

LOCAL BRIEFING

From staff reports

Class covers basic botany

ISLAND CITY — The next OSU Master Gardener class will be "Basic Botany," presented by Dr. Karen Antell, EOU professor of botany, from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Jan. 22. The class will be held in the conference room at the Union County OSU Extension Office, 10507 N. McAlister Road, Island City. Community members may attend for \$5 per class. For more information and to RSVP for classes, call the Extension Office at 541-963-1010.

Hearing held to consider cemetery district petitions

ENTERPRISE — The Wallowa County Board of Commissioners will convene a hearing after its regular board meeting at 10 a.m. Jan. 22 in the Thornton Conference Room of the Wallowa County Courthouse in Enterprise. The purpose of the hearing is to consider petitions by certain landowners to be withdrawn from the Joseph Cemetery Maintenance District and annexed to the Alder Slope Cemetery Maintenance District.

All interested persons may appear and be heard. Meetings and hearings are open to the public.

Aviation banquet includes awards

WALLOWA LAKE — The annual Wallowa County Aviation banquet will be held Jan. 20 at the Wallowa Lake Lodge. Beginning at 4:30 p.m., the event will include presentations on this year's aviation events in Eastern Oregon, such as the implementation of an aviation program at Joseph Charter School. Lastly

the organization will present a \$6,000 CAAT (contribution to the advancement of aviation technology) award to an outstanding Eastern Oregon high school senior.

The Northeastern Oregon Aviation Foundation grew out of the annual Wallowa County fly-in, which takes place the second week in July at the Joseph State Airport. NEOAF organizes educational displays to expose and develop interest in students to possible career paths, and uses proceeds from the fly-in to promote STEM education in the local school

system. The foundation's ultimate goal is to develop a regional education center in Eastern Oregon that would work for revitalization and attract new "soft" industries to the region.

Discussion concludes EOU's celebration of Dr. King

LA GRANDE — "Building the Beloved Community: MLK Jr.'s Challenge to America & the World," a facilitated discussion held Jan. 22, will be the culmination of a two-week series of events in celebration

of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and legacy. The gathering is free and open to the public. Beginning at 6:30 p.m., Chris Burford will give a presentation and lead a discussion afterward, at the La Grande United Methodist Church, 1612 Fourth St.

The events were sponsored by the EOU Diversity Committee, Student Council for Multicultural Affairs, TRIO Student Support Services and Office of Student Diversity & Inclusion. For more information, contact the Multicultural Center at 541-962-3741.

OBITUARIES

Brian R. Abell

Formerly of La Grande
1958-2019

Brian Reed Abell, 60, of Richland, Washington, and formerly of La Grande, died Jan. 14 at Kadlec Regional Medical Center in Richland. Viewing will be held Jan. 24 and Jan. 25 during normal business hours at Mountain View-Colonial DeWitt in Walla Walla, Washington. A funeral service will begin at 10 a.m. Jan. 26, also at the funeral home, with Gordon Reoch officiating, followed by a reception. A concluding graveside service will take place at the Summerville Cemetery later that same day.



Brian was born Jan. 23, 1958, to Bernard M. and Phillis R. (Gerdes) Abell in La Grande, where he grew up. While in high school he became interested in funeral services, and after graduating he served a funeral director apprenticeship in The Dalles. He later graduated from San Francisco College of Mortuary Science, and in 1981 he became an Oregon licensed funeral director and embalmer. Brian was a funeral director and embalmer for 38 years, serving many families in several communities, including Portland, Prineville, Ontario, Pendleton, La Grande and Walla Walla. He was also active in community service, including volunteering as a hospice board member and president of the chamber of

commerce and the Rotary club in various communities.

Brian loved his family first and foremost and loved spending days with his dad, sons and his grandchildren. In his spare time he enjoyed the outdoors where you could find him accompanied by his four-legged best friend, Deke, either hunting, fishing, rafting or cruising around on his Honda S90. According to his family, Brian was a brave and adventurous soul with many stories to tell.

Survivors include his sons, Jared Abell, Trevor Abell and Court Abell; sister, Marvel Abell-Dement; 11 grandchildren; stepmother, Shelley Abell; and stepbrothers, John and Jerry Mclean.

He was preceded in death by his parents.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Blue Mountain Humane Society in care of Mountain View-Colonial DeWitt, 1551 The Dalles Military Road, Walla Walla, Washington. To share memories and sign Brian's online guestbook, visit www.mountainview-colonialdewitt.com.

Patrick J. Schaan

Formerly of La Grande

Patrick J. Schaan, 57, of Redmond and formerly of La Grande, died Jan. 11. He is survived by his children, Brendon, Keenan and Savanna; brother, Bob; and sisters, Catherine and Theresa. A graveside service will be held at 1 p.m. Jan. 19 at the North Powder Cemetery.

PUBLIC SAFETY REPORT

LA GRANDE FIRE DEPARTMENT

La Grande Fire Department responded to six calls for medical assistance and one carbon monoxide check on Wednesday and five calls for medical on Thursday.

LA GRANDE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Arrested: Alyssa Casey Harvill, 20, unknown address, was arrested on a Umatilla County warrant charging failure to appear in court on a charge of making a false report. She was also arrested on a charge of unlawful possession of methamphetamine.

Arrested: Robert Lee King, 22, unknown address, was arrested on a charge of second-degree criminal mischief.

Arrested: Christina Anne Cantor, 38, unknown address, was arrested on a Union County warrant charging failure to appear in court on a

charge of resisting arrest.

Arrested: Tyson Arthur Hancock, 42, Union, was arrested on a charge of fourth-degree assault, domestic.

Cited: Jack Colter Grant, 34, La Grande, was cited on a charge of second-degree theft.

UNION COUNTY SHERIFF

Arrested: Jeramie Lee Gillman, 41, unknown address, was arrested by the Milton-Freewater Police Department on two Union County warrants. The first warrant charged first-degree failure to appear in court and contempt of court. The second warrant charged failure to appear in court on a charge unlawful possession of methamphetamine.

Cited: Kaylie Brooke Thomas, 20, La Grande, was cited on a charge of misrepresentation of age by a minor.

Cited: Heather Joy Hawkes, 20, La Grande, was cited on a charge of use of an invalid license.

US shutdown stalls training, other prep for wildfire season

By Gillian Flaccus

The Associated Press

PORTLAND — Just two months after a wildfire wiped out Paradise, California, officials are gearing up for this year's fire season and fear the government shutdown could make it even more difficult than one of the worst in history.

The winter months are critical for wildfire managers who use the break from the flames to prepare for the next onslaught, but much of that effort has ground to a halt on U.S. land because employees are furloughed. Firefighting training courses are being canceled from Tennessee to Oregon, piles of dead trees are untended in federal forests and controlled burns to thin dry vegetation aren't getting done.

Although the furloughs affect only federal employees, the collaborative nature of wildland firefighting means the pain of the four-week-long shutdown is having a ripple effect — from firefighters on the ground to federal contractors and top managers who control the firefighting strategy.

State and local crews who need training classes, for example, are scrambling without federal instructors. Conservation groups that work with the U.S. Forest Service to plan wildfire-prevention projects on federal lands are treading water. Annual retreats where local, state and federal firefighting agencies strategize are being called off.

The fire season starts as early as March in the southeastern United States, and by April, fires pop up in the Southwest. Last

year's most devastating fire leveled the Northern California town of Paradise just before Thanksgiving, leaving just a few months to prepare between seasons.

"I think a lot of people don't understand that while there's not fire going on out there right now, there's a lot of really critical work going on for the fire season — and that's not getting done," said Michael DeGrosky, chief of the Fire Protection Bureau for the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

It's especially important with climate change making wildfire seasons longer, deadlier and more destructive.

DeGrosky was supposed to be teaching a course this week for firefighters who want to qualify for the command staff of a fire management team. But the class was canceled without instructors from federal agencies.

Similar classes were called off in Oregon and Tennessee, and others face the same fate as the shutdown drags on. President Donald Trump and congressional Democrats are at odds over funding for a border wall.

A dozen senators from Oregon, California, New Mexico, Washington, Colorado, Nevada, West Virginia and Michigan sent a letter this week to Trump warning that the shutdown would put lives at risk this coming fire season. Classes necessary for fire incident managers, smokejumpers and hotshot crews are in jeopardy in the near future, the senators said.

Smokejumpers parachute into remote forests to battle



WesCom News Service File Photo

An air tanker drops fire retardant along the leading edge of a wildfire burning near Bessie Butte southeast of Bend on July 22, 2018.

blazes not accessible by firefighters on the ground and hotshot crews are small groups of elite firefighters trained to battle the most ferocious flames.

The winter is also when seasonal firefighters apply for jobs, get the required drug tests and move to where they will train and work. In many cases, there's no one to answer the phone or process the applications, and some potential recruits may decide to work elsewhere to avoid the hassle.

"Even if the shutdown ends and we start hiring people, we will have missed the cream of the crop," DeGrosky said.

The U.S. Forest Service said in an email that the agency was committed to hiring for temporary and permanent firefighting positions and would continue critical training "to the extent feasible."

The first session of an apprenticeship program for wildland firefighters went ahead this week, Forest Service spokeswoman Katie O'Connor said.

"The agency is assessing and prioritizing the activities we are able to maintain while in shutdown status. We are unable to speculate on specific impacts while the government shutdown is ongoing and ever-changing," O'Connor said in a statement.

Conservationists and fire managers say there are other concerns.

Clearing and thinning projects and planned burns on federal land that could lessen fire danger by weeding out flammable debris also are largely on hold in California, Oregon and elsewhere. Private contractors say they have received letters telling them to stop the work.

There's already a backlog of such projects in federal forests in Oregon and Northern California, said Michael Wheelock, president of Grayback, a private

contractor in Grants Pass.

Intentional fires can only be set in a narrow winter window before temperatures and humidity falls — and that is rapidly closing, Wheelock said.

"Every week that goes by, it's going to start increasing the impact," he said.

Joyce McLean, who lost her and her husband's home in Paradise last November, supports Trump's push for a border wall but worries what will happen if firefighters aren't prepared for next time.

"I hope there are no more forest fires," said McLean, 74. "I wouldn't wish that on nobody."

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