

MARCH

Funding to back EOU field house

By Dick Mason
The Observer, March 7

Today it is barren, but 2-1/2 years from now, the Snowflake Field area at Eastern Oregon University will be an oasis of opportunity for the athletic program and the general public.

The Legislature passed legislation that will provide Eastern with \$9 million for the construction of a field house at EOU on the eastern edge of its campus. The state will raise the \$9 million through the sale of lottery-backed bonds.

The field house will feature a six-lane, 200-meter indoor track; an exercise lab and instructional space for the Physical Activity and Health Degree program; winter weather practice space for outdoor sports teams; and exercise space for the public.

“This is very exciting. It is huge,” said Tim Seydel, Eastern’s vice president for university advancement.

Seydel said Eastern would begin raising money for the field house project, which will be used to augment the construction of the facility. Regardless of how much money is raised, construction of the field house will begin in the fall of 2019 and likely will take a year to complete, Seydel said.

The facility’s running track will be the only permanent competition-grade one in Oregon, said Ben Welch, EOU’s track and field coach. Welch added that Eastern will be the only non-NCAA Division I university west of the Rocky Mountains with an indoor track.

“This will completely change the dynamics of (what EOU has to offer). It is a game changer,” Welch said.

The facility will be able to host track meets and volleyball, basketball and wrestling tournaments. Welch noted that the field house will have enough space for four volleyball courts, space that also could be easily converted into three basketball courts.

In addition to being an excellent athletic practice



Courtesy photo

Eastern Oregon University will build a new field house with \$9 million from the state’s sale of lottery-backed bonds, thanks to new legislation.

facility and exercise and health lab site, the field house will also provide space for June graduation ceremonies in the event of bad weather and community events like trade and outdoor shows.

“It will be a magnificent model of versatility,” said Welch, noting it will also be available to community members who want to exercise.

Eastern secured \$9 million for the field house via Senate Bill 5702, a bonding authorization bill that also provided funding to the University of Oregon and Oregon State University for building projects. The bill was amended during the current Legislative session to provide funding for Eastern’s field house, which will be named later.

Seydel credits state representatives Greg Barreto (R-Cove) and Greg Smith (R-Heppner) and State Senator Bill Hansell (R-Athena) for their efforts in securing bond authorization for the field house project.

“They provided us with excellent support,” Seydel said.

Smith helped do this as a member of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Capital Construction where SB 5072 was considered.

“Eastern Oregon University is our rural university. This facility will help recruit and keep our Eastern Oregon youths and athletes

in Eastern Oregon,” Smith said in a news release.

Eastern succeeded in landing funding from the Legislature for the field house after first unsuccessfully trying to do so in the 2017 session. A year ago, EOU requested \$6 million from the Legislature for the field house project and planned to raise \$2 million more in private funds.

Despite the setback, EOU made a second attempt to secure funding for the field house in the 2018 Legislative session.

“A lot of people felt when we started this (the second attempt) that it was a long shot,” Seydel said.

Eastern succeeded in part because it took a different approach, he said.

“We believed we had a better case,” Seydel said, explaining joining forces with UO and OSU helped Eastern’s cause and so did agreeing to take an environmentally friendly approach that benefits the state’s economy.

All three universities promised, if SB 5072 passed, to construct their buildings out of cross-laminated timber, an engineered wood building system. Cross-laminated timber is made from several layers of lumber board stacked crosswise and fused together on their wide faces. Cross-lamination provides stability, strength and rigidity, making CLT a viable alternative to concrete, masonry and steel, Seydel said.



Cherise Kaechele/The Observer

Eastern Oregon University was designated Oregon’s “rural university” after legislation unanimously passed through the Oregon House and Senate in February, and was ultimately signed by Gov. Kate Brown in March.

Eastern soon to be Oregon’s official ‘rural university’

By Alyssa Sutton
The Observer, March 2

Eastern Oregon University gained the designation of “Oregon’s Rural University.”

On Feb. 27, the Oregon State Senate passed House Bill 4153 designating EOU as Oregon’s rural university. HB 4153 passed the Oregon House and Senate unanimously and was later signed into law by Gov. Kate Brown.

“Eastern Oregon University has been serving rural Oregon since its founding in 1929,” Senator Bill Hansell (R-Athena) said in a press release. “Giving EOU this official designation will allow the university to appeal to potential students across the nation and leverage federal funds.”

The designation is part of the university’s strategic plan to increase enrollment across platforms, including an aspiration to enroll 5,000 online students annually by 2029, and to be recognized as a leader in promoting “rural community prosperity and resilience.” The designation is one of the key performance indicators the university is seeking in support of its goal to “serve as the educational, economic, and cultural engine for rural places” and to “be recognized as a leader in promoting

rural community prosperity and resilience.”

“This designation essentially carves out our niche in the state,” Tim Seydel, EOU’s vice president for university advancement, told The Observer.

According to the bill, Eastern Oregon University serves as a resource for rural communities and was the first university in the state to develop “distance duration programs” for students who have difficulty leaving their current geographical locations to attend school.

The designation allows Eastern to leverage additional federal education dollars and apply for grants it currently isn’t eligible for. This will be beneficial as the university serves the highest percentage of students eligible to receive the Federal Pell Grant in the state.

“The designation will provide more external funding opportunities,” Seydel said.

Also noted in the bill is the university has 11 online and distance education locations in partnership with communities and community colleges throughout the rural sectors of Oregon.

Regional Outreach and Innovation Executive Director David Vande Pol was hired in July 2017 to oversee Eastern’s regional

centers, online courses and transfer students. Regional centers provide proctors for exams and advising for the university’s online students, who can earn an accredited bachelor’s degree entirely online.

The bill references events and programs such as Eastern Promise, the Math Olympiad and the Future Business Leaders of America as well as regional competitions, sports camps and musical and theater performances that host thousands of elementary and secondary school students each year and also engage community members.

The bill emphasized the effect the university has on the professional workforce, as it is a factor in how many rural residents hold university degrees.

The bill also noted the university is recognized nationally as being friendly to the military and that a significant number of veterans reside and work in the rural communities served by the university. Eastern’s campus is also not larger than the majority of the rural communities in the region and therefore provides a comfortable transition for students, making university success more likely for many rural students.

Students walk out to raise awareness

By Dick Mason
The Observer, March 16

La Grande High School senior Sylvia Alf-Rippee walked on March 14 so that someday other students will not have to run in fear.

Alf-Rippee was one of more than 200 LHS and La Grande Middle School students who walked out of their schools at about 10 a.m. as part of a national student event protesting gun violence. Students remained out of class for 17 minutes, one minute for each of the victims in the deadly Feb. 14 shooting Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Alf-Rippee, who said she saw the images of students running out of their school in Parkland, was one of four students who helped organize the walkout in La Grande. She hopes protests like the walkout will help end gun violence in schools.

“I am really praying that (the Parkland shooting) is the last school shooting,” said Alf-Rippee, who put together the walkout with juniors Mollie Smith, Elizabeth Babcock and Caiya Chandler.

About 100 LHS students participated in the walkout. The young women who led the protest expressed surprise about the size of

the turnout.

“I expected 10 or 15 people, knowing the tradition of the community,” Babcock said.

Babcock was making reference to the large number of gun rights supporters in Northeast Oregon, something the other leaders of the student walkout also acknowledged.

Alf-Rippee stressed, though, the walkout was not meant to be an anti-firearm protest. A member of La Grande High School’s trapshooting team, she said she does not oppose guns but she does believe the use of guns needs to be more tightly regulated.

Local stores diverge on age restrictions

By Cherise Kaechele
The Observer, March 12

Major corporations, including MetLife, Hertz and Delta Air Lines, recently have cut ties to the National Rifle Association. Walmart, Kroger, L.L. Bean and Dick’s Sporting Goods announced they will no longer sell guns to anyone younger than 21, according to an article by The Associated Press.

The Northwest-based retail chain Bi-Mart also announced it will raise the age restriction to 21 years old.

Those actions amounted to an act of defiance against the NRA and its allies in Washington who have vehemently opposed any ban on AR-15s and other semi-automatic weapons or a higher age limit for gun purchases.

The local Bi-Mart declined

an interview with The Observer due to restrictions on speaking to the press. However, a press release was issued by the corporate office in Eugene that spoke to the change.

“We support the responsible sale and use of firearms,” the release stated. “Since the day Bi-Mart was founded, we’ve always carried a mix of merchandise supporting the shooting sports and hunting community. We’ve done this without selling assault type weapons. This style of firearm is not part of our current mix of goods and will not be in the future. We have never stocked or sold AK or AR platform rifles or bumpstocks and we do not stock high capacity magazines for these firearms. Our policies for firearm sales meet or exceed all Federal and State

laws where we operate and currently follow all government age restrictions. We will continue to carry our current selections of items for the hunter and sport shooter.”

Phil Gillette, sporting goods manager at La Grande’s Ace Hardware, confidently said his store will not be following suit.

“I’d turn my membership back to them (if they pushed us to raise the age restriction),” Gillette said, referring to Ace Hardware.

In fact, he said the store has seen a definite rise in business since the discussion about restrictions began.

Gillette said he stands firm in his opinion on the right to bear arms.

“I’m a disabled vet,” he said. “I will buy what the Constitution allows me.”



Kristy Nelson
Loan Officer





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