

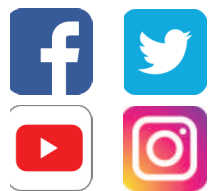
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Elgin's Opera House Youth Actors earn awards at nat'l festival

By Amanda Weisbrod
The Observer

In 2006, Elgin Opera House's new executive director Terry Hale and his wife, opera house board member Stephanie Hale, moved from Portland to Elgin to undertake the massive project of resurrecting the Opera House. In 2019, the Opera House Youth Actors group took home multiple awards from a national festival, evidence that the Hales' hard work over the past 13 years has paid off.

"When we first moved here, the Opera House was barely on the map," Terry said. "Now, going to the Junior Theater Festival and receiving such great recognition, there are people all over the country who have heard of Elgin, Oregon, and associate it with the theater."

OHYA attended workshops, watched performances from Broadway professionals and listened to inspirational talks from industry experts at the 2019 Junior Theater Festival West in Sacramento, California, Feb. 8-10. JTF pulls theater students ages 8-18 from all over the country in an annual celebration of performing arts. This year's event featured 42 groups, most of which were from metropolitan areas with large theater programs,



2019 OHYA performs their first number, "Fugue for Tin horns," from their abridged version of "Guys and Dolls, Jr." Courtesy photo

making OHYA's success even more notable.

This is the second time OHYA has traveled to Sacramento for JTF West, with their first visit in 2018 earning them the Most Inspirational Performance award. This year, the group's abridged performance of "Guys and Dolls Jr." did not disappoint — in fact, the troupe brought home several awards, including the Freddie G. Outstanding Performance award, which gave them the opportunity to perform their opening number, "Fugue for Tin horns," on stage for more than 2,000 festival attendees.

"I'm so proud of our kids," said Terry in a press release. "They've grown in so many ways and have proved to themselves that with hard work and determination, kids from small, rural communities can win big. I'm looking forward to expanding the OHYA program into Wallowa Valley and other communities so that more kids can experience the confidence and countless other benefits that come from being involved in the arts."

Abigail Hale, Terry and Stephanie's daughter, won the Freddie G. award for best choreography and her work

as OHYA's junior choreographer. Abigail hopes to continue her passion for theater after high school.

"I heard my name and just started crying because I felt like all of my hard work finally paid off," said 16-year-old Abigail, who is a sophomore attending school online. "JTF has really opened up my experience as a choreographer, and all of my opportunities have grown. Now I can say I'm an award-winning choreographer at such a young age."

Hunter Adams, a 15-year-old, won the Freddie G. award for best choreography and her work



Abigail Hale and Hunter Adams pose with their individual awards. Courtesy photo

Sen. Hansell introduces bill La Grande officials lobbied

By Max Denning
The Observer

When the City of La Grande lost a city employee who worked as its electrical inspector — reviewing building and construction plans for compliance with City ordinances — it had trouble finding a qualified replacement.

"Frankly, it is difficult to compete with the private sector for trade professionals with the required licenses that are needed to become certified as an electrical inspector," City Manager Robert Strope said.

So when Sen. Bill Hansell (R-Athena) and Rep. Greg Barreto (R-Cove) held a discussion with local officials in last July at Eastern Oregon University, officials from La Grande broached the idea of passing a state law allowing cities to hire con-

tractors to do electrical inspections. Hansell now has introduced Senate Bill 314, which would do just that.

SB 314's catch line states the bill "allows municipalities with building inspection program that includes administration and enforcement of electrical code to use contracted electrical inspectors."

The bill makes it clear that municipalities could still have a full-time electrical inspector, and has only a few lines of amendments to the statutes that currently set the legal standards for electrical inspections — ORS 479.530, 479.820 and 479.855.

The major change can be found on pages three to four of SB 314, where it adds a clause in a statute: "A city or county may use employees or contract for electrical inspection services to carry out the county or city responsibilities regarding inspections under the electrical safety laws."

When Strope originally contacted the state about using a contractor for electrical inspections, the state told him that was illegal.

"The reason provided to us was that we could not delegate government functions to contractors," Strope said. "Because the decisions made by building officials are both regulatory and discretionary, those decisions must be made by government employed personnel."

That put the city in a bind.

See **Bill** / Page 5A



EOU student Taylor Ann Skramstad is Miss Rodeo Oregon 2019. Courtesy photo

From horsemanship to law school, Miss Rodeo Oregon aims high

By Trish Yerges
For The Observer

The coronation of Eastern Oregon University student Taylor Ann Skramstad as Miss Rodeo Oregon 2019 was celebrated Feb. 9 at Wildhorse Resort & Casino in Pendleton.

Money raised at the event's silent and live auctions will help her to pay for costs incurred as she performs her honored duties during the year.

As Miss Rodeo Oregon, Skramstad will be eligible to compete in the week-long Miss Rodeo America Pageant, which will be held in December in conjunction with the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, Nevada. Skramstad will

compete against other reigning state rodeo queens in the areas of horsemanship, appearance and personality.

Skramstad's 2019 schedule as Miss Rodeo Oregon will include thousands of miles of travel throughout the state, representing Oregon, its rodeo committees and the Professional Cowboys Association.

"Miss Rodeo Oregon is something that I've dreamed of since I was young," Skramstad said. "My dreams have finally come true, and it's a lot of work. I'm really excited to represent my favorite sport and the state that I love and all the cowboys and cowgirls. It's

See **Rodeo** / Page 5A

Imbler School District plans barn raising

By Dick Mason
The Observer

The Imbler School District will soon have the extra building space needed for it to more effectively maintain and repair its buses.

The school district is preparing to construct a new, larger bus barn. Materials for the construction are expected to cost about \$50,000. Bids for the project have been submitted and one should be awarded to a firm later this month, said Imbler School District Superintendent Angie Lakey-Campbell.

The new bus barn will be 3,300 square feet, significantly larger than the school district's present facility, which is not large enough to house a standard-size school bus. This means that when maintenance work is done on a bus, only about 75

percent of it fits inside the building. "We really can't do maintenance work on the buses now (because part of the bus would) be out in the weather," Lakey-Campbell said.

The new bus barn, which will be about 45 by 75 feet, will be large enough to easily fit an entire school bus into. It will be used primarily for bus maintenance and repair. The site will also have a large metal lean-to that will protect four to five buses from the elements.

A portion of the new bus barn will be used to store paper products including paper towels and copy paper. This will allow the school district to purchase paper projects in greater bulk, enabling it to save money, Lakey-Campbell said. Currently the school district purchases paper products every month of the school year, since it does not have space to store them.

The new bus barn will be built

in an empty space north of Imbler High School. The school district rents its current bus barn, which is on Esther Street east of where the new one will be constructed.

Lakey-Campbell said she hopes the bus barn will be installed by the end of summer.

A second project on the school district's docket is the renovation of its concession stand, which is located about 10 feet outside the main entrance of the high school gym. The district plans to add a wall oven and replace its aging dishwasher, refrigerator and cabinets.

The wall oven will be much more convenient since presently food has to be cooked in another part of the high school and then brought to the concession stand, Lakey-Campbell said.

She said it would be ideal if the concession stand work was completed before the start of the 2019-20 school year. ■

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