

## FIREFIGHTERS

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eight students were chosen by the Island City teachers and are given \$100 to spend for Christmas gifts. The money comes primarily from the volunteer association's pancake breakfast held during the summer.

"We've been doing this for eight years, but we used to do the shopping for the kids ourselves," Swales said as he followed Josh Lopez, 11 years old, through the aisles. "Five years ago, we started taking the kids with us."

Swales and the six other firefighter volunteers took the eight students shopping in two groups — and, as a bonus, they picked the children up in fire trucks.

"This is the way we provide and give back to our community," Swales said. "This event is specifically



*This is the way we provide and give back to our community. This event is specifically for our (fire) district."*

— La Grande Rural Fire Capt. Anthony Swales

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It's not always about fighting fires, he said. This is a way for the volunteers to bring joy to the children who live in their district.

"If it brings a smile to their faces, then we're all for it," he said.

Josh stood in the toy section of Walmart debating what to get himself for Christmas. The decision was between a scooter and a Razor, similar ride-on toys.

"Do you have a helmet?" Swales asked, noting one toy was potentially more dangerous and would require more protection.

Several aisles over, Jordan Sain, 8 years old, was looking for bike gear for her uncle. She said he rides a lot, and at

night. She also listed having to get her fish a present, too.

Chris Stauffer and Joe Boyle, both volunteer firefighters who shopped with the students, said this event allows them to do something for their community outside of the normal parameters of the job.

"It's the right thing to do," Stauffer said. "Every kid deserves a gift to open on Christmas."

Boyle said giving back to the community gives back to the firefighters a sense of humility.

This is the kind of action that Christmas is really all about, he added. It brings Christmas cheer.

It was recently announced that the department's fire chief would be stepping



Cherise Kaechele/The Observer

Firefighter Cody Self and Island City student Jordan Sain shop in Walmart on Monday morning. Sain bought items for her Mom, sister and uncle.

down — Swales has been the volunteer association president for the last 10 years, encompassing the eight years of Shop with a Firefighter. The volunteers are determined that the event will continue, and

Swales said the fire department will always have Shop with a Firefighter.

This year, the association received an appreciated donation from Certified Personnel Service Agency Inc. to go toward the event.

While the pancake breakfast — held during the summer — is the primary source of fundraising, donations are always welcome. To make a donation, call the rural fire department at 541-963-6895.

## POPULATION

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Rich noted often young people move away from rural areas to pursue higher education.

"One of the big trends for the younger generation now is to move directly into college," Rich said. "A lot of the time that involves going to a different place for college."

While in Union County the 18-24 population is propped up by students at Eastern Oregon University, the county might not hold on to those residents.

"When they graduate, depending on what their degree is, they might not find a lot of opportunity over here," Rich said. "So you might see a lot of exodus from those people... There's definitely a lot more opportunities for certain degree fields in urban areas."

While young people may see a lack of educational and vocational opportunities, older individuals see rural areas as an alternative to the way of life found in cities.

"There's a draw for retirees to move into more rural areas as well," Rich said. "(Such as) lower housing costs, maybe an easier pace of life."

Around Union County, changes in population are varied. In La Grande, where approximately half the county's population lives, the population has grown 1.95 percent to an estimated 13,340 people. Every other city in the county has grown by a similar rate except for Cove, which is 16 miles east of

La Grande. Cove's population has declined by an estimated 90 individuals, which is a decrease of 14.06 percent. Cove is now smaller than it was in 2000.

Around the state, larger metro areas continue to grow. The state's three largest cities — Portland, Eugene and Salem — have grown by 11.11, 7.51 and 4.96 percent, respectively, since 2010.

Population growth is often accompanied by an increase in construction and traffic, Rich noted. The effects of too much growth may not be what the residents of rural areas want.

"There's a possibility of things becoming larger, and whether that fits in with somebody's idea of what their community should be like is another story," Rich said.

## BROWN

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am the promise of Oregon and staying on track to graduate because..."

Brown completed the sentence: "...because I can help people be healthier. I believe health is the track to happiness."

A member of the LHS track team, Brown wants to make health her career focus. She is interested in pursuing a sports medicine, physical therapy or another related health field. This does not surprise Julie Bodfish, LHS's head track coach.

"That would fit her perfectly. That is the kind of person she is," Bodfish said.

Bodfish described Brown, a member of the local Fellowship of Christian Athletes chapter, as a very talented athlete who is always thoughtful and respectful.

"She is kind of a dream,"

the track coach said.

Nicole McConnell, a LHS science teacher, said Brown is a pleasure to have as a student, noting that she is bright, hard-working, motivated and popular with her classmates.

"She is a good kid," McConnell said.

The La Grande School District is one of five in Oregon selected to participate in "The Promise of Oregon" campaign. The others are the Central Point, Hillsboro, Gresham-Barlow and Nestucca Valley school districts.

The new student from the five school districts will be featured on the website every week through the first half of 2019. The La Grande School District was selected because the OSBA wanted Eastern Oregon represented and is impressed with its programs.

"Its superintendent, George Mendoza, is doing



Contributed photo

This photo of La Grande High School sophomore Katie Brown is currently appearing on the promiseoregon.org website for a campaign coordinated by the Oregon School Boards Association to boost support for public education.

a great job," Pulaski said.

The "Promise" campaign officially debuted in November 2014, according to its website.

It aims to create public support for education from kindergarten through high school and lift student achievement and graduation rates. The website

says the campaign is based on two defining principles: 1) Today's students are Oregon's greatest natural resource. 2) Oregonians must invest in our public schools so the next generation can reach its poten-

tial. "We need to continue to dream bigger," said Jim Green, OSBA's executive director. "Public schools are the best investment we can make in our young people."

## WINDS

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preparations for the planned opening the next day, when a wind gust topped the shack.

"Luckily no one was around the shack," he said. "But they saw it happen."

A weather station near the top of the lift recorded a peak gust of 61 mph on Friday afternoon, with several other gusts topping 50 mph.

Johnson said the shack, which has been in place for at least 25 years, has withstood winds of similar strength in the past.

"It was more about the direction," he said. "We don't normally get winds out of the southeast."

The overturned shack slid about 25 feet. On Sunday Johnson and another employee used Sno-cats to move the shack back into position.

Johnson said Ian Warner, Anthony Lakes' operations manager, worked most of the day rewiring the electronic connections to the chairlift.



Contributed photo

Anthony Lakes had to delay its opening weekend by one week after high winds caused damage to the shack housing the chairlift's electrical system.

"He did a great job and we're in great shape now," Johnson said. "It would have been a great Saturday opening, but it looks like we're going to get more snow this week."

The winds didn't cause any other damage, Johnson said.

In some places the gusts actually helped by consolidating the snow. Wind did scour snow off one section but new snow later in the weekend

covered that area, Johnson said.

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- When a loved one is unconscious or unresponsive
- When you suspect a heart attack - chest pain, shortness of breath, etc.
- When you suspect a stroke - facial droop, weakness on one side, slurred speech
- After an accident or injury where you suspect a concussion, broken bone, internal injury, or other serious condition.

For most other health concerns, call your primary care doctor or provider. For life-threatening emergencies, call 9-1-1.

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