

EOU falls to Warriors

La Grande first city in state to switch to daylight saving time, 2A



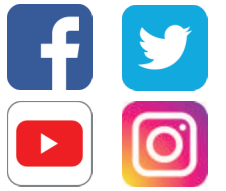
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Good day to our valued subscriber Janet Repanich of La Grande

Proposed state education spending plan is 'survival budget'

■ Educators hope funding will be boosted

By Dick Mason
The Observer

While the proposed \$8.8 billion education budget by top lawmakers for the 2019-21 biennium would allow the La Grande School District to continue operating without making any staff or program cuts, the school district would not be able to increase the services it provides students.

"It is a status quo budget," said La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza. "We are very hopeful that the state will find more funding for education."

Lance Dixon, superintendent of the North Powder School District, echoes the feelings of Mendoza.

"We will not be cutting (under the proposed budget), which is a great place to start

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Dolls bring joy to seniors with dementia

■ Local program helps relieve anxiety and stress in dementia patients by giving them baby dolls



Courtesy of Community Kindness

Liz Meyer presents a resident at Wildflower Lodge with a Memory Doll.

By Francisca Benitez
The Observer

Community Kindness of Eastern Oregon has been helping seniors with dementia by giving them dolls and other comforting items. The new non-profit has donated two dolls to seniors so far and has plans to donate at least two more. Both dolls were given to seniors at Wildflower lodge, but Liz Meyer, president of Community Kindness, said she hopes to place dolls with seniors all over the area.

Lifelike baby dolls dressed up in baby clothes and being treated like they are real babies might seem strange, but Meyer said the joy the residents have when they receive one is unique and special.

"They light up," she said. "It sends them back to the nurturing days of being a parent and brings back good memories."

Jenna Wright, assis-

tant executive director at Wildflower Lodge, agreed.

"It really is absolutely moving," she said.

Wright explained residents with dementia can often feel anxious or depressed, and the dolls can help relieve those feelings. The residents don't

To see them pouring on so much affection to this doll or talking to this doll (is) very sweet. It soothes them and makes them feel like they have a purpose."

— Jenna Wright, assistant executive director at Wildflower Lodge

necessarily believe they are holding a real baby, though.

"Just because someone has dementia doesn't mean they can't tell the difference between reality and a doll," she said. "A lot of our ladies and

men in the community, where they are in the progression in the disease, they are looking for their children. And if those children are infants in their mind, it can be very comforting to have that feeling of holding a baby and then combining it with the stimulation of soft blankets, the smell of baby powder, those kinds of sensory things."

Wright said often times residents with dementia become nonverbal, and a doll can encourage them to speak because they might speak to the baby, or want to show their baby to others. The doll also gives residents a sense of responsibility, which can help fend off feelings of depression and improve their quality of life.

Wright said the dolls are a way to help residents with dementia deal with the emotional hardships that come with the

See **Dolls** / Page 5A

Elgin earns grant for wastewater system

■ City to receive \$476.4k in funding for sewer project

By Amanda Weisbrod
The Observer

The City of Elgin received nearly \$500,000 in a Community Development Building Grant from Business Oregon, the state's economic development agency, for revitalizing the city's outdated wastewater system. Business Oregon announced the award recipients, which include Elgin, Willamina, John Day, Dayville and Grant County, on Feb. 28.

See **Elgin** / Page 5A



Duffy

A new life awaits for the Umatilla Chemical Weapons Depot

By John Notarianni
Oregon Public Broadcasting

HERMISTON — The giant metal lock is nearly rusted shut on bunker A-903 at the Umatilla Chemical Depot in northeastern Oregon. Once we're able to pry it loose and open the 10-foot tall concrete door, we're walking into a literal time capsule.

Inside the cavernous room, we find boxes and boxes of sealed U.S. Army biscuits, toilet paper, can openers and potable water. One box dates back to January 1964.

A-903 is only one of a thousand identical bunkers sprawling in every direction as far as the eye can see at the depot. The rolling hills of the bunkers can be seen for miles from Interstate 84. The entire site covers nearly 20 square miles; for comparison, that's about the size of the central Oregon city of Bend.

The depot was built in the ramp-up to World War II. For nearly 50 years, 7 million pounds of deadly chemical weapons such as sarin, mustard gas and VX nerve agent were stored here.

Bill Elfering is a Umatilla County commissioner and member of the Columbia Development Authority, the regional board working with the U.S. military to transfer the depot back to local control. He refers to the endless rows of bunkers as "igloos," a strangely cute name for rooms

built to house weapons of war. As we tour the site, Elfering points out how they were built in staggered rows.

"There was a concern that one might set the whole thing off and it would be like a string of firecrackers on the Fourth of July," he said. "All of a sudden it just went 'pop, pop, pop.'"

The staggered design was proven to work in 1944 when one of the igloos did explode, killing six people. At the time,

There was a concern that one might set the whole thing off and it would be like a string of firecrackers on the Fourth of July."

— Bill Elfering, Umatilla County commissioner

the depot's administrators were only able to tell who had been killed in the blast by having everyone on site clock out after the explosion and then tracking which time cards were left.

"I think the earth would still be shaking if they were to all go off," Elfering said.

A Time-Consuming Transition

It's been years since weapons were actually stored at the Umatilla Chemical Depot. A 1993 United Nations resolution banned all use and storage of chemical weapons. In

2004, a massive furnace was built on the property, and all of the weapons were incinerated. The depot officially closed in 2012.

The property was supposed to return to local control in 2015, but even today, much of the land remains in the hands of the military.

That could be about to change. After years of negotiations, locals are cautiously optimistic that much of the depot's land will soon be back in local control.

Dr. David Drotzman is the mayor of the nearby town of Hermiston. Hundreds of people from the neighboring community worked at the depot when it was in operation, and a lot of those jobs are gone.

"Were those some good paying jobs? Absolutely," he said. "And have they been replaced with the same level of jobs? Maybe, maybe not."

He's eager to see new development.

"Everybody's wish list is Costco. 'When can we get a Costco out there?'" he said. "I think any employer that provides an opportunity for good paying — above you know the state average wages."

The plan to redevelop the depot has several parts. The first phase, converting a portion of the land to a National Guard training center is already well underway. Portions of the land will also be designated as a

See **Depot** / Page 5A

Baker City man arrested after high-speed chase

WesCom News Staff

A Baker City man who led police on a high-speed vehicle chase through town Saturday was arrested later while hiding in a garage.

Ramon Nunez Jr., 36, of 1221 East St., was arrested about 6:21 p.m. at 2539 Ninth St.

Nunez is in custody at the Baker County Jail on charges of attempting to elude police, reckless driving, unlawful use of a motor vehicle, possession of a stolen vehicle, first-degree criminal trespass, two Malheur County warrants charging him with failure to appear and multiple traffic violations, including speeding, running a stop light and careless driving.

The brief chase lasted just a few minutes — from about 5:38 p.m. to 5:41 p.m. Saturday — Baker City Police Chief Dustin Newman said today.

The incident began when police saw Nunez driving about 70 mph in a 40-mph speed zone on Highway 7 north of David Eccles Road, a press release stated. He was driving a 2005 Chevrolet pickup truck pulling a small flatbed trailer.

Nunez turned on to Sec-
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Nunez

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