



Sports

Gooderham joins Mounties

Inside

Outdoor enthusiasts are the easiest to shop for, 1B

THE OBSERVER Weekend

FRIDAY-SUNDAY • December 14, 2018 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Tom Schuft of La Grande

(Sensory-friendly) Santa Claus coming to town

■ A Santa and Mrs. Claus event catered to special needs children will be in La Grande today

By Max Denning
The Observer

Santa and Mrs. Claus will be offering a different type of experience for special needs children and their families in La Grande.

The Autism Society of Oregon is hosting a sensory-friendly Santa from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. tonight at Tri-County Equipment, 62460 Commerce Road, for the first time ever in La Grande. While the society had previously asked families to reserve a time, organizer JulieKay Dudley said families are welcome to drop in as well.

Dudley, the Autism Society of Oregon's Region 1 representative, said she helped organize a sensory-friendly Santa event after families in the area asked her about the possibility of having one last year in La Grande. Some had seen advertisements for a sensory-friendly experience with Mr. Claus in Portland.

"We didn't have enough time to get it together last year, so we put it forward to this year," Dudley said.

The Autism Society organizes sensory-friendly Santas in all 50 states around the holidays. Children with all types of special needs, not just autism, are welcome to come meet Santa in a calm environment.

The entire experience of visiting Santa can be a "sensory overload" for children with special needs, Dudley said, adding that the children are often uncomfortable approaching strangers.

"The line is part of it, and there's usually a lot going on," she said. "We try to take the sensory part down a few notches. Usually the Santas are kind of in a rush."

One of the main ways Dudley and the local branch of the Autism Society is hoping to combat that is by giving families a 30-minute block to spend with Santa and Mrs. Claus. This gives the children ample time to acclimate to the big man in the bright red suit. In addition to having a chance to take a photograph with Santa, the La Grande event will include snacks, sub sandwiches and other activities such as coloring.

"We let the kids decide when they want to approach Santa," Dudley said. "He is just sitting there and wait-

See **Santa** / Page 3A

Right: In May, the North Powder School District celebrated the ground breaking of their new school.



Left: Old West, a credit union, will open in the City of Union in summer of 2019.



Local officials reflect on 2018 civic resolutions

By Max Denning, Cherise Kaechele and Dick Mason
The Observer

In January 2018, The Observer reached out to city and county representatives to ask them what they wished to accomplish in their official capacity over the next year. The Observer also contacted the Union County Chamber of Commerce to ask for its goals for the business and tourism industry. The reporters told them there would be a follow-up story at the end of the year about whether they accomplished their goals. This is what they said:

Union County

Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage focused her goals on economic development in 2018. She wanted to see more businesses in the Baum Industrial Park, wanted a more cohesive partnership with the towns in the county and wanted the Buffalo Peak Golf Course to make a positive step forward.

Beverage said she believes she has accom-

plished all of those goals this year and she feels good about going into a new year.

The first half of the year, county and city officials talked about holding an economic development summit together. While the idea of that summit slightly shifted from having the officials lead the group to having business-relevant entities lead it, the summit helped organizers create resources for future business owners.

"Twelve presenters spoke to the business owners in Union County," Beverage said. "We put together a list of all those presenters and how to get in touch with them. When a business comes to us, we can give them this one piece of paper that has all the information they need."

Beverage said if new or potential business owners need help putting together a business plan, finding a work force or securing funding, this resource can direct them to the right people.

The success of the Baum Industrial Park was a personal goal for Beverage,



Observer file photos

The City of La Grande has focused its attention on the housing crisis. It received a grant to do a study on where La Grande is lacking in housing.

who wanted to see two new businesses move in.

"We sold lots to three new businesses this year," she said. "I also wanted to make sure pavement was laid out there, and that will happen next spring."

She said broadband internet is also accessible now, which gives businesses at the industrial park high-speed wireless internet access.

Finally, Beverage said the golf course's finances are improving.

"We put together a

business plan for the golf course," she said. "By putting that plan together, we were able to get a fixed interest rate, which will help us in the long run."

Cove

In Cove, two major projects were on the agenda for 2018, and the city succeeded in both of its undertakings.

Cove installed a new sidewalk along Main Street and up Haefer Lane to the intersection of Conk-

See **Resolutions** / Page 5A

New report finds Oregon public defender system is flawed

The Associated Press

PORTLAND — Oregon's system of public defenders for indigent people is so flawed it can't guarantee clients are getting the defense they're owed, according to a new draft report.

Oregon Public Broadcasting said the report was completed by the Sixth Amendment Center, a nonprofit group that studies how legal systems across the country are complying with the constitutional requirement.

The Oregon Legislature paid for the report, which cost \$193,000. Report authors studied nine counties in depth, ranging from Harney to Multnomah.

The report found the state lacked oversight of attorneys with whom it contracts to provide public defense services. And the way it pays attorneys encourages them to deal with cases as quickly as possible.

The report recommends making public defenders state employees, or moving to an hourly pay system and away from the flat case rate model the state's been using for more than 30 years.

"This compensation plan creates an incentive for attorneys to handle as many cases as possible and to do so as quickly as possible, rather than focusing on their ethical duty of achieving the client's

case-related goals," the report said.

The U.S. Constitution requires a defendant who cannot afford to hire their own attorney be provided counsel at public expense.

"I think there are serious problems in the way the constitutional right to counsel is provided within Oregon," said David Carroll, executive director of the Sixth Amendment Center, who authored the report. "I believe it's time to reevaluate how services are provided."

Lane Borg, executive director of the state's Office of Public Defense Services, pursued funding for the report.

"It confirms what we

suspected and gives us specifics, which is: The system you have is not constitutional," Borg said. "And what I mean by that is, because the funding model creates an economic conflict between the client and the lawyer, that would violate the rules of professional conduct."

Borg is a former public defender who also spent nearly a decade running the Metropolitan Public Defenders, a nonprofit that operates in Multnomah and Washington counties.

The draft report will be presented to lawmakers and other state officials in Salem on Friday.

Island City Elementary principal set to retire

■ John Tolan is completing 39th year with LGSD

By Dick Mason
The Observer

An award-winning La Grande School District educator is set to retire.

Island City Elementary School Principal John Tolan has announced he plans to step down on June 30 after a 39-year career with the La Grande School District. The educator, who joined the school district in June 1980, has been Island City's principal since 2002.

"The La Grande School District has been a wonderful district for my career. I was able to learn from so many outstanding teachers, principals and superintendent's over my 38-1/2 years with the district," Tolan said in a letter to Superintendent George

See **Retirement** / Page 5A

One less moose on the loose

■ \$7,500 reward offered for information

By Cherise Kaechele
The Observer

The recent killing of a moose in Wallowa County reminded the public of the existence of the naturally reclusive creatures that live in parts of Northeast Oregon.

Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Troopers are asking for information regarding the moose that was illegally shot and partially cut up near the Chesnimnus Unit sometime between Nov. 8 and Nov. 11. According to press releases from OSP and the Oregon Hunters Association, the OHS is offering a total of \$7,500 for information leading to an arrest in the case. The OHA's reward of \$1,000 was boosted by \$500 pledges from 13 OHA chapters, including the Union-Wallowa chapter.

"The poaching of a moose is a tragic thing," said OHA Conservation Director Jim Akenson, who lives in Wallowa County. "Especially because our moose

See **Moose** / Page 2A

INDEX

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

WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Friday
28 LOW
A bit of snow



Saturday
41/36
Partly sunny



Sunday
43/38
Rather cloudy

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page 4A.



MONDAY

LHS FBLA CELEBRATES 12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

Online at lagrandeobserver.com