

EOFF

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EOFF and helped coordinate the festival's films at the La Grande theater. Arnson wrote a letter to the Greulichs earlier in January asking to be trained in the theater's digital projection systems. The Granada's digital projection system allows films to be played at the highest quality and also record box office numbers for films from major companies. While the film festival shows only a few films each year that require box office recordings, the Granada's system gives the festival a wider swath of films to choose from. The letter, which was obtained by The Observer, outlines Arnson's extensive communications background with the Army National Guard and his appreciation for the film festival. "I have been diligent in the liaison position, ensuring the festival and Granada can host such an event without issue and with a profit to the Granada," Arnson wrote to the owners. EOFF was named one of MovieMaker magazine's "Coolest Film Festivals in the World" in 2017. It was featured in an hour-long segment on the OPB's State of Wonder last year. In 2018, actor and director Bruce Campbell, well-known for his starring role in the Evil Dead film franchise, held a Q&A in La Grande as part of the EOFF. Arnson, who has worked at the Granada since late 2000, said he appreciates what the EOFF brings to La Grande. "I think it's one of the best forums for new film and art in our region," Arnson said. "It's the best exhibition of independent film for this region. It's the best amalgam of live music, artists, bands and filmmakers. I love the film festival. It changed my life." Jennings said the Greulichs didn't seem concerned with Arnson's letter. "When we received the email, (which) was really dismissive of that heartfelt request, it was disheartening," Jennings said. Ian Clark, program director and co-founder of the EOFF, said the Gruelichs' decision was "extremely disappointing." Clark also said there has been very little communication between EOFF leadership and the Granada's owners. "I wish we could have had a sit-down meeting, if not a face-to-face conversation, then a phone call," Clark said. "Their decision kind of breaks my heart." Jennings, who is also a co-owner of hq, an event venue that hosts EOFF's after parties and a number of film screenings, said the Grana-

da severing its ties felt cathartic. "Every year's been kind of a challenge to coordinate, to get permissions (and) commitments or to get any type of additional marketing support (from the Granada)," he said. "It's been a great amenity to have for our festival, but it hasn't been a partnership in the way we had always wanted it to be." Clark, who is also an independent filmmaker, said the decision won't be the end of the EOFF. "It forces us to do what we've always done — innovate," Clark said. "EOFF will go on. We'll become a stronger organization." In 2019, Jennings said the EOFF will be looking to partner with a number of community businesses to take over the role of the Granada. Among the potential associates are Eastern Oregon University and Arts Center East. Using the event space at what was once the Mt. Emily Ale House will also be investigated. "All the cool downtown venues, bars, establishments have always reached out and said, 'If you ever need anything, we could maybe do a screening here or if you need a place to put music.' All those people are going to come in handy this year. We are really looking forward to mapping out whatever 10 years looks like." Jennings also hopes the Liberty Theatre will have its occupancy by then. Michael Jaeger, chairman of The Liberty Theatre Foundation board, said he could not commit to the Liberty having occupancy in time for the 2019 EOFF, set for October. Jaeger said the construction currently has an 18-month timeline, with an expected completion date of sometime in 2020. He also noted the foundation does not currently have funding to complete the construction. To be able to have its occupancy, Jennings said the theater most likely needs an HVAC system and bathrooms. If the historic theater has enough construction completed, Jennings said the EOFF can be creative with the space. "People can sit on 200 bean bag chairs," he said. Even if the Liberty Theatre has occupancy or the McKenzie Theatre at EOU can be used by the film festival, to get a digital projector that can play films "the way they need to be shown," as Jennings puts it, the EOFF will need to fundraise between \$50,000 and \$100,000. No other organization in La Grande has a high-end digital projector other than the Granada. "That's probably something we're going to fall short on this



Observer file photos

Top: EOFF director Christopher Jennings sits with actor and producer Bruce Campbell at the 2018 EOFF event "Brunch with Bruce." Bottom: The Granada Theatre is filled on opening night of the EOFF in 2018.

year," Jennings said. "We'll have to (use) Blu-rays and other ways to show these films." Jennings said the EOFF will be organizing a comprehensive fundraising campaign, but he said they will also need the help of civic organizations in La Grande. "I've submitted a county grant (application). I'm working on a county ask for operational funding," Jennings said. "I'm submitting a city ask for operational funding, again, even though they'll direct me to the chamber." He plans to make a public comment at a city council meeting in February. Currently, EOFF is run by Jennings, Clark and a team of

volunteers. The festival doesn't have any full-time staff. "If we want this film festival to grow and stick around and do what it can do, then we've got to figure out how to invest in it," Jennings said, noting the EOFF could co-fund a position with matches from the city, county and perhaps Eastern Oregon University. In 2020, Jennings hopes the Liberty Theatre will be up and running, and he said the EOFF is written into the contract of the Liberty, making it the only organization that can show first-run films at the theater. While Jennings and the EOFF team hope to utilize more commu-

nity spaces and partners in 2019, Jennings didn't shy away from criticizing the Greulichs' decision. "Because the owners haven't taken the time to investigate what we are, they don't even have a clear idea of what the community sentiment behind the festival is," Jennings said. "To make that decision from Portland or California or wherever they're at, without really considering the community they serve, was irresponsible. I hope the community lets them know that." *For updates and to support the 10th annual Eastern Oregon Film Festival, go to eofilmfest.com.*

LADD

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north side of the freeway, will be for cars only. "It will be the fast lane," Strandberg said. Truck drivers will be allowed to use the two lanes already in place while drivers of cars will have the option of using any of the three lanes. The lane is intended to reduce congestion on the steep Ladd Canyon incline. "It will help cars get around slow-moving trucks," Strandberg said. Another plus of the expanded space is it should reduce the number of times Ladd Canyon has to be closed due to truck accidents blocking traffic. "We will be able to let traffic get around while everything is being cleared," Strandberg said. The removal of the bridge near the western entrance into Ladd Canyon, which motorists can use to get from the eastbound to the westbound lanes of I-84, and replacing it with a culvert will reduce the amount of ice drivers encounter. "Replacing the bridge with a culvert) will reduce the accumulation of ice that currently plagues the overpass structure by providing an insulating layer of earth between the culvert and freeway surface above it," Strandberg said. The culvert will be easy to drive through. "It will basically be a tunnel under the freeway," Strandberg said.

ODOT's plan also calls for the I-84 pavement from La Grande to Ladd Canyon to be upgraded. "The project will create a safer, smoother, more efficient freeway and help reduce challenges that result from slow-moving commercial vehicles, slick roads and crashes," Strandberg said. Non-road work as part of the project includes stream improvements and culvert upgrades for Brush and Ladd creeks, he added, which will improve fish passage along these waterways. Work on the Ladd Canyon Freight Improvement Project began this week. Construction signs are being set up and other preparations for road work are being made at the future work site. Motorists can expect some lanes of traffic in the construction area to be briefly closed in January and February. However, at no time will all lanes of eastbound or westbound lanes be closed due to roadwork. Beginning in March, lane closures will be longer but there no plans to shut down all eastbound or westbound lanes at any time during the project. Work is expected to be finished by the end of 2020, Strandberg said. Bicyclists and pedestrians will be prohibited in the construction zones for much of the project because space on the shoulder of I-84 in road work areas will be very limited due to the presence of roadwork equipment, Strandberg said.

URA

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application process can deter applicants. Agency Member Jim Whitbeck agreed the CFP is not an ideal program and needs restructuring. The agency is not equipped to be a financial institution, he said, but the program "is the difference between someone having food on their table and not." It's a valuable resource for business owners, but there are flaws. Agency Member Justin Rock said getting rid of the CFP program would mean there isn't anything to show for the URA. Rock stressed any drastic change to the program should be more thought out than what they were able to do at the retreat. Another major topic of conversation is the transparency — or lack thereof — of the businesses the Buxton project brings in.

Buxton, a customer analytics company based in Fort Worth, Texas, is under a three-year contract with the URA to provide information on businesses that are a good fit for La Grande. The city is entering its third year of the contract in 2019. Buxton assesses local needs and identifies potential recruits for the area. Each year of the contract, the city receives a new list of 20 potential businesses. Economic Development Director Christine Jarski, who was not able to attend Wednesday night's meeting, is confined to confidentiality agreements regarding the businesses identified. Howard said she understands the confidentiality agreements — it's common in business negotiations — but she "hates not knowing what's on the list." She pointed out the city pays \$50,000 per year for the names on the list, yet the URA cannot know the specifics of what it's paying for. Whitbeck said there was a committee formed during the first year of the contract made up of local business owners who weighed in on the list. Whitbeck, who owns Blue Mountain Outfitters, served on this committee and said he believed it was definitely needed. However, the committee was disbanded, and he couldn't figure out why. "I'm not prepared to answer that," Strobe said. The URA members discussed how having a representative involved in the discussions who knows what the city is looking for when it comes to economic develop-

ment — even if he or she couldn't talk about it to the other agency members — would go a long way in securing their confidence in this \$50,000 investment. Howard stressed it was not that the agency did not trust Jarski, but more that the members want multiple people involved in the decisions about the city's economic development. Strobe argued except for that one representative, the agency members still wouldn't know the specifics of what's happening. "At least you'd know there's a process taking place," Whitbeck said.

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To everyone who said a prayer, made a phone call, babysat our critters and our house. For getting the house set up with any medical things to help take care of me, the food, the decorations, the benefit dinner, the volunteers and auction, the cards and all the visits. I love my family and friends and I don't have the right words to begin to tell you all how very blessed I am to have each of you in my heart.

Love and many thanks,
Cody and Dawna Miller

THANK YOU

