



Courtesy photo

The 2019 OHYA cohort poses with their awards after winning in multiple categories.

## OHYA

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old sophomore at La Grande High School, won best performance by a male actor for his performance as the “Guys and Dolls” character Sky Masterson and was praised by adjudicators for his “old school musical theater charm.” Adams dreams of starring on Broadway one day, and judges agreed he has the potential to get there. “Winning the award for best male actor at JTF made me feel like I accomplished something that would really help me do what I want to do in my future,” he said. “After our adjudication, Steven G. Kennedy, a Broadway choreographer, came up to me and told me that I have what it takes to make it on Broadway.”

Adams said Terry is responsible for getting him to join OHYA in the first place at the group’s conception two years ago, and he is thankful for Terry “giving (him) the chance to show what (he) can do and to prove (himself).” Adams has always known he wanted to do something with music, but he didn’t know what exactly until his grandmother took him to see “Annie,” his very first musical, at the Elgin Opera House when he was 5 or 6 years old. “Everything from the set to the music, to the acting, to the choreography... everything about the stage felt right to me,” he said. “The Opera House (now) means family to me. I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else even in the roughest of times.”

Terry said he couldn’t emphasize enough how “extraordinary” it was for Abigail, Adams and the entire group to win these awards. “These kids really do put their entire heart and soul into their art,” he said. “It’s not something they do just for fun. It’s something they do because they have a passion and a discipline for the art form.” In the middle of working on “Guys and Dolls Jr.” for JTF, OHYA put together a holiday musical show as a fundraiser. Each member of the 22-person group had to raise about \$2,000 to cover the cost of the trip to Sacramento. In preparation for JTF, they rehearsed from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. every Saturday in December and January at the Elgin Opera House to

learn the show, practice focus and gain stamina. “We worked hard for what we wanted to do and we had fun while doing it,” said Adams. “This whole experience has opened my mind to knowing I can do theater while having fun with something that I love without feeling like I’m working hard, but knowing that I am.” Terry said he hopes to take OHYA to JTF again next year, but it might be difficult to make that happen without grant money. “It’s a lot of work. It’s very challenging from both the artistic perspective and the logistical one,” he said. “At the very end (of the fundraising effort for the 2019 trip), we received a grant for \$10,000 from Cycle Oregon. It was really an amazing gift. We’ll have to send them a big thank-you and show them what they were able to do with that money.” OHYA features actors from cities across Union County and surrounding areas including Baker City and Pendleton. The ability to bring people to Elgin from the entire Northeast Oregon area is something special indeed, according to Terry. “The Opera House is definitely a beacon for Elgin itself,” he said. “The Friends of the Opera House, our arts program, is a beacon for the greater community at large.” Terry sees the Opera House as a large part of Elgin’s identity. Adams agrees that, without it, the local arts scene would be missing out.

“The Opera House brings something new and different to the community. Sure, the high school(s) and the college have theater, but the Opera House brings the whole community together, not just students,” he said. “I believe that without the Opera House, a lot of kids like me wouldn’t even try to audition or would even have a love for theater.”

To join OHYA, actors ages 8-18 must attend the Opera House’s summer camp. Information can be found at [elginoperahouse.com](http://elginoperahouse.com). The Opera House’s next production, “Mamma Mia!,” will take place from April 5-27. Purchase tickets at the website above or contact Carol Buckley at 541-663-6324 or [tickets@elginoperahouse.com](mailto:tickets@elginoperahouse.com). ■

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## BILL

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With less financial resources than private companies, hiring a certified electrical inspector was difficult. According to the job posting website Zip Recruiter, the average annual salary for an electrical inspector is \$65,211. “Without the option of contracting out the services, we were not sure we would be able to continue to provide electrical inspections for La Grande and Union

County,” Strobe said. While city officials were searching for a new electrical inspector and also hoping the state law would soon change, La Grande received some help from the state. “The Building Codes Division was able to help us by providing inspection services for a number of months, but that was only a temporary solution,” Strobe said. Last month, Hansell’s SB 314 was referred to the Senate Committee on Business and General Govern-

ment. Hansell said the bill is important for helping rural cities and counties. “In rural Oregon, there isn’t a big enough community to have a full-fledged department for all the electrical and plumbing inspections,” Hansell said. Strobe has high praise for the bill. “The bill proposed by Senator Hansell would resolve the issue and provide the flexibility for smaller communities to continue to provide needed inspection ser-

vices with either an employee or a qualified contractor,” Strobe told The Observer. ■

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## RODEO

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hard to describe how great an honor it is.” Skramstad, 23, is the eldest child of Scott and Kelly Skramstad of Umapine, a rural community about 10 miles northwest of Milton-Freewater. She and her younger siblings, a brother and two sisters, have enjoyed ranch life on the Lazy SK Quarter Horse Ranch, where they raise and train performance quarter horses. One chestnut quarter horse born on the ranch has been her loyal mount through much of her rodeo career. “My quarter horse’s registered name with the American Quarter Horse Association is SK Zans ‘Foxy’ Command,” said Skramstad. “She’s out of our first crop of horses on our ranch, so we’ve had her since she was born. She’s 19 now, and she’s been my horse since I was 10 years old.” She and Foxy have competed in countless rodeos over the years and won more than 20 belt buckles together in junior events and at the collegiate level. As a member of the Walla Walla Community College’s rodeo team, Skramstad and Foxy competed in team roping, barrel racing and breakaway roping. “It is not typical for one horse to do so many events,” she said. “You usually have different horses for different events, but Foxy is a rock star. She was my main mount in the grand entry

when I was a Pendleton Roundup princess in 2017.” Growing up in rural Eastern Oregon, Skramstad has participated in 4-H and Future Farmers of America and represented her local riding organizations and PRCA rodeos. She was elected as the Milton-Freewater Pioneer Posse Princess in 2010 and as their queen the following year. Her accolades also include representing two of the Big Four Rodeos at the Walla Walla Fair, plus serving as the 2012 Frontier Days Queen and as the 2017 Pendleton Round-Up Princess. These achievements led to her August 2018 participation in the Miss Rodeo Oregon Pageant, held in conjunction with the Clackamas County Fair and Canby Rodeo. There she won in the categories of horsemanship, personality, appearance and photogenic qualities. “The night of my coronation at the pageant was the most memorable,” she said. “I was having fun and felt

relaxed, and I knew I had done the best I could do.” Presently, Skramstad is a junior at Eastern Oregon University with a dual enrollment at Oregon State University. She is majoring in agricultural science and minoring in political science. As a collegiate athlete, she is on the EOU Spirit Squad and is a member of both the cheerleading squad and dance team. Her extracurricular activities also include membership in the Agricultural Technical Club. Skramstad anticipates graduating from EOU in 2020, but if she wins Miss Rodeo America, her duties will push graduation off another year. Following graduation, she aspires to attend the University of Idaho College of Law in Moscow to obtain a law degree. Her long-term goals include running for a seat on the Oregon State Senate to advocate for Oregon agriculture and Eastern Oregon. ■

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