

Tigers in trophy talk



THE OBSERVER

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Local counties ask for forest exemption, 2A

Weekend

Good day to our valued subscriber Maggie Lamont of La Grande

Local educators facing more classroom disruptions

By Dick Mason
The Observer

The office of La Grande Middle School Principal Kyle McKinney is a bit utilitarian yet unquestionably comfortable and inviting.



McKinney

The office's features include a window providing an expansive view of the LMS commons, living-room quality chairs and a table with a Rubik's Cube, a Newton's cradle and snacks.

The table is a tool McKinney uses to bring out the best in students who have just had emotional outbursts or other behavior issues in school. It is there that McKinney calms students and prepares to get them back on a path to success.

McKinney has these students sit at the table for five or 10 minutes to let their emotions cool while he does busy work on his computer. Then he joins the student at the table, not to deliver a stern lecture but to spark a conversation addressing what just happened.

"It is collaborative problem solving. I don't tell them what to do. We try to find multiple solutions (to the behavior) issue," McKinney said.

Unfortunately, McKinney has had to have an increasing number of collaborative problem solving sessions with students in recent years. He and educators throughout the La Grande School District and the state are seeing an increasing amount of incidents of disruptive behavior. The findings of a new report by the Oregon Education Association, "A Crisis of Disrupted Learning," makes this point abundantly clear. The report details what teachers and members of the community shared at 14 public forums throughout the state.

"Over the past three years, OEA members have told more and more stories about extreme behaviors in Oregon schools. These behaviors have made classrooms feel unsafe for students and educators, and everyone is feeling their impact," the OEA report states in its introduction.

Scott Carpenter, the La Grande School District's director of curriculum and Title I programs, said the statewide problem the OEA report addresses also applies to his school district.

"We are not unlike any Oregon school district (with regard to this issue)," Carpenter said.

See **Behavior** / Page 5A



Observer file photo

The Liberty Theatre, built in 1910, was placed on the National Register of Historic places in 1999.

EOFF and historic theater consider continuing partnership

Both the Liberty Theatre Foundation and the film festival hope to bring community together for the arts

By Amanda Weisbrod
The Observer

The Liberty Theatre Foundation held a board meeting Tuesday night to discuss updates on the construction of the historical Liberty Theatre on Adams Avenue and its ongoing relationship with Eastern Oregon Film Festival, the largest showing of independent film in the region.

Michael Jaeger, board president of the nonprofit foundation, said the City of La Grande has accepted the theater's overall construction plan, which includes architectural layouts for the lobby and facade, or the face of the building, and a contract for repairing the roof.

"We're feeling pretty good about phase one," Jaeger said. "We still have some grants to write, but we're confident to make a big impact on the refurbishing of the theater."

The foundation hoped to open the theater by the end of this year, but Jaeger said 2020 is more likely.

"We're anticipating we will be open some time next year," he said. "There are still some grant organizations that are interested out there, and it usually takes several months to go through the process of applying and receiving grants."



Observer file photo

This chandelier, which remains today, was the theater's original light fixture installed during the early 19th century.

See **Liberty** / Page 5A

Cove homicide arrest made

By Cherise Kaechele
The Observer

An arrest has been made in the November homicide of Loretta Williams.

According to a press release from the Union County Sheriff's Office, Ronald D. Lee, 71, was arrested on a charge of murder by the Northeast Oregon Regional SWAT team at 9 a.m. Thursday.

Lee and Williams were married until July 2018, according to See **Cove** / Page 5A

Census staff present to commissioners

By Cherise Kaechele
The Observer

Ken Wisdom, the chief petitioner for Union County's Second Amendment ordinance, asked the commissioners to approve the updated version of the ordinance that was passed in November 2018.

On Wednesday, the commissioners heard from Wisdom who said the passed ordinance was written in 2016. The updated one he presented to them was from 2018.

Wisdom said the significant changes include changing the county to a Second Amendment Sanctuary county. The new ordinance also states the local governments have the "legal authority to refuse to cooperate with state and federal firearm laws that violate (Second Amendment) rights."

Wisdom also said the ordinance takes the sheriff "completely out of the equation."

He said Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen supports the Second Amendment, but if there were another to replace him who did not plan to uphold the amendment then this ordinance will be able to protect its community.

The commissioners will decide whether to pass the updated ordinance in a future meeting.

The 2019 census is also right around the corner and Sarah Bushore, the partnership specialist for Oregon, presented to the commissioners about what to expect — and how the county can help move the process along.

Bushore has been traveling across the state to tell the communities about the importance of the census, which occurs every 10 years.

See **Census** / Page 5A

Wallowa Resources hire takes on weed management

By Max Denning
The Observer

Wallowa Resources announced an addition to its team on Feb. 15, bringing the nonprofit land stewardship organization to 17 full-time employees. Kris Crowley, a Boise State graduate who was most recently working for seven years in Burns, is the new Wallowa Canyonlands Partnership Program Manager.

In a press release, Wallowa Resources outlined Crowley's

job: "Kris will be responsible for development, implementation and evaluation of invasive weed management strategies across the Canyonlands of Wallowa County. This involves coordination with numerous partners including public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private landowners to implement management across jurisdictional boundaries."

Crowley told The Observer the work Wallowa Resources does on

this topic is essential.

"The threat of noxious weeds and invasive species in general has no regard for jurisdictional boundaries, and thus it is key to be able to work with all parties toward effective solutions," Crowley said.

Wallowa Resources is based in Enterprise and its mission "is to empower rural communities to create strong economies and healthy landscapes through land stewardship, education, and job creation,"

according to its website.

Before beginning his job in Wallowa County earlier this month, Crowley worked in Burns for seven years for the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in the aquatic health program and the Burns Paiute Tribe as a fisheries biologist and program manager. He said the region clearly supports conserving the environment.

"Having only been in the position for a couple of weeks, it is all See **New Hire** / Page 5A

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Friday 26 Low 1-3" of snow
Saturday 37/27 Snow showers
Sunday 36/24 A little snow

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
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