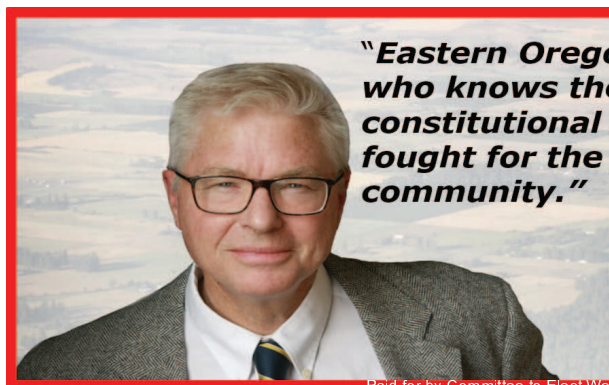


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New US Forest Service regional forester comes to La Grande

By Cherise Kaechele
The Observer

A roomful of people surrounded Glenn Casamassa, the new U.S. Forest Service regional forester for Region 6, on Thursday as representatives from multiple Eastern Oregon counties talked about their concerns with the newest Blue Mountain Forest Plan revision.

Casamassa — a longtime Forest Service employee and former supervisor of the Arapaho and Roosevelt national forests and the Pawnee National Grassland in Colorado — works out of Portland, according to an article by the Capital Press.

A 30-year veteran of the Forest Service, Casamassa will oversee 16 national forests, two national scenic areas, the Crooked River National Grassland in Oregon and two national volcanic monuments, according to the article.

On Thursday, though, he was listening to county commissioners, Rep. Greg Barreto, Sen. Bill Hansell, staff from Boise Cascade and other representatives who raised objections to the Blue Mountain plan.

Also in attendance was Oregon Congressman Greg Walden, who said when the newest revised plan

See **Forest** / Page 5A



Cherise Kaechele / The Observer

Cassiopaia Smith, center, is overjoyed when she received two bouquets of flowers by Sandy Fuller, left, and Cortney Turner, right, who work at Cherry's Florist. The day was Petal it Forward, a nationwide event where florist shops give free bouquets to brighten people's day, hoping they'll pass it along. Sixty bouquets of flowers were given out to approximately 30 individuals who were supposed to give the second bouquet away.

Cherry's Florist hands out nearly 60 bouquets for national Petal It Forward day

By Max Denning
The Observer

It's around noon on Wednesday, Oct. 24, and Sandy Fuller and Cortney Turner are standing on the corner of Adams Avenue and Depot Street searching for people walking by who look like they could use

a surprise on the cloudy autumn day.

In Fuller's and Turner's hands are a set of assorted bouquets featuring flowers from their workplace, Cherry's Florist. But on this day they aren't just making corsages for local homecomings or fixing

flower arrangements for an upcoming wedding. They are taking part in the Society of American Florists' 2018 Petal It Forward event, giving away close to 60 bouquets to unsuspecting people in downtown La Grande.

As Cassiopaia Smith

walks down Depot Street toward Fuller and Turner, she looks inquisitively at Fuller. Fuller then greets her and gives her spiel.

"Today is National Petal It Forward day, so we are going to give you a free bouquet of flowers for yourself

See **Petal** / Page 5A

HUD awards local agency comprehensive counseling grant

Community Connection of Northeast Oregon receives funds to improve quality of counseling services

By Audrey Love
The Observer

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded more than \$900,000 in housing counseling grants to HUD-approved agencies in Idaho, Washington and Oregon — including a \$24,570 grant to Community Connection of Northeast Oregon in La Grande.

National and regional agencies distribute much of HUD's housing counseling grant funding to community-based organizations that assist low- and moderate-income families to improve their housing conditions and enhance the quality of housing counseling services.

"The HUD grant supports all of (the programs we offer) — the counseling,

classes, educational materials — to help folks achieve their goals," said Debbie MacBaker, housing resource center manager at Community Connection. "We help a lot of folks (and) save a lot of homes from foreclosure, get people back on track and help people get in homes. It provides a great service for the community."

Grant recipients such as

Community Connection address the full range of housing counseling needs. This includes helping potential home buyers evaluate their readiness for a home purchase and understand their financing and down payment options. Financial capability counseling also covers budgeting, improving credit and other financial obstacles.

"As a housing counselor,

I do a full analysis of what their financial situation is and come up with options for them based on their situation — options (they didn't know they had) the day before," MacBaker said.

Additional counseling can be sought concerning mortgage options for those working on a fixed income or those facing foreclosure.

See **HUD** / Page 5A

Union County voters contribute to political campaigns

By Max Denning
The Observer

This year's Oregon gubernatorial race is the most expensive in Oregon history. The race for Congressional District 2 has seen more money raised by both incumbent Rep. Greg Walden (R-Hood River) and his challenger, Democrat Jamie McLeod-Skinner, than ever before.

While a large part of campaign donations come from corporations and wealthy individuals, the "little guy" often puts his money where his mouth is — even here in Union County.

Governor's race

Republican gubernatorial candidate Knute Buehler has received \$2.5 million in donations from Nike founder Phil Knight and another \$1 million from the Republican Governor's Association. In total, he's raised more than \$12 million this campaign cycle, compared to Governor Kate Brown, who has raised almost \$10 million.

Buehler has raked in considerable donations from residents of Union County, with almost 50 contributions of more than \$100 each. His largest local donation came from Barreto

Manufacturing, which is co-owned by Oregon State Representative Republican Greg Barreto and his wife, Christine. Barreto Manufacturing contributed \$20,000 to Buehler's campaign. The \$20,000 donation marks the only individual or company in Union County that has donated more than \$1,000 to either gubernatorial candidate.

Greg Barreto said his reason for donating to Buehler is simple: "I want him to win."

Barreto went on to explain he supports conservative candidates and causes. In the past, he said, he has

donated to Walden, Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson and other local candidates.

"I have a sizable company, and if I can help change the direction of the state of Oregon that's a pretty small price to pay to do that," he said.

Sally Smith, a La Grande resident, donated \$600 to Buehler's campaign. Smith is the grandmother of The Observer's publisher, Karrine Brogoitti. Smith said she donated because she does not support Brown.

"He is about the only Republican who is going to beat (Kate Brown),

See **Campaign** / Page 5A

LGSD seismic upgrade work plans move forward

Work to be done at LHS and Greenwood Elementary

By Dick Mason
The Observer

The La Grande School District is a big step closer to getting \$3.25 million in seismic upgrade work started next spring.

The school board voted Wednesday to put Griffin Construction, of Prineville, under contract to serve as the construction manager/general contractor for the seismic upgrades planned at La Grande High School and Greenwood Elementary School.

Griffin is one of three firms that submitted proposals for the project. Griffin received the highest score in an evaluation in which eight factors were scored by a school district committee, including firm and personnel experience, references and understanding the needs of the project.

Work Griffin Construction has done includes seismic upgrade projects in the past year in the Imbler and Baker school districts.

"(Griffin) has a good reputation for the work it has done in this area," said Merle Comfort, a member of the La Grande School Board.

Joseph Waite, La Grande School District's bond and facilities manager, said the work should start late next spring and most of it will likely be finished before the start of the 2018-19 school year.

La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza said he is glad Griffin Construction was selected early because this will make it easier to line up subcontractors for work next summer. School districts that get a late start on projects often have a harder time finding contractors for summer work.

The work Griffin Construction will do will be funded by two \$1.5 million grants for seismic upgrades the school district received from the state, plus \$250,000 from the school district.

The seismic upgrade work at Greenwood will cost \$1.5 million, and the expense of the seismic

See **LGSD** / Page 5A

INDEX

Calendar.....7A Horoscope.....5B Record.....3A
Classified.....4B Lottery.....2A Sports.....8A
Comics.....3B Obituaries.....3A
Crossword.....5B Opinion.....4A
Dear Abby.....8B Outdoors.....1B

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Friday 45 LOW Rain and drizzle
Saturday 62/49 Clouds and sun
Sunday 56/39 A little rain

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