

A helping hand

■ CHD jail diversion program works to keep former inmates and at risk individuals out of the criminal justice system

By Amanda Weisbrod
The Observer

For some inmates of Union County Jail, the chances of breaking free from the vicious legal and justice system cycle grow exponentially with the help of the Center for Human Development's jail diversion program.

Taylor Brown, jail diversion team lead, said the program was established in 2016 to give inmates with behavioral health problems access to community services, as well as to keep people with mental illness who are at risk of incarceration out of jail in the first place. Last quarter, the team reports working with 48 of these individuals, which is the largest number they've served since the program's beginning.

"Our main goal is to get involved with individuals who have mental illnesses and end up stuck in the spiral of the justice system," she said. "We start providing intensive services that (the inmates) may not have known were available to hopefully reduce recidivism (the chance of reincarceration)."

Brown works with three other CHD employees on the jail diversion team: Kory Escobar, employment and education specialist; Louise



Amanda Weisbrod/The Observer

From left, Troy Davis, Louise Larvik, Taylor Brown and Kory Escobar run CHD's jail diversion team, which focuses on keeping community members with mental illness out of jail.

Larvik, nurse; and Troy Davis, case manager.

Together, they provide what Davis called "pre- and post-booking services" — such as individual therapy, group therapy, supported employment and education services, peer support, medicine management and more — to individuals in Union County who may be at risk for incarceration based on their mental illness, to current inmates with mental illness, and to recently released convicts who are trying to reintegrate into the community.

"We try to intervene before these individu-

als are sent to jail," Davis said. "But we also provide services to inmates after lodging at the Union County Jail."

As case manager, Davis assists former inmates with navigating health insurance, attending court hearings or parole meetings and applying to government programs so they can successfully stay out of jail.

"My role is to stabilize people to help them achieve the basics of living," he said. "There

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Unanswered questions in resignation, eligibility case at Enterprise

■ Record tampering part of claims brought forward by now former EHS Athletic Director

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

Details surrounding the chain of events that led to Enterprise High School Athletic

Director Larry Wells' decision to resign are still murky, as more than two months after he announced his resignation, and three weeks after it went into effect Feb. 22, there are many questions that still remain unanswered.

Wells announced his intentions to resign from his post in a letter to High School Principal Blake

Carlsen and the Enterprise School Board Jan. 4, citing actions by District Superintendent Erika Pinkerton and the school board that "contradict EHS and OSAA policies with respect to player eligibility, as well as inappropriate activities and questionable ethics."

Wells said the superintendent and the board mishandled the eligibility request of Enterprise senior Justus Even, who during his prep career played football, basketball and track for the Outlaws. The 18-year-old student left Enterprise High School in August, then returned in early September following a two-week stint enrolling in — and out of — three different Southern California schools. However, he was ruled ineligible to play sports upon his return for what would have been his senior year at Enterprise as he was considered a mid-year transfer by OSAA guidelines.

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Regional Forester decides to withdraw revised plan

By Cherise Kaechele
The Observer

Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage and other members of the Eastern Oregon Counties Association flew to Washington D.C. to speak to the head of the U.S. Forest Service. Through that exchange — and several other meetings — the group came back with some very good news for the Umatilla, Malheur and Wallowa-Whitman Forest Plan revisions.

The Regional Forester has been instructed to withdraw the draft Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement, and the three revised plans.

According to a press release from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Forest Service Acting Deputy Chief and Reviewing Officer Chris French issued a letter to Regional Forester Glenn Casamassa explaining his instruction.

"Many factors com-



Courtesy photo

Members of the Eastern Oregon Counties Association flew to Washington D.C. earlier this month to meet with Forest Service officials about the Umatilla, Malheur and Wallowa-Whitman Forest Plan revision. Yesterday, the Regional Forester instructed officials to withdraw the draft Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement, and the three Revised Plans.

pounded to produce revised plans that would be difficult to implement," French said. "While my review did not identify any specific violations of law, regulation, or policy, significant changes occurred over the 15-year time period of the planning process."

French added that a number of plan modifications occurred that were often

complex and not well understood, and there were frequent changes in organizations, stakeholders and key Forest Service staff. The revised plans also did not fully account for the unique social and economic needs of local communities in the area.

"The resulting plans are very difficult to understand, and I am concerned that

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School board gives LG superintendent high marks

■ Energy project almost complete

By Dick Mason
The Observer

The La Grande School Board is giving Superintendent George Mendoza high marks for his job performance.

The school board praised Mendoza in its annual evaluation letter, which was read by chair Joe Justice at the board's Wednesday meeting.

"You continue to meet and exceed our expectations of a superintendent," Justice said.

Mendoza's ability to use his communication skills to make connections were lauded in the early portion of the letter.

"You are an extremely effective communicator and this is evidenced in the relationships you have built with the board, your staff, the community and throughout the state," Justice read aloud.

Mendoza was also

praised for his continuing efforts to boost the La Grande School District. Justice in the letter noted Mendoza is always seeking to improve the district as shown through the development of a five-year maintenance plan; increased support for students and staff, which creates healthier school environments; commitment to hiring coaches for science, technology, engineering and math programs; and pursuing options to incorporate early learning programs.

The board's evaluation emphasized Mendoza's continuing support of Professional Learning Communities. PLCs, a program that began in the La Grande School District about seven years ago, brings together teams of educators to develop plans for addressing the individual needs of students.

Mendoza was also See School / Page 5A



St. Patrick Pot Of Gold With Rainbow PNG Picture/Clipart.info

How will you celebrate St. Patrick's Day?

By Francisca Benitez
The Observer

St. Patrick's Day is coming up on Sunday, making it the perfect time to examine the holiday's origin and find out what you can do locally to celebrate this weekend.

According to History.com, St. Patrick's Day is the celebration of the anniversary of St. Pat-

rick's death on March 17, 461. St. Patrick is the patron saint and national apostle of Ireland.

People would attend church in the morning and celebrate in the evening by drinking and dancing and feasting on traditional Irish cuisine. The holiday has long been recognized all over the world. In La Grande, there are a few events on

Saturday to celebrate.

Revelers can start the day with a charitable and healthy cause. The annual Shamrock Shuffle is a run that benefits United Way of Eastern Oregon. Participants will be able to choose between a 5K and a 10K run. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students, children and seniors. Children younger

than 5 can attend for free. Participants should meet at the Eastern Oregon Quinn Colliseum at 8 a.m. to register.

Ten Depot's annual St. Patrick's Day party will also be on Saturday. The menu features corned beef, cabbage, soda bread and red potatoes as well as Irish whiskey and Guinness. See Holiday / Page 5A

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Friday
29 Low
Mainly clear

Saturday
52/29
Partly sunny

Sunday
56/29
Partly sunny

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Email story ideas
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