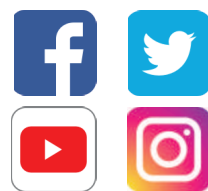




THE OBSERVER

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Good day to our valued subscriber Mack Stewart of La Grande

For sale: Us

By Suzanne Roig
WesCom News Service

The Observer's parent company, Western Communications, has put all seven of its newspapers and related real estate up for sale while it seeks protection from its creditors under Chapter 11 of the federal bankruptcy code.

However, company owners plan to seek investors in order to preserve local control of the chain's flagship paper, The Bulletin, as well as The Redmond Spokesman.

To market its newspapers, Western Communications has hired New Mexico newspaper merger and acquisition firm Dirks, Van Essen, Murray & April. The company owns five newspapers in addition to those in Redmond and Bend. They are the Baker City Herald, The Observer in La Grande and the Curry Coastal Pilot in Brookings, plus two newspapers in California, the Del Norte Triplicate in Crescent City and The Union Democrat in Sonora.

The company also has engaged brokers in the sale of its real estate holdings, company President John Costa said.

"All the real estate is for sale," Costa said. "We have valuable property."

The Union Democrat distribution facility on Camage See **WesCom** / Page 5A

Tackling truancy with compassion

By Dick Mason
The Observer

Many students who regularly skip school share a common link.



Wistocki

According to retired police detective Richard J. Wistocki of Illinois, these young people are on the run.

Wistocki, who is helping Northeast Oregon school districts deal with truancy issues, knows this firsthand after working extensively with youth during a three-decade law enforcement career.

"Many times students who are chronically absent are running to or away from something. The key is finding out what it is," Wistocki said during a recent meeting with educators and law enforcement officials in La Grande.

See **Truancy** / Page 5A

Blake Frost on his motorcycle, enjoying the mountain trail and its jump features. Contributed photo

New motorcycle trail opens at MERA

By Trish Yerges
The Observer

Imbler High School senior Blake Frost created a 1.3-mile-long motorcycle and mountain bike trail at the Mt. Emily Recreation Area that will be open for use this spring.

The new trail was part of Frost's senior project at Imbler High School, and he credits his mother, Jennifer Frost, for the idea. His project adviser, Nicholle Arnoldus, helped him stay on task, and his mentor, Mark Barber, one of the head trail builders for MERA, checked on his

progress and advised him along the way.

"I met Mark a couple of years ago during a Youth Safety Evaluation Program to get my riding certificate. After that I contacted him about being a mentor for my trail building project because I enjoy riding mountain bikes," Frost said.

Barber walked through the route with Frost during the planning and designing stages of the project, and discussed Frost's concept of what the trail features would include.

See **Trail** / Page 5A

Census process starts Monday

Official count begins in 2020

By Cherise Kaechele
The Observer

The first part of the long process of preparing for the next U.S. census will start on Monday. The census, which attempts to count every person in the United States, occurs every 10 years and goes toward helping the states, and its communities, with funding for programs like Section 8 housing and school lunch programs.

"These records are kept confidential for 72 years until they are released by the National Archives," according to Census.gov. "Every 10 years, when a new set of individual records is released, they are eagerly anticipated by genealogists, historians and researchers, creating an opportunity to increase awareness of census statistics."

Sarah Bushore, a U.S. Census Bureau partnership specialist, has been visiting counties in Oregon to present to the municipalities in preparation of the census. She said there are five part-

ner specialists who will be traveling around the state to inform and organize groups to help with the census.

Bushore said the first tier will be to present to the county commissioners throughout all the counties. The second tier will be to go to the city councils in cities with a population of 2,500 or more, and the third and final tier is to go to the community-based organizations in the communities.

The presentations will be to educate the public and find out which local organizations can help count "hard to reach" populations, such as senior citizens, homeless people, migrant workers, renters, those without internet access, the foreign-born and those who are younger than 5.

"Approximately 76 to 80 percent of the population will respond to the internet or toll-free phone number option," Bushore said. "The remaining people will be who we need to go after."

Invitations will go out



WesCom file photo

The homeless population is one of the more difficult groups to count during a census. Local organizations that believe they can find a way to count this group will be needed once the 2020 census begins.

to every household with instructions on how to respond to the census online. For a family of four with one person answering the questions, it should take 15 minutes.

The push for people to participate online is a big change this year, Bushore said. After the fifth attempt to get people to take the census online or over the phone, Bushore said, enumerators will visit the households who haven't responded in order to get the information.

"Our goal is to count everyone once, and only once

in the right place," she said. "We'll target senior citizen centers and have outreach programs there. But for the meantime, we're trying to get to the public officials. So they know what's coming."

Bushore said the data taken from the census is confidential. The numbers collected generate funding for the states. In 2016, according to a George Washington University report, Oregon received \$13.4 billion in funding based on census data.

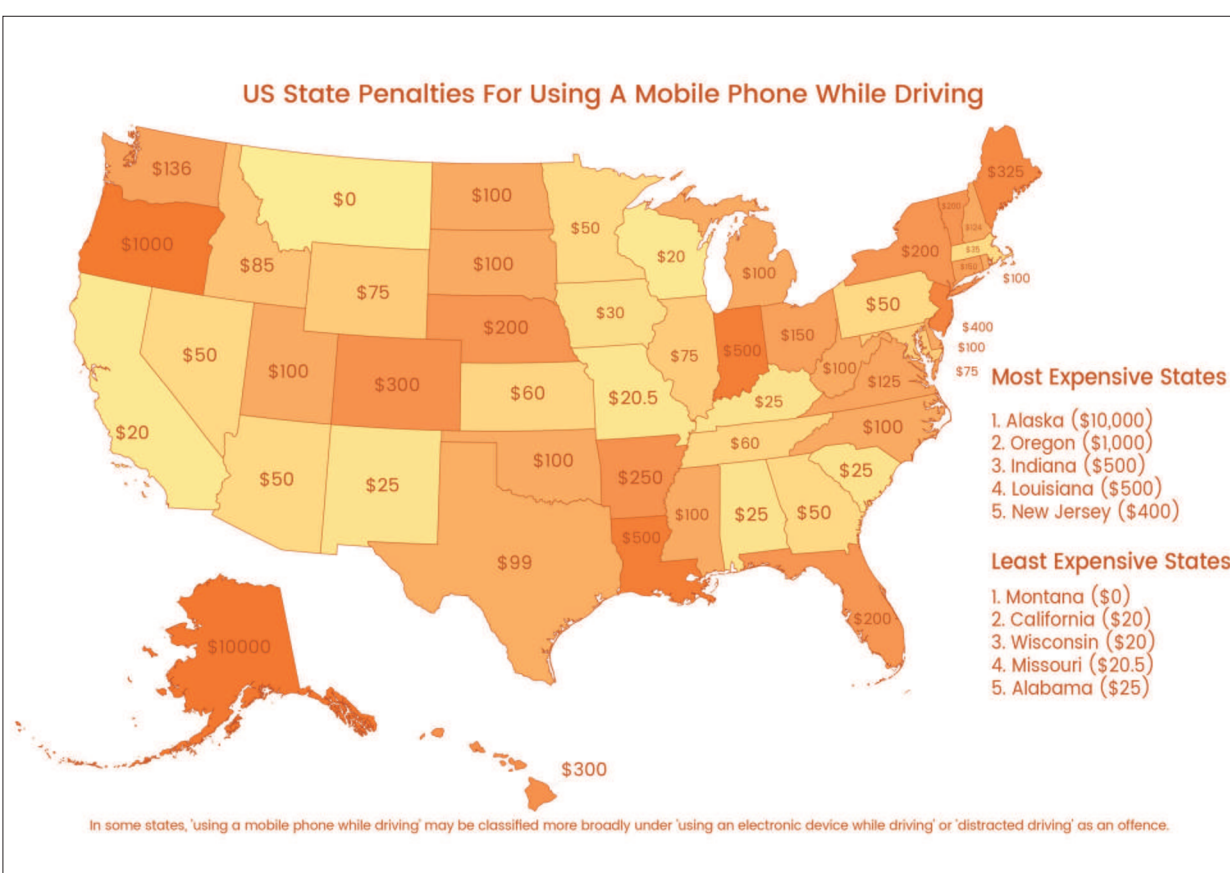
"That number equates to roughly \$3,200 per capita. See **Census** / Page 5A

Oregon distracted driving fines highest in US

By Francisca Benitez
The Observer

In a 2018 analysis comparing fines associated with different types of traffic offenses internationally, the British financial analysis company GoCompare found that Oregon charged the second highest fees in the country, second only to Alaska.

However, Alaska passed a bill in June 2016 that lowered the penalty, making Oregon the state with the highest penalty in the country. The initial texting and driving law in Alaska charged a first-time offender with a misdemeanor, up to a year in jail and a \$10,000 fine. In 2016, SB 123 was introduced

See **Fines** / Page 5A

GoCompare.com illustration

GoCompare's dataset illustrates driving fines in U.S. states and 31 countries.

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Friday 32 Low Partly cloudy
Saturday 56/34 Partly sunny
Sunday 58/38 Becoming cloudy

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Issue 38
2 sections, 16 pages
La Grande, Oregon

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