



Sports

Ducks dominate Beavers

Inside
Loving the Thanksgiving leftovers, 1B

THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896



Follow us on the web

MONDAY • November 26, 2018 • \$1.50

Good day to our valued subscriber Joel Jarvis of Cove

Absenteeism rates improving in NE Oregon

By Dick Mason
The Observer

Northeast Oregon is outpacing the state when it comes to reducing chronic absenteeism in its school districts.

Oregon Department of Education statistics indicate that Northeast Oregon was the only region in the state that saw its overall chronic absenteeism rate decline in 2017-18. The rate for the most recently completed school year was 18.7 percent, down from 19.1 percent in 2016-17, said Landon Braden, the Inter-Mountain Education Service District's chronic absenteeism coordinator.

"This is very encouraging," Braden said.

The Oregon Department of Education, for the purpose of comparing chronic absenteeism statistics, has the state divided in six regions. Union, Wallowa, Baker, Umatilla and Morrow counties comprise Region H.

Despite the drop in Region H, the overall chronic absenteeism rate in the state rose by 0.8 percent to 20.5 percent in 2017-18, according to the Oregon Department of Education's website.

These Oregon Department of Education statistics indicate that seven Union and Wallowa county school districts are below the state average for chronic absenteeism and two others are just above it. Those under the state average are the Cove, Imbler, North Powder, La Grande, Joseph, Wallowa and Enterprise school districts. Just above the state average are the Union and Elgin school districts.

Students are considered chronically absent by the state if they are absent for 10 percent of the school year. This means if they miss as few as two school days a month for an entire academic year, they are listed in the chronically absent category. Students in school districts with four-day weeks are considered chronically absent if they miss 14 or more days a year, and those in five-day school districts are rated as chronically absent if they miss 18 or more school days in an academic year.

Braden believes school districts in Northeast Oregon are improving with regard to chronic absenteeism because of the close-knit relationship between the schools and their communities. This makes it easier for staff and community members to reach out to help chronically absent students.

"We have an incredibly good group of communities," Braden said. "Everyone knows each other (and) there are close relationships" between school staff, schools and communities.

Erin Lair, the IMESD's director of teaching and learning, agrees.

"We have incredible communities," said Lair, who is helping Braden address chronic absenteeism.

The Oregon Department of Education began placing greater emphasis on reducing chronic absenteeism rates about two years ago. The move was spurred by an effort to improve graduation rates. Students who are chronically absent are less likely to earn a high school diploma.

The push to improve chronic absenteeism rates "is all about getting students to graduate," said IMESD Superintendent Mark Mulvihill.

Larry Glaze, the IMESD's director of operations, said it is easy to fall into the chronically absent category if one is not careful.

"A day here and a day there — people don't realize that it adds up quickly," said Glaze, who served as superintendent of the La Grande School District from 2008 to 2017.

Students who miss 10 percent of school days are considered chronically

See **Absenteeism** / Page 5A



EOU photo

Matthew Cooper, professor of music at EOU, plays the new Fazioli grand piano in the McKenzie Theatre at EOU.

EOU's 'Ferrari of Italian pianos' to debut at Holiday Music Festival

■ Grand piano fundraising campaign has less than \$15,000 to go

By Max Denning
The Observer

Eastern Oregon University Music Professor Peter Wordelman has a unique comparison for the Fazioli grand piano that the university has been raising money to purchase for almost a year.

"It's a major upgrade," he said. "It's basically like the Ferrari of Italian pianos."

The price tag is also comparable: 2018 Ferraris start at approximately \$215,000, and EOU is set to raise \$150,000 to purchase the Fazioli. The university's fundraising efforts were kickstarted by the Oregon Agriculture Foundation, which was established by Jean and Glen McKenzie in 1992. Glen graduated from what was then the Eastern

Oregon Normal School in 1936, and he served as a trustee of the EOU Foundation.

In December 2017, fundraising began when the OAF offered the university a \$40,000 matching grant, meaning the foundation would match donations made to the grand piano campaign up to \$40,000. In just a few months, the university had raised \$40,000. So the OAF offered an additional matching grant of \$25,000. By October, the university had raised the \$25,000.

As of today, the university had raised \$135,626. Wordelman said approximately 130 people have donated to the campaign.

With the purchase of the piano and McKenzie The-

atre scheduled to undergo a \$5.5 million renovation, Wordelman said the EOU theatre will become the grandest facility in the region.

"We now have a premier concert instrument," he said. "One of our overall goals is to make sure that McKenzie Theatre is the best equipped theatre in our 12-county region. That should be our role as a university and as educators."

Daniel Durrell, a junior music major at EOU, played the piano in an upper-division piano course.

"The clarity from that piano is way different from the (previous grand piano)," the Yamhill native said. "You can stand all the way in the back (of McKenzie Theatre) and hear just a pedal tone compared to the other one where it can kind of blur together. I got the chance to

See **Piano** / Page 5A

Museum set to reopen at old city hall

By Dick Mason
The Observer

The past will soon become a big part of Elgin's future.

The Elgin Museum and Historical Society is moving forward with plans to reopen its museum in Elgin's old city hall building. The Museum Society's board recently voted to ratify an offer from the City of Elgin for renting the building at 180 N. Eighth St.

"The vote was unanimous," said Gerald Hopkins, president of the Elgin Museum and Historical Society.

The board's vote finalized a three-year rental agreement, which the Elgin City Council approved earlier this fall.

The building on Eighth Street served as Elgin's city hall until early this month



Courtesy photo

The Elgin Museum and Historical Society's collection includes this undated photo of Summerville.

when the city moved into its new home, the old W.C. Construction office building. The city purchased the building, located at 815 Hemlock St.,

earlier this year after the owners of W.C. Construction retired. The city moved into the building because it

See **Museum** / Page 5A

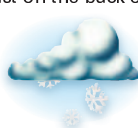
INDEX

Classified.....4B Home.....1B Opinion.....4A
Comics.....3B Horoscope.....5B Sports.....7A
Community.....6A Letters.....4A Sudoku.....3B
Crossword.....5B Lottery.....2A
Dear Abby...10B Obituaries.....3A

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
38 LOW
A little rain



Tuesday
44/35
A bit of snow

CONTACT US

541-963-3161

Issue 139
2 sections, 20 pages
La Grande, Oregon

HAVE A STORY IDEA?

Call The Observer newsroom at 541-963-3161 or send an email to news@lagrandeobserver.com. More contact info on Page 4A.



8 51153 00100 6

WEDNESDAY IN GO!

BAKER CITY FESTIVAL OF TREES

Online at lagrandeobserver.com