioned whether the number of jobs generated, which is generally hypothetical, should have such an impact on scoring and whether job type should be taken into account.
The committee also questioned whether or

not to begin giving the highest ranking project the amount they requested, then give the second highest ranked project what they requested and so on until all the money is dispersed. That way, the projects deemed most worthy of the funding are guaranteed to receive the startup funds they need.
Strobe also mentioned the URA of Sandy, Oregon, identifies specific projects or blighted buildings it would like to see invested in, and those who are willing to put in the work receive money.
By the end of the work session, the URA and URAC made a list similar to the categories already in place for Call for Projects, with some slight variations to reflect the agency’s priorities. The revised categories under consideration include capital investment, blight, whether the project is located in the Central Business Zone or in the Business Park, what kind of jobs it will create, historic preservation, business type and business viability. The members will discuss subcategories to those and continue the discussion about the policy and its point system in future work sessions.

market (the majority of recycled materials from Oregon went to China), the company has been approaching La Grande City Council and Union County Commissioners, as well, weighing potential solutions. Elgin voted to accept the rate increase.
The council also presented for citizens’ discussion an ordinance granting the use of recreational vehicles on city streets. Aside from La Grande, Elgin is the only city in Union County that doesn’t allow city residents to drive such vehicles on city streets.
“I think safety to our community has to be our number one priority,” Duffy said of the proposal. “That’s our biggest concern is how do we keep those who are not going to be safe off the street. I believe we can draft an ordinance that would be acceptable to those

who have had safety concerns that would actually pass.”
Before an official ordinance is presented, however, Duffy suggested a group of citizen volunteers meet with the public safety committee to help draft the ordinance, ensuring the establishment of rules and guidelines and that all safety concerns are met. Citizens would be required to buy a permit to allow operation of their recreational vehicle within city limits, as well as view a safety video and sign an agreement to abide by state motor vehicle statutes. Other requirements are yet to be determined.
“I think we can draft some good rules and make this ordinance work, but it’s going to take a community effort,” Duffy said. “By coming together we can make it work.”

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Saturday, Sept 22 • 9am - 3pm

Ecologist David MILDREXLER will lead a hike exploring the Huckleberry Mountain Roadless Area which lies on the north flanks of the Wallowa Mountains. Rich in old growth forest and wildlife habitat, Huckleberry is a critical part of the Eagle Cap Wilderness Additions.

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