



Audrey Love / The Observer

The Ercoupe, owned by local pilot George Gilchrist (far right), is one of only around 5,500 ever made. Thompson's daughter, Jyl, contacted Gilchrist through the Ercoupe Owners Club after months of searching online for someone willing to take her father up for "one last ride."

AIRPLANE

Continued from Page 1A where a member directed her to Gilchrist about a month ago. After explaining her proposed plan, Gilchrist agreed to fly Thompson free of charge.

"I said I'd be pleased to give him a ride — it would be the highlight of my day," Gilchrist said Friday. "He's a little rusty, but he's still got the touch, and we just cruised around and had a great time."

Jyl planned the event as a surprise, though Thompson wasn't easily fooled.

"He suspected when I asked him about his logbook that I was going to do something. This has been a really hard secret to keep," Jyl said with a laugh. "But he didn't know for sure until we walked around the corner (and saw the plane). He was excited and had a really big grin on his face."

After the pair took off, radio traffic from above was broadcast through a speaker near the tarmac: "We have Mr. Thompson flying straight and level, doing a great job. Just like he was an old pro," reported Gilchrist's voice.

"I was so nervous all

morning," Jyl said. "I (was) anxious for him to get back in the saddle."

Before migrating to Caldwell, Thompson and his family established a homestead in Kennewick, Washington on "nothing but sagebrush." In his 20-year career as a farmer, Thompson grew sugar beets, alfalfa and wheat on 160 acres of land, bought for 25 cents an acre. He spent another 40 years as a plumber, eventually moving to Dallas, Texas, and finally settling with his wife of 63 years in Idaho and retiring at age 79.

Thompson took up flying

as a hobby nearly 45 years ago, taking flying lessons and eventually purchasing his beloved Ercoupe, occasionally letting his children, especially Jyl, play co-pilot.

When asked why he decided to fly, he said, "I don't know. It just looked like a fun thing to do. I worked all my life. I never had time to goof around very much. But that was good relaxation, to get away from the farm and fly around a little while."

Touted as "the airplane that anyone could fly," the small, all-metal, two-seater Ercoupe was designed to

handle safely and more easily than its predecessors. According to Gilchrist, only around 5,500 Ercoupes were ever built. Unique design features — such as a steerable control wheel, similar to that of a car, instead of standard rudder pedals and a triangle landing gear (still used today) — set the Ercoupe apart. Its bubble canopy also allows windows-down, open-cockpit flying.

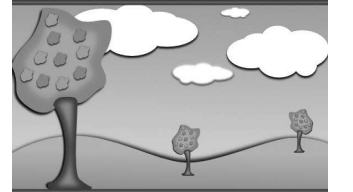
"It was nice," Thompson said after returning to solid ground. "It kinda brings back old memories... real old ones. It's been 45 years since

I've had that plane." After four decades outside the cockpit, Thompson wasn't worried about taking over the controls for roughly half the flight.

"I don't get nervous over many things. It was fun — a lot better than commercial flights," he joked.

Pilots are required to keep a logbook (a record of all of their flights) and Jyl is still hoping to uncover some of her father's old logbooks to locate his original plane through the aircraft's "tail number." In the meantime, the day's trip more than sufficed.

"We're so thankful for George (and) the whole Ercoupe Owners Club," Jyl said. "It's phenomenal. I appreciate George more than he will ever know."



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LURING

Continued from Page 1A confirmed Stonebrink was employed as a sanitation truck driver working at the Miller Complex Fires (in Jackson and Josephine counties) periodically from August to November 2017.

According to the

release, on Jan. 9, with assistance from the Enterprise Police Department and the Wallowa County Sheriff's Office, JCSO detectives served a search warrant at Stonebrink's home. They recovered several items of evidence. Electronic items were later analyzed by forensic examiners with the

Oregon Department of Justice.

On Sept. 19, a Jackson County grand jury indicted Stonebrink on charges of encouraging child sexual abuse in the first and second degree, luring a minor, and using a child in a display of sexually explicit conduct. A judge issued an arrest

warrant following the indictment.

Stonebrink was arrested on the warrant in Wallowa County last week. He was lodged in the Umatilla County jail and transported to Jackson County on Thursday.

Detectives say Stonebrink used his real name as well

as nicknames including "JDStone," "JDStone67" and "codywest" on social media and email. Additional charges may be forthcoming as the electronic evidence is examined further.

Anyone with information about the case is asked to call Detective Steve

Bohn at 541-774-6168 (case #17-22149).

According to Stonebrink's court records, he was found guilty of driving under the influence of intoxicants in 2015.

CRASH

Continued from Page 1A the ensuing four years, and 2018 has already surpassed the 2013 total, according to the Oregon Department of Transportation.

In 2013, 313 people were killed in crashes in Oregon, including highways, local roads and city streets. The number of fatalities rose to 357 in 2014 — a 14 percent increase.

The trend not only continued, but accelerated. The death toll in 2015 rose by 25

percent, to a total of 446.

The 2016 total was 495, the highest since 2003, when 512 people were killed in crashes.

Fatalities dipped to 439 in 2017, but so far 2018 is on pace to reverse that trend. As of Sept. 24, 337 people died on Oregon's roads this year, up from 302 for the same period in 2017.

Although the number of miles driven in the state has risen over the past five years, the death toll has increased at a



S. John Collins / WesCom News Service

A husband and wife, Eugene and Ellen Rowley, died last Wednesday morning when their pickup truck collided with a semi-truck on I-84 north of Baker City.

faster rate.

The death rate per 100 million miles trav-

eled increased from

0.93 in 2013 to 1.35 in 2016. The rate for

2017 is not yet available.

COVE

Continued from Page 1A with Avista. Rose has been overseeing the hydroelectric plant since he first joined the council. He also said he has helped do maintenance work on the plant.

"On the council, I've been volunteering my time and equipment to replace the rudder, getting the generator rebuilt and reconfiguring part of the hydroelectric plant," he said.

In addition, Rose said he believes he should be re-elected because he doesn't have a personal agenda and will do what's best for the city.

"My whole time on the city council has been (motivated by) wanting to be a part of our community and serving our community," Rose said.

Delbert Little

Delbert "Del" Little is no newbie to city government. He worked as an engineer for the City of La Grande for many years and also worked in the planning department for La Grande. In the late 1970s, Little spent six years on the Island City City Council. Little has also worked for the U.S. Forest Service, the State of Oregon's Economic Development Department and also served in the U.S. Navy.

Little, who has lived in Cove for approximately five years, previously volunteered to help write the city's sidewalk ordinance and looked over Cove's nuisance ordinance. Little said he would like to use his expertise to give back.

The La Grande native said

his wealth of knowledge is why Cove residents should vote for him.

"I have a lot of experience to offer," Little said, "(such as) my experience with city infrastructure and the economic development department where my functions were helping finance infrastructure projects for communities."

Little said he has talked with Donna Lewis, Cove's city recorder, and thinks he could help assist her with her day-to-day tasks.

Additionally, Little said he wants to hear what citizens of Cove think are the most pressing problems.

"A lot of issues can be resolved (by) lending an ear to the public and relay(ing) to them things the city can and can't do," he said, noting he has worked with

the public in his previous positions.

With three new council members joining the board after the November election, Little said his experience could help them get acclimated to the board.

He said more needs to be done to let citizens know why costs in Cove continue to rise.

"A lot of citizens are concerned with cost of living," Little said. "Prices keep going up, rates that you pay for sewer and water. What does that fee go to and why does it need to be raised on a regular basis? That's an education issue. Inform your citizens of why you need to raise your rate, and for the most part they're going to understand the need and be supportive."

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