

LEGO

Continued from Page 1A said. "They learn that it's both challenging and fun to tackle technological and scientific problems."

The importance of teamwork was echoed by Brandi Canfield, a fifth-grade teacher at Greenwood Elementary in La Grande. Canfield is in her fourth year coaching the Greenwood robotics team. She attended a workshop at EOU over the summer four years ago where they presented on Lego robotics. Canfield was intrigued and got a grant from the Oregon Department of Education to start a team.

She said one of the big takeaways the students have from being a part of the robotics team is learning how to work with each other.

"They focus on teamwork, discovery and having fun," Canfield said. "The experience to build connections in a small group and to present (to the judges) and speak in front of an audience is pretty phenomenal."

Canfield's team consists of two fourth-graders and five fifth-graders. She said each year team dynamics differ, but she has been consistently impressed with the strides each group has made as a team.

"The (students learn about the) perseverance that it takes to keep working even when you hit the walls," Canfield said, "because there are a lot of walls they hit within the programming and solving the problems. They keep going and try not to get discouraged."

One of the students she has



Cherise Kaechele /The Observer

From left, Haiden Davis, Lauren Leathers, Carson DeClue, Wyatt Murie, Carter Harden and Cameron put finishing touches on their robot before the competition.

seen a lot of growth from this year is Lauren Leathers. Canfield said when Lauren joined the club, she was reserved and unfamiliar with the programming aspect of the robotics tourney, but as the group started meeting more, she became more confident.

"She is now almost successful with her mission, has created her own attachment, and has modified it," Canfield said.

The Greenwood teacher noted it can be difficult for younger students to compete with teams of older and more experienced opponents, but where her team may falter in the robot game, they make up for it with their research, presentation and performance in the teamwork challenge.

"Those (other aspects) can make us more competitive with teams that have more experience," she said. "But, yes, it is a challenge."

One team member, fourth-grader Wyatt Murie, said

he enjoys programming the robots and being on a team with his friends.

"I like that you get to use a Chromebook and the robots," Murie said.

Overall, Croft said he hopes the competition gives students a new appreciation for science and technology.

"The big takeaway is we want the kids to learn that science is fun," he said, noting he knows of students at EOU who took part in the competition as children and have gone on to become computer scientists.

The opening ceremony will begin around 9 a.m. in Huber Auditorium. The robot games part of the competition, which is open to the public, will take place in the multi-story atrium of Badgley Hall.

At 2 p.m. the events will conclude with a ceremony led by La Grande Mayor Steve Clements to recognize Croft's leadership of the tournament for the past 14 years.

State had 2nd-highest number of votes cast

By Andrew Selsky
The Associated Press

SALEM — Oregon recorded the second-highest number of votes cast in an election in the 2018 election in state history, though the percentage of registered voters who cast ballots was the lowest since 2002, according to final certified results released Thursday.

The clashing numbers are due to the number of registered voters having shot upward through Oregon's "motor voter" automatic voter registration. Only five times since 1960 has the 2018 turnout percentage of 69.7 percent been lower. It was as high as 86.51 percent in 1960.

The Oregon Secretary of State's office on Thursday said 1,914,923 ballots were returned last month, the number eclipsed only by the 2016 election in which 2,051,452 ballots were cast.

Through Oregon's pioneering motor voter program, those

doing business at the motor vehicles department are automatically registered to vote.

Since the last midterm election, in 2014, voter rolls have increased by 26 percent. The total registered voters in Oregon for the Nov. 6 election was 2,748,232, compared with 2,553,808 in 2016 and 2,174,763 in 2014.

Gov. Kate Brown, who sailed to victory in the November election, said in her policy agenda last week that she intends to make it even easier for Oregonians to register to vote and to vote.

She proposed that any state agency interaction should allow eligible voters to easily register, whether it is signing up for classes or getting a fishing license.

The Democratic governor also wants no postage stamp required for Oregonians to vote by mail. Voting is currently either done by mail in a stamped envelope or by

using drop-off boxes.

State Election Director Steve Trout said the large number of votes cast this election means that the number of valid signatures that will be required to put initiatives and referenda onto ballots for the next four years has increased by 21 percent.

"Our constitution says that the number of signatures required to put initiatives and referenda on the ballot is a percentage of all votes cast for governor in the previous election," Trout said in a videotaped announcement. A total of 1,866,997 votes were cast for governor.

To add a constitutional amendment will require 149,360 signatures, or 8 percent of the votes cast for governor. An initiative statute requires 6 percent, equal to 112,020 signatures, and a referendum requires 4 percent, which is 74,680 signatures, Trout said.

EOU

Continued from Page 1A her position at EOU for three years, said the university has initiated an early alert system for at-risk students.

"Because of the term systems in Oregon, once you get behind, it's extremely difficult to get back," she said. "So we are trying to figure out how to support students before they get behind."

In addition to the individualized efforts, Brown and the team at the university focused on retention have different strategies for retaining online students. Brown noted while students on campus are largely between the ages of 18 and 24, online students are often older and are dealing with a differing set of issues that might hinder them from pursuing their education.

"You're looking at a group who are already in the

workforce and have families and different things like that," Brown said. "Some of the basics are the same, but the belonging piece you have to look at in a different manner."

While retention rates have improved with Brown in her current role, she also continues to see room for improvement.

This winter, EOU will be rolling out the Mountaineer Success Team in order to keep improving the student experience and the university's retention rate. The

team will be composed of faculty and staff members across the campus who will act as academic coaches for struggling students.

"Basically what it's creating is an additional net for students to be caught in if they're struggling at all," Brown said. "It's just another person for people to talk to. We wanted to train people so they can be part of the solution and for it to be clear that retention is important for everyone on campus."

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Community attends McClure's retirement party



Cherise Kaechele /The Observer

A room full of people at the Union County Senior Center came together to celebrate the 30-year career of Steve McClure, who is serving the last part of his Union County Commissioner term this month. John Howard, who is a former commissioner, emceed the event on Thursday afternoon and told stories about McClure, along with many other former and current county employees and commissioners. Visitors from Umatilla and Wallowa counties also came to support him. McClure, who recently had neck surgery (far right), decided to not seek reelection.



Cherise Kaechele /The Observer

La Grande Fire Chief Les Thomas gives Al Dockweiler and Blake Eckstein awards for their role in helping first responders save a hunter who was found suspended in his harness in a tree in August.

OTEC

Continued from Page 1A es who helped get Voelker out of the tree were recognized for their actions. Two of the four men were there to represent the team.

"There is a group who assisted that would not normally be asked to respond to this type of incident. That organization is (OTEC)," said LGFD Chief Les Thomas. "We would like to take this opportunity to recognize OTEC and its workers who provided us a bucket truck to aid in the rescue."

Thomas said without the assistance of the OTEC

staff, the "outcome could have become tragic."

The members of the OTEC team — Al Dockweiler, Blake Eckstein, Seth McKern and Dan Patton — were given certificates and City of La Grande Fire Department challenge coins for their assistance.

"The individual saved that day from almost certain death has almost recovered and is able to walk on his own," Thomas said. "He is expected to make a full recovery."

Firefighters Tibbetts and Ployhar, Joshua McGonagle and Chancy Ferguson were privately recognized in November for their part in

Voelker's rescue. They were given the Above and Beyond Award by La Grande City Manager Robert Strope.

Additionally, the LGFD was recognized on an EMS website as having the fifth most "strange" rescue in the nation this year.

"While most calls are fairly routine, first responders dealt with several incidents in 2018 that are so unbelievable, they sound like episodes of a fictional television show," according to the Year in Review article on EMS1.com.

Contact Cherise Kaechele at ckaechele@lagrandeobserver.com. Follow Cherise on Twitter @IgoKaechele.

TO YOUR HEALTH

HEALTH CARE DIRECTORY

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