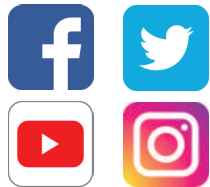


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House committee to review SAR state funding bill

Union County search and rescue would benefit

By Amanda Weisbrod
The Observer

The state House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Services is set to review a bill directing the Oregon Office of Emergency Management to research and recommend state funding options for county search and rescue programs by 2021. Although the bill mandates only exploring funding sources and not allocating them just yet, it is still a step forward for SAR programs statewide, according to Union County SAR Lieutenant Nick Vora.



Vora

If House Bill 2503 passes, Vora said, it would be especially helpful to rural search and rescue programs because they are forced to operate on small budgets based on low populations. “(This bill) could help us significantly,” said Vora, who has been involved with SAR since 2013. “Even funding to the tune of \$2,500 — that might sound like peanuts, but that would essentially double our funding.”

Union County’s search and rescue team is currently composed of about 40 volunteers who give their time and supply their own equipment in order to save lives. In 2018, SAR received 30 calls, 23 of which



Courtesy photos

LEFT: SAR volunteers participate in avalanche rescue training near Anthony Lakes. RIGHT: Instructor Brent Kerns, center, oversees training for the recovery of avalanche victims. Josh Cobb, left, and Mike Dunn have located a buried transceiver and probed successfully.

resulted in SAR “activation,” or the process of dispatching volunteers into the field. Because almost all of these volunteers are recreationally active in the area, they know the land well, giving their search and rescue efforts an edge.

“Having local people on our search and rescue team is a huge

asset to us. Search and rescue is big in areas like Eastern Oregon where a significant amount of our population enjoys outdoor recreation of all types,” Vora said. “When they have an emergency out there, we are the resource that is equipped and trained to

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Cove City Council debates sidewalk ordinance

By Max Denning
The Observer

In just his second meeting as mayor of Cove, Del Little established new rules for the public comment section of council meetings — as well as for councilors wanting to speak.

“The last meeting was not a pleasant situation. It had become a hostile environment,” Little said at Tuesday’s council meeting.

While the meeting included fewer interruptions and comments from attendees, members of the council, Little and Public Works Director Michael Brown continued to clash over Little’s proposed

sidewalk ordinance.

The ordinance Little drafted was the subject of much ire and debate among councilors at the January board meeting. The ordinance, which was not available to the public, would set up standards for anyone constructing a sidewalk regarding ADA accessibility and the sidewalk’s grade and width. In addition, it would set rules for who must repair a sidewalk in the case one gets damaged.

In January, Councilor Matt McCowan made clear his qualms with Little’s proposed ordinances. The council as a whole



Max Denning/The Observer

Mayor Del Little debates with the Cove City Council about a proposed sidewalk ordinance at the council meeting Tuesday.

offered a few criticisms, including worries that one line of the ordinance made it sound like all individuals must construct a sidewalk in front of their properties. Yet, when the ordinance was reintroduced by Little on Tuesday, no edits had been made.

Little told the council Tuesday

the line about constructing sidewalks was taken out of context and does not imply all property owners must construct sidewalks.

“No changes (will be) made until we receive input from all of the councilors,” Little said.

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Class to prepare youth for emergencies

By Dick Mason
The Observer

Teenagers in Union County will soon have the chance to play a role in community preparedness and resilience.

A new federally funded emergency preparedness class for youths age 13 to 19 will be offered free in April and May in La Grande. Part of the national My Preparedness Initiative (MyPI), the Oregon Youth Preparedness Initiative program is coordinated by Oregon State University.

“This could be the start of something really special,” said Lou Gerber of La Grande, who will co-instruct the class with his wife, Robin, and hopes the class will be continued after this year in Union County.



Gerber

Lou is a retired National Guardsman who served as a combat medic during a deployment to Iraq about 15 years ago and is an experienced CPR and first aid instructor. Robin is a longtime 4-H leader in Union County. The couple received extensive training on teaching the course from the Oregon Youth Preparedness Initiative program.

Robin Gerber said the class will provide an enormous boost in the event that there is an emergency.

“If there is a major disaster, we will have many youths who are trained to assist,” she said.

Students taking the class will learn how to extinguish small fires, conduct light search and rescue operations, set up medical treatment areas, assist emergency responders, identify hazards, reduce fire hazards in the home and workplace, help reduce survivor

stress, assist with crowd control, assist with evacuations and more.

Teens will have the chance to earn certifications in CPR, first aid and the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Community Emergency Response Team search training. Robin Gerber said these certifications will open doors for teens interested in pursuing careers as emergency responders.

“There are a lot ways (the skills taught in the class) can fit into the life of a young person,” she said.

This is the first year Oregon Youth Preparedness Initiative classes are being taught, and Union County is the only Eastern Oregon county taking part in the program.

Other counties where the class will be taught include Curry County, where Ruth Dixon, a cer-

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LGPD arrest woman for alleged child abduction

Observer Staff

A 31-year-old woman from Eureka, California, Sondra Dean, was arrested on two counts of child abduction by the La Grande Police Department Monday.

Dean was arrested late in the afternoon after the La Grande Police Department responded to a warrant it had received for her two hours earlier. The arrest warrant stated that Dean allegedly abducted two of her children and that they had been reported missing by the Humboldt County Sheriff’s Office, according to a La Grande Police Department news release.

Detectives from the La Grande Police Department then coordinated an immediate investigation in partnership with the Department of Human Services’ child welfare division after learning that Dean and the missing children were possibly in the La Grande area. During their investigation, LGPD detectives learned that Dean allegedly abducted the children from their father, who is the

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Senator Hansell sponsors more than 70 bills in 2019 session

By Max Denning
The Observer

Sen. Bill Hansell (R-Athena) might be in the super-minority in the Oregon Legislature, but don’t tell him that. The sixth-year Oregon senator has introduced more than 70 bills already, and the Legislature is in only its third week of the 2019 session.

Hansell said he is committed to serving his constituents in District 29.

The Oregon senator, now in his second term, has a legislative agenda that includes bills aimed at strengthening resources for protection against wildfires and farmland fires, offering Eastern Oregon counties with options to change property zoning, and helping rural Oregon cities have more options for electrical contractors.

Two bills for which Hansell is the chief sponsor, SB 291 and SB 292, would allocate more resources for potential air response to fires and also would grant “more flexibility” to the state in how to fight these fires, Hansell said.

Hansell is also cosponsoring a bill with Senate President Peter Courtney that would allow a number of Eastern Oregon counties to rezone land outside the urban growth boundary of any city or county. The bill’s description says: “Allows listed eastern Oregon counties that undertake economic opportunity analysis to designate up to 50 acres outside urban growth boundaries for industrial and other employment uses.”

Hansell explained that these laws

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



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