

LOCAL BRIEFING

From staff reports

Do you want your ofrenda photos and messages back?

LA GRANDE — The ofrenda, which was part of Art Center East’s Day of the Dead celebration, has been taken down. Anyone who would like their photo or message from the Dia de los Muertos community ofrenda is asked to pick it up as soon as possible. ACE is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday and from noon to 4 p.m. Saturday. If you have a question, call 541-624-2800.

Free computer training offered

LA GRANDE — Training

& Employment Consortium, a part of WorkSource La Grande, 1901 Adams Ave., offers computer classes to the public at no charge. All classes are held from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Pre-registration is required by calling Glenna at 541-963-7111 ext. 248. The classes offered in December are Introduction to Computers (one-day class), Dec. 4; Introduction to Excel (one-day class), Dec. 5; and Intermediate Excel (five-day class), Dec. 6, 11, 13, 18 and 20.

Children’s books sought for Santa Mall

LA GRANDE — Mountain Valleys Reading

Council is asking for donations of new or gently read children’s books to be given to children at the annual Santa Mall in December. To make donations, email [president@oregonread.org](mailto:president@oregonread.org) or leave a message at 541-962-3557.

Cash prizes awarded to floats in Elgin’s Light Parade

ELGIN — The Elgin Lions Club reminds the public to make plans now for the Dec. 8 Light Parade. Line up is at Henderson Park at 5 p.m. Cash prizes will be awarded. Call 541-437-3321 for more information on floats for the parade.

Art Center East announces volunteer opportunities

LA GRANDE — Art Center East has several upcoming opportunities for volunteers. On Dec. 1, volunteers are sought to host art activity tables at the Festival of Trees Family Fun Day at the Blue Mountain Conference Center. Three to four volunteers to make art with the community are needed for the 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. shift and/or the 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. shift. Community members are sought to make a fancy finger food appetizer or dessert for the opening reception

for “The Big,” ACE’s annual open exhibit. The reception begins at 6 p.m. Dec. 7, and food items must be delivered by 5 p.m.

Volunteers are also needed to rake leaves outside the ACE building. For information on volunteering, contact Sarah at [sarah@artcentereast.org](mailto:sarah@artcentereast.org) or 541-624-2800.

Medicare enrollment period open until Dec. 7

SALEM — A press release from the Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services reminds seniors and other Medicare recipients that

any Medicare Advantage (MA) or prescription drug plan (Part D) changes must be made by Dec. 7 in order to ensure that coverage begins without interruption on Jan. 1, 2019. Those who are late to enroll may face a lifetime of premium penalties.

Oregon’s Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assistance Program provides free health insurance counseling on how Medicare works, additional insurance options and reducing out-of-pocket costs. SHIBA staff members and certified counselors are available by calling 1-800-722-4134 (toll-free) or visiting [www.shiba.oregon.gov](http://www.shiba.oregon.gov).



Katy Nesbitt/ The Observer

Eagle Cap Extreme seeks volunteers for important roles in expanding race event

ENTERPRISE — Wallowa County’s Eagle Cap Extreme Sled Dog Race, to be held Jan. 23-26, 2019, is joining with two other prestigious races in Idaho and Montana to offer the Rocky Mountain Challenge Cup.

“This means that we are recognized as a truly premier event,” said ECX President Randy Greenshields. “It’s really a feather in our cap.”

In planning stages for months, the ECX collaboration with both the Idaho Sled Dog Challenge Race and Race to the Sky in Montana to offer the new Rocky Mountain Challenge Cup was announced at the recent volunteer meeting in the Tomas Center, Enterprise. The Rocky Mountain Challenge Cup provides recognition for mushers who place in each of the three races. The new opportunities for awards are expected to bring more teams to the Eagle Cap Extreme, as well as the other two events.

The Eagle Cap Extreme is looking for volunteers to fill several important roles for the 2019 race: still needed are two cooks for the Ollokot checkpoint, several volunteers to staff the Salt Creek Summit checkpoint and a few people who are familiar with the race to answer questions from the public and assist with educational programs at Race Central in the Joseph Community Center. The race also needs one or two snow machines to transport dropped dogs and carry supplies.

Those interested in these or any volunteer opportunities can sign up at [www.eaglecapextreme.com](http://www.eaglecapextreme.com) or contact Julian Pridmore-Brown at [ecxops@eaglecapextreme.com](mailto:ecxops@eaglecapextreme.com) or 503-709-9109.

Community Bank organizes Union County Warming Station donation drive



Max Denning/ The Observer

LA GRANDE — Community Bank is heading up a charity drive at its two La Grande branches to support the Union County Warming Station. Through Dec. 19, the bank will contribute 50 cents for every dollar donated to the warming station at each branch. The La Grande branches are located at either end of Adams Avenue, at 904 Adams and 2313 Adams.

Beyond monetary donations, the Union County Warming Station, which opened Nov. 15 at its new permanent location, 1609 N. Willow St., La Grande, pictured above, is seeking volunteers as well as the following items, which may be dropped of at Nature’s Pantry, 1907 Fourth St., La Grande: socks, hats, gloves, scarves, blankets, twin-size sheets, snow suits, snow pants, coats, hand and feet warmers, sleeping bags, backpacks, coffee supplies, breakfast food, non-perishable snacks, microwavable food, bottled water, tents, tarps, laundry soap, toilet paper, feminine hygiene products and disinfectant cleaning supplies.

More information is available at [www.facebook.com/unioncountywarmingstation](http://www.facebook.com/unioncountywarmingstation).

Firefighting crew has common trait: military service

By Andrew Selsky  
Associated Press

SALEM — After being in firefighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, members of one of America’s newest elite wildfire crews are tasked with fighting fires in rugged country back home.

On the U.S. Bureau of Land Management’s only hotshot crew focused on recruiting veterans, members have traded assault rifles and other weapons of war for chain saws and shovels. But, like in the military, they have camaraderie, structure and chain of command. And the occasional adrenaline rush.

“Being in a firefight is way different than being in a wildland fire, but both are mentally taxing,” said Chris Schott, who served two tours in Afghanistan with the Army’s 7th Special Forces Group. “In a wildland fire, no one’s shooting at you, but conditions can go favorable to unfavorable very quickly.”

The Lakeview Veterans Interagency Hotshot Crew, based in Klamath Falls, received its hotshot certification after rigorous training and testing, the Bureau of Land Management announced last week. It’s now among 112 elite U.S. wildland firefighting teams and the only one targeting veterans for recruitment, the agency said.

Crew superintendent Michael McGirr said he and other managers took then-President Barack Obama’s initiative to hire veterans to heart.

“We felt it was important for them to transition back home,” McGirr said.

Their maturity and ability to follow and lead are benefits that quickly became apparent when the crew started operating in 2012 as a lower-classification unit, McGirr said. Their military experience also means they’re used to enduring tough missions.

“It’s a lot of arduous hiking in nasty terrain,” McGirr said. “The steeper the terrain, that’s usually the ground hotshots are on.”

Kenn Boles, a member of the crew since 2012 who did three tours in Iraq as a Marine, agreed that veterans can withstand the intense work.

“You’re working hard, sweating; the fire doesn’t stop because of those things,” he said. “It’s like in combat — just because you’re hungry, tired and thirsty doesn’t mean the firefight stops.”

The crew is on leave and hasn’t been battling the recent deadly wildfires in California.

Of the 25 positions on the crew, 17 are filled by veterans, McGirr said. There are three additional openings, and McGirr said he wants to recruit female veterans, too.

Schott, the Army veteran, said the crew felt they had the potential to achieve elite hotshot status after fighting fires in 2015, including one in Oregon’s Crater Lake National Park that they almost had contained when winds picked up and changed direction, pushing the flames behind them.

They worked two weeks in a row, digging fire lines and doing prescribed burns to deprive the fire of fuel. After

three days off, they worked another two weeks straight.

“After that, we thought we could be the first veterans hotshot crew in the nation,” Schott said.

The crew usually works for nine months, with three months off.

“We spend more time together than with our families,” McGirr said. “It’s a grueling pace. We eat together, sleep together.”

That creates a camaraderie that allows the veterans to share their wartime experiences with those who understand what they endured.

Boles lost a close friend a week after he left Iraq. That was the biggest contributor to post-traumatic stress disorder that hit him later, he

said, describing it as “a lot of survivor’s guilt.”

The veterans have each other’s backs when PTSD issues arise, acting as a support group.

“Instead of bottling it up, we’re really receptive to hearing people’s stories and problems,” said Boles, who was in the invasion of Iraq and in heavy fighting in Fal-lujah and Ramadi.



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OBITUARIES

Carol J. Mariani  
La Grande

Carol Joyce Mariani, 83, of La Grande, died Nov. 25 at her residence. An obituary is forthcoming. Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory will be handling the arrangements.

Michael L. Balluff  
Medical Springs

Michael L. Balluff, 60, of Medical Springs, died Nov. 24 at his residence. An obituary is forthcoming. Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory will be handling the arrangements.

Michael J. Wood

November 4, 2018

Michael J. Wood, 62, died November 4, 2018, from pancreatic cancer, at his home in La Grande. A Memorial Service will be held at the Presbyterian Friendship Center on Saturday, December 1, 2018, at 10:00am. Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory is handling the arrangements.

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What’s Cooking ?

by Sandy Sorrels of

TEN DEPOT STREET

We are starting our holiday Christmas season with excitement this week at Ten Depot Street. The restaurant was beautifully decorated yesterday by Laura Haefler and her husband Mike as they have done for the past many years.

Jazz and swing band, Pendulum Swing plays Thursday at Ten Depot from 8:00 to 10:00. Join us for music and dinner or a warm drink in our bar by the Christmas tree. For an appetizer, Chef Bill Monda is preparing Panko Parmesan Cod Bites with Honey Sriracha Sauce during the week and then Oysters Rockefeller on Friday when the fresh oysters come in.

Our Blue Plate Special this week is one of our all time favorites Cioppino. Cioppino is a seafood stew created by Italian fishermen in San Francisco. The seafood is cooked to order in a rich seasoned broth with tomatoes,

onions, garlic and white wine. Great with our sour dough bread!

Ten Depot Street has served Cajun Barbecued Beef Ribs on Mondays practically since we opened. We use the ribs from our delicious slow roasted Prime Rib. But lately we have not had enough ribs to satisfy the demand every Monday, so we have decided to have Rib Night just once a month, on the first Monday. For the other Mondays we will be featuring different kinds of Barbecue, of which there are many. Today we have on our special board a Barbecued Prime Rib Sandwich served with a choice of sides for just 14.95.

For holiday gatherings, groups large and small, Ten Depot Street is a great place. Just call 541 963-8766, preferably during the day, to make arrangements.

BLUE PLATE SPECIAL \$10.95

Cioppino (seafood stew with clams, scallops shrimp and cod)  
Green Salad, sour dough bread  
(served Monday through Friday)