

LITERACY

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we have (our own) assessments for the kids (based on grade)," Britschgi said. "If they're wanting to build on a certain subject (or) if they're struggling, then we'll find a program that works to help (them). We also want to have consistency with the school and make sure we're working with what their programs are and reinforce (that)."

The center aims to pair each student with a volunteer who can assist with whatever is needed, such as homework help or tutoring on a specific subject. Students typically stay at the center for an hour or more each visit.

"We just want to see them succeed and to feel that learning is fun — to see kids enjoy reading (and) enjoy learning," Britschgi said. "We see a lot of kids come at a time when they're really struggling. They just don't get it. If they struggle, they may not want to continue, (but) if they succeed, they want to learn more. When they have fun with learning, it's a win-win all the way."

Currently, only four adult volunteers work at the center throughout the week, not including Britschgi, the center's only staffed tutor. Britschgi hopes to garner more volunteer support



Audrey Love photos /The Observer

The Adult and Family Literacy Center (left) at Cook Memorial Library offers free literacy and reading programs, tutoring and homework help and more to the community, particularly kids grades K-8. Volunteer tutor Bel Donna (right) helps student Bryclyn St. Claire with her schoolwork.

to accommodate more students as the school year progresses and possibly extend the center's hours on Thursdays and into weekends.

The literacy center also continues its services into the summertime through the end of July, to help curb the deterioration of academic skills and information learned throughout the school year.

"If students get out (of school) in May and do nothing until September, they fall way behind," Britschgi said. "From my own experience, (I've seen that) the last three or four months of the

(school) year are when students really mature and grow to get where they need to be. We want them to be ready for the next school year."

Though the center's services are academically-centered, Britschgi said it also helps students and families beyond the classroom. For working parents, the center can provide a safe, after-school haven for their children. For students, Britschgi said, being "where they should be academically and not feeling like they're behind" can boost self-esteem and help with relation-

ships and making friends.

"We're just that support for the family — (a place their kids can go) and know they're safe and taken care of," she said. "(We are here to) help anyone in the community succeed in the world and get ahead. Kids will come back (later on in life) and say, 'I'm so glad I came here. It helped me so much,' and that's just a wonderful feeling."

Around eight to 10 students have utilized the literacy center since school began, but Britschgi projects higher numbers as students and families settle into the

school year. She believes more would be able to take advantage of the literacy center's services, however, if transportation were offered from the school to the library, as some children aren't able to make the trek. Though no formal plans have been made, she is considering discussing the possibility with the La Grande School District.

More information about the Adult and Family Literacy Center can be obtained through Cook Memorial Library at 541-962-1339. All services are free and walk-ins are welcome.

TOURISM

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to update its economic study on the impact of wildfires on tourism in 2018.

"Given the profound consequences of last year's fires, we request you analyze, in detail, the economic consequences and compounding effect of the 2018 wildfire season on Oregon communities," the Aug. 3 letter stated.

According to reports from the Associated Press, Julie Cortez, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's spokesperson, said the theater lost \$2 million this summer because wildfire smoke forced the cancellation of more than two dozen outdoor performances. The famed Oregon Shakespeare Festival is among the oldest and largest professional nonprofit theaters in the nation and attracts tourists from around the world to Ashland.

In Eastern Oregon, the impact of wildfires on tourism has not been nearly as prominent as in other parts of the state. Alice Trindle, regional destination manager for the Eastern Oregon Visitors Association, said the smoke on the far western side of the country may have vactually driven people to Eastern Oregon.

"We experienced a number of visitors who came out of California (who) actually came to Eastern Oregon because we had less smoke than they had in California," Trindle said.

Noting that it doesn't make sense to compare tourism from August 2017 to this year because of the large number of visitors last year's eclipse brought to the region, Trindle instead referred to statistics comparing 2018 to 2016 that show occupancy rates in Eastern Oregon are up 3.9 percent.

Overall in 2017, tourism was a major industry in Northeast Oregon, with \$31.8 million being spent

in Union County and \$29.9 million being spent in Wallowa County. From 2010 to 2017, the average annual tourism spending increase in Union County was 2.6 percent — in Wallowa County it was 2.7 percent.

Bob Kavanaugh, executive director of the Union County Chamber of Commerce, said he believes there has been an increase in tourism this year and he expects tourism to continue to grow in Northeast Oregon.

"We are (in) this beautiful, untouched landscape that people really long for," Kavanaugh said. "I think we're going to see a rise in tourism because people want to get outside and have some sort of adventure."

Trindle agreed that travelers to Eastern Oregon are attracted by the region's outdoor recreational opportunities, which would be affected by blazing forests and poor air quality.

Kavanaugh said a wildfire in the area would certainly have an impact on local tourism.

"If we suffer and incur a devastating fire in any one of our wilderness areas or a fire that blows thick smoke into our region, yes, that will impact us in a negative way. To what degree? It's going to depend on the severity of the fire and the smoke," he said.

Despite the wildfires, Union and Wallowa counties saw large tourism spending increases from 2016 to 2017, with a 5.3 percent increase in Wallowa County and a 5.6 percent increase in Union County, though that includes eclipse-related tourism from August 2017.

Tourism organizations in the state have tried to make it clear that when wildfires happen in the region it doesn't mean the whole state is inhospitable.

"Wildfires are certainly something we want to make our visitors aware of," Trindle said.

mischief; and a Baker County warrant on a charge of unauthorized use of a motor vehicle. Others charges include unlawful possession of a controlled substance (meth) and unlawful delivery of a controlled substance (meth).

Anyone with information regarding Martinez is asked to call the LGPD at 541-963-1017.

WALLING

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rant on a charge of probation violation on an original charge of unauthorized use of a motor vehicle, first-degree theft and unlawful possession of a controlled substance (meth); a Union County warrant on a charge of probation violation and third-degree criminal

NEOEDD

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services like an auto repair shop and senior housing.

Brookshire noted too often people who have lived in Union most of their lives have to move to La Grande in their later years to live at a senior center.

Councilor Randy Knop said it is important not to forget the many businesses in Union that are not on Main Street. The city councilor said efforts need to be made to keep these businesses connected with the community.

Some councilors noted that many Union residents have jobs outside the city, making it a bedroom community. Councilor Sue Hawkins said if this is so, steps should be taken to accommodate the needs of residents working outside the city. These might include encouraging businesses to extend their hours.

Council Matt Later said Union

should build on what it has rather than looking to lure outside businesses in.

"Instead of focusing on growth, we need to worry about the businesses we have," he said. "We need to be as self-sustaining as possible. We don't need to have something grandiose like a big box store."

He suggest that Union's city government needs to be careful not to overstep its bounds when trying to build up business.

"I would rather use carrots than sticks," he said.

For example, Later said that he would opposed the city requiring businesses to have a uniform appearance. Instead he would encourage the city to say it would help businesses with their painting expenses if it chose colors that tied in with the city's theme.

Miller was asked at the meeting about how Joseph has benefited from having a downtown with a shared theme. Miller said that before its

transformation into an arts and cultural district, one completed in 2001, Joseph had many churners — businesses that would open during the tourist season from Memorial Day to Labor Day and then leave and not return. Today, Joseph has many more businesses that operate year round, Miller said.

NEOEDD is a public organization established in 1985. Baker, Union and Wallowa counties formed the District by Intergovernmental Agreement as a way to enhance community and economic development services in the region, according to its website.

Miller said she is encouraged to see Union moving forward to boost its economic development and the NEOEDD wants to be a part of the process.

"We would like help however we can" she said.

The NEOEDD, she added, is available to provide connections and referrals for Union and play a supporting role.

BALLOTS

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insert by hand.

In addition, Church explained, the U.S. Postal Service provides counties using the mailing service a special bulk rate because the company has computers that place address bar codes on envelopes.

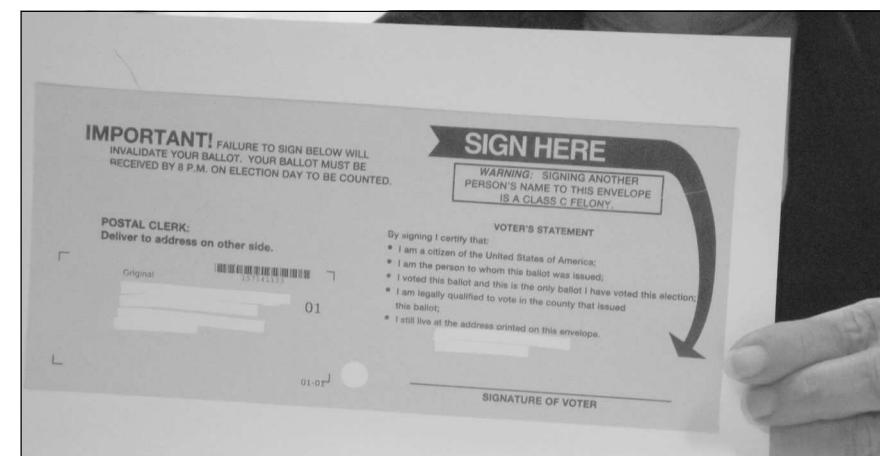
The codes make it much easier for the Postal Service to sort envelopes containing vote-by-mail ballots being sent to voters.

All of the envelopes with vote-by-mail materials for Union and Wallowa counties have already been inserted and addressed mechanically. Church said the process was completed in three hours for Union County's more than 17,000 vote-by-mail ballots.

"This would have taken us 11 days," Church said.

Lathrop said it took the company between 45 minutes and an hour to insert and address the Wallowa County ballots, saving her an enormous amount of work.

Although the ballot envelopes for



Dick Mason /The Observer

The appearance of the vote-by-mail envelopes sent to voters in Union County will change now that a private mailing service is being used. The envelope shown above is the type previously used.

Union and Wallowa counties were prepared by the mailing company last week, voters who have moved since then can update their voter registration information and still receive a mail ballot. The updated ballots will be sent by the Union and Wallow county clerk's offices and not the mailing company. The name and location of the mailing company has not been released because of security

concerns.

Voters providing change of address information will have a ballot sent to their new address with the word "reissued" stamped on it. The ballot that was sent to their old address by the mailing company will be invalid. Anyone who receives two ballots needs to be careful to disregard the one with the old address, Church said.

DRUGS

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was stopped by the Union County

Drug Task Force. He attempted to flee and resisted arrest but was quickly subdued by law enforcement. Two firearms were found inside his

clothing. He was previously charged with failure to register as a sex offender and is prohibited from possessing firearms.



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