

ENTERPRISE

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step was setting up meetings with parents of children who were at risk of being categorized as chronically absent, which is defined as missing more than 10 percent of school days. "I just believe bringing it to the front and having those hard conversations initially are what brings the awareness," Pinkerton said. "I truthfully believe parents have not realized that their child has missed so many days. There was not a system in place besides the report card that you would receive every quarter that would record the student's attendance. There was no communication between the school and the families."

Pinkerton was also able to bring in Kayla Hull, who splits her time among all Wallowa County school districts, to help assist the Enterprise School District with its attendance issue. Pinkerton said Hull helped the school district get the message into the hallways that attending school was important.

"Our quota is 'Seven or less for greater school success,'" Pinkerton said. "That's what we're training our kids. To be chronically absent in my school district, you would have to miss 15 days of school. So, we as a staff decided if we can get our kids to miss seven or less days, they're going to have a solid education."

With the establishment of the "seven or less" mantra, Enterprise Elementary School also started

class competitions for attendance.

"We have a bulletin board that shows each classroom's weekly attendance," Pinkerton said. "There's a competition (and) the classroom who has the best attendance for the month (wins an extra) 15-minute recess. These are things that don't take money. It's time and effort, and it pays off."

One of the most impactful changes Pinkerton made was establishing the Watch D.O.G.S., which stands for "Dads of Great Students." Pinkerton started the Watch D.O.G.S. this school year after getting the recommendation from the Enterprise police chief, Joel Fish, who had the program at his elementary school growing up. The Watch D.O.G.S. are volunteer

fathers who commit to spending an entire day at the school. Pinkerton said this school year, she has had 64 fathers pledge to spend a day at the elementary school. These dads do just about everything — they patrol the school's perimeter, mentor students in classes, eat lunch with them and run structured activities at recess.

David Bates, a father of two Enterprise Elementary School students, Hope and Elli, said he believes more fathers need to be present in the lives of their kids.

"I think as a nation we are seeing the results of, unfortunately, a lot of dads being disengaged or not around enough throughout multiple stages of a child's life," Bates said.

As a member of the Watch

D.O.G.S., he also said the experience helped him better understand the role of teachers.

"It was eye-opening to see how hard a teacher's job is," Bates said. "It's really rewarding (to volunteer) in a small tight-knit community like Enterprise."

Pinkerton said the most Watch D.O.G.S. she ever has at the school at one time is three, but their presence is always felt — and she believes these fathers are making an impact on attendance.

"It's just another way for every kid to feel they belong, that they have a connection," she said. "I think it will help with absenteeism in that it's another positive reason for kids to want to come to school."

Operation Christmas Child begins next week

■ Donations go to more than 130 countries in the world

By **Cherise Kaechele**
The Observer

Operation Christmas Child is under way and the community is welcome to fill a shoebox with toys and necessities for children who could use it most.

Operation Christmas Child, which now reaches more than 28,000 children a year, was started by Franklin Graham, the late Rev. Billy Graham's son. Originally part of an organization called Samaritan's Purse, it provides spiritual and physical aid to victims of war, natural disasters, disease, famine, poverty and persecution in more than 100 countries.

"People have been answering the call (ever since)," said Dawn Collins, team coordinator for the Operation Christmas Child drop-off locations in Union and Wallowa counties. "Everyone can do this."

Collins said people may spend what they want to fill the shoebox with items, and there is a suggested list of items at www.samaritanaspurse.org that can help people to choose what's best.

One thing that is different locally this year, Collins said, is the drop-off location. The new location is La Grande's Calvary Chapel.

"The way people can participate is by donating items or money," Collins said. "They can choose a boy or a girl and an age range. They can go online and purchase the items (at the Samaritan's Purse website) or purchase the items themselves."

According to a flyer that lists the suggested items to donate, a "wow" item should be included — such as a doll, soccer ball or stuffed animal — along

with smaller items like school supplies, hygiene items or other toys.

Collins said candy, liquids or any kind of war toys (like guns, soldiers or anything that would remind them of war) are not allowed. Even items for the parents or others in the household are acceptable.

Collins said there is a suggested additional donation of \$9, which helps with shipping the box — however, that shouldn't stop anyone from donating if they can't afford the additional donation.

Previously, there have been 900 boxes donated out of Union County, she said.

In total, more than 46 million Operation Christmas Child boxes have been delivered to children in 134 countries around the world. The children use everything in the box, she said. Even the wrapping paper they stick on their walls.

Operation Christmas Child began in Union County approximately 18 years ago thanks to Carolyn Vaughan, who was the team coordinator prior to Collins. According to a previous article printed in The Observer, Vaughan, the administrative assistant for the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in La Grande, heard about the program and set up her church as the relay center for collecting boxes. The number of donations has grown every year since then.

The community is encouraged to fill a shoebox to donate to Operation Christmas Child and drop it off at Calvary Chapel, 1433 Jefferson St., La Grande between Nov. 12 and Nov. 19. For more information go to www.samaritanaspurse.org.

Art Center East incorporates culture and community with Día de los Muertos event

■ Community gathers at ACE for art and activities honoring 'Day of the Dead'

By **Audrey Love**
The Observer

The first two days of November denote a colorful, festive Día de los Muertos holiday for many of Mexican and Latin descent. However, the "Day of the Dead" celebration in the U.S. generally pales in comparison to Mexico's or is missed altogether.

This year, La Grande's Art Center East sought to incorporate culture and community in its free Día

de los Muertos (or 'Day of the Dead') celebration Nov. 2 in honor of the traditional Mexican holiday. Practiced annually, the holiday is a celebration of both life and death in which families commemorate their deceased loved ones.

"I think it was a huge success," said Sarah West, community outreach coordinator at ACE, after the event. "We didn't know what to expect, but

hoped for a minimum attendance in line with our usual gallery receptions. We more than doubled that and it was one of our largest event attendances ever."

In keeping with Day of the Dead aesthetic elements, the event offered face painting, sugar skull (or "calavera") cookie decorating and art activities, a photo area with traditional-style costume items, refreshments, more

than 200 tamales and a homemade salsa bar, and a sponsored screening of Disney Pixar's "Coco" by the Union County Safe Communities Coalition.

"We saw a wider range of ages than usual. We expected families, because that's what the event was

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VA

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Wounded post-9/11 veterans are relatively young and trying to get their lives back on track.

"They are still learning to survive," Spears said. "They have potentially a long life ahead and (need to learn) how to live with their injuries."

This means in many cases they need to focus on how to do things they once did via a different route. For example, a veteran who enjoyed skiing and mountain climbing may still be able to do both after losing a leg but will have to do so with prosthetics.

Caregivers helping such veterans should strive to put them in touch with people who can provide the training they need to overcome their injuries and do what they once did but on a different level, Spears said.

"You are trying to help them reach their new potential," she said.

The role played by caregivers in helping veterans and non-veterans alike is often overlooked, she said.

"Caregivers are unsung heroes," Spears said. "They do what needs to be done."

She said many caregivers of family members do not

have time to do anything but care for their loved one, and when they do have a rare free moment they are not up to doing much.

"During downtime all you want to do is sleep," Spears said.

She said neighbors and friends can make a big difference in the lives of caregivers by doing relatively small things for them — something as simple as mowing their lawn.

"The most common thing we hear is that caregivers would like their lawn to look

nice," Spears said.

Spears said the objective of providing VA services for caregivers is to lend a hand without being invasive.

"Our job is to help without intruding," Spears said.

The outreach event conducted by the Caregiver Supporter Program Friday was the second of four being conducted by the Walla Walla VA clinic this month. The remaining two are set for Nov. 14 at the Walla Walla VA clinic and Nov. 30 at the Lewiston, Idaho, VA clinic.

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