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THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

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Good day to our valued subscriber Coy Turner of North Powder

Wallowa man accused of luring minor

Observer staff

A Wallowa County man has been accused of attempting to lure a Central Point teenager online and is now sitting in the Jackson County jail.



Stonebrink

According to a press release from Jackson County, this was an 11-month investigation by the Jackson County Sheriff's Office.

On Oct. 19, 2017, the parents of a 14-year-old boy with an autism spectrum disorder contacted the JCSO to report suspicious online activity. According to the release, detectives learned the teen victim had been communicating online with an adult male who sent the victim images depicting child sexual abuse, and encouraged the victim to send sexual images of himself. The victim told detectives the man claimed to be a firefighter who attempted to meet the victim in person while he was working in Southern Oregon.

Detectives were later able to identify the suspect as John Delbert Stonebrink, 50, of Wallowa. Detectives

See **Luring** / Page 5A

Sen. Merkley announces bill to fund forest restoration

By **Katy Nesbitt**
For The Observer

To curtail the rampant destruction of private property and valuable national forest resources by wildfires, Sen. Jeff Merkley announced his Wildfire-Resilient Communities Act, which would create a \$1 billion fund to support fuels reduction and forest restoration.

In a conference call with Oregon journalists, Merkley said the fund would allow the U.S. Forest Service staff to treat the woods on the "front end" with thinning and fuels reduction rather than the "back end" with fire suppression. He reasoned by reducing the fuel load in the forest, wildfires would cost less to suppress and create

fewer health problems from lingering smoke, which is having an increasing toll on health care costs.

"Years ago, 16 percent of the Forest Service's budget went to fire suppression. Now it's at 55 percent," Merkley said. "The amount of acres is growing."

According to the National Interagency Fire Center

in Boise, Idaho, there have been 67,518 fires so far this year in the U.S., burning 4.7 million acres — and there are three full months left in the year.

Frustrated with his inability to get \$500 million included in a spending bill to increase funding for fuels reduction, Merkley said

See **Forest** / Page 11A

Accident near Baker City claims two lives

By **Jayson Jacoby**
The Baker City Herald

A husband and wife from Washington state died last week when their pickup truck collided with a semi-truck and trailer in the westbound lanes of Interstate 84 north of Baker City.

Eugene Rowley, 65, the driver of a 1993 GMC pickup truck pulling a U-Haul trailer, and his passenger, Ellen Rowley, 63, both died at the scene, Oregon State Police spokesman Timothy R. Fox stated in a press release.

The driver was reportedly traveling west when he passed a 2013 Freightliner truck driven by Alexandr Ciubuc, 58, of Tumwater, Washington. The accident happened about 10:10 a.m. on a straight stretch of freeway near milepost 301.

The vehicles collided, went through the median and came to rest adjacent to the eastbound lanes, Fox stated. The pickup truck and U-Haul trailer were crushed under the jackknifed Freightliner truck.

Ciubuc was transported by Baker City ambulance to St. Alphonsus Medical Center in Baker City with injuries that were not life-threatening.

Both eastbound and westbound fast lanes were closed for about five hours.

OSP was assisted at the scene by the Baker County Sheriff's Office, Baker City Fire Department, Baker Rural Fire Protection District and Oregon Department of Transportation workers.

Death toll on Oregon roads continue to rise

After the yearly death toll on Oregon's roads dropped in 2013 to the lowest total since World War II, the number of fatalities has been higher in each of

See **Crash** / Page 5A

BACK IN THE COCKPIT AGAIN

La Grande pilot offers 91-year-old former pilot celebratory joyride in vintage airplane



Audrey Love/The Observer

Gordon Thompson, 91, sits inside the cockpit of a 1946 Ercoupe civilian airplane, much like the one he used to own nearly 45 years ago. Thompson traveled to La Grande Friday from Caldwell, Idaho, to fly in the plane as a surprise birthday gift.

By **Audrey Love**
The Observer

Gordon Thompson is proof you're never too old to climb back in the proverbial saddle. Or fly a plane, for that matter.

Thompson, 91, of

Caldwell, Idaho, made a pit stop at the La Grande/Union County Airport Friday morning to receive a belated surprise birthday gift from his daughter, Jyl — a ride in a 1946 ERCO Ercoupe civilian airplane.

Local pilot and Ercoupe owner George Gilchrist assisted Thompson in his flight, taking to the skies under clear, sunny conditions for a 30-minute ride above the Grande Ronde Valley as Thompson's wife, Valene,

and three grown children watched from the tarmac. Thompson owned a similar Ercoupe model nearly 45 years ago when he took up flying as a hobby, but sold the plane after several short years of ownership due to career and family obligations.

Nearly six months ago, Jyl began an online quest to find an Ercoupe owner in order to give her dad "one last trip in a plane like he used to own."

"I'd been trying for months, and was getting to the point where I (thought) it wasn't going to happen," she said of searching. "(Dad) had been telling us lots of stories of when he'd flown and how he loved it and missed it, so I started (looking online), asking if anybody knew of somebody with this plane. I said I was willing to go anywhere — we'd make sure he got there."

Jyl's investigating led her to the Ercoupe Owners Club,

See **Airplane** / Page 5A

Imbler medical student receives prestigious Pisacano Scholarship

By **Dick Mason**
The Observer

Nick West knew he faced long odds when he applied for a prestigious Pisacano Scholarship earlier this year.



West

After all, history was not on his side.

West, who grew up in Imbler, is a medical student at Oregon Health and Science

University. Earlier this year he went through the time-consuming and sometimes grueling process of applying for a \$28,000 Pisacano Scholarship. The scholarship is for medical students who demonstrate a strong commitment to the specialty of family medicine.

"I really did not think I had a chance. Almost everyone who receives them has been from schools like Harvard, Stanford and

Brown," West said.

Nobody from Oregon Health Sciences University had ever received a Pisacano Scholarship — that is, until September when West was awarded one.

"I was pretty shocked," he said.

The scholarship will provide West with a total of \$28,000 over the next four years as he completes his final year of medical school and then a three-year residency. West

said another benefit of being a Pisacano Scholar is it will help him make connections in the family medicine field and possibly open some doors.

Pisacano Scholarships are awarded based on leadership skills, academic achievement, communication skills and community service work. Only 146 medical students have been awarded the

See **Scholar** / Page 11A

Two write-in candidates face off in Cove mayoral race

By **Max Denning**
The Observer

Originally, the Cove's mayor race looked to be uncontested. In fact, not a single person, including the incumbent Lyndon Rose, had filed. However, Rose, who said at a Cove City Council meeting he did not file in time, is running for reelection as a write-in candidate, and

will be challenged by another write-in candidate, Delbert "Del" Little.

Lyndon Rose

Lyndon Rose was originally appointed mayor after serving on the Cove City Council for what he estimates is between 16 and 18 years.

Rose said there have been

a number of projects completed while he has been mayor that he considers important accomplishments. One example is the city finishing drilling a new well for the water system. Another is the recent completion of the Haefer Lane project, which created a sidewalk-bike path that begins at Conklin Lane and goes down the south

side of Haefer Lane to Cove Elementary School. The path is a little less than a quarter-mile long and wide enough to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists.

"It's a big passageway for kids walking to school," Rose said. "Getting that done was really a big relief as far as danger to children walking back and forth to school."

If re-elected, Rose said he would like to continue work on renegotiating a contract to sell power from Cove's hydroelectric plant. Cove had been selling the power generated by the hydroelectric plant to Idaho Power, but the contract expired in June 2016. The Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative has been purchasing power from Cove since then

on an interim basis, while the city has negotiated its contract with the Avista Corporation. The Observer previously reported the City of Cove receives, on average, \$5,292 per month from OTEC for the sale of its power. Rose said the city is very close to hammering out the final details on a new deal

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
49 LOW
Mostly cloudy



Tuesday
67/36
A shower

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