

Tigers drop home opener

Local sports-caster Ken Kennedy remembered fondly, 7A



THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

Weekend

FRIDAY-SUNDAY • April 5-7, 2019 • \$1.50

Good day to our valued subscriber Dale Witherspoon of Elgin

LG City Council passes utility licensing ordinances

Public comments vary from criticism of city spending to announcing awards for urban forestry improvements

By Amanda Weisbrod
The Observer

Wednesday evening's city council meeting in La Grande mainly focused on two ordinances — one for general utility right-of-way licensing and the other for renewing Oregon Trail Electric Co-op's franchise agreement — but heated public comments on city spending and praise for La Grande's urban forestry office were also present.

The utility license ordinance, which will establish "a licensing fee for utilities which are located within the City's rights-of-way" was first proposed in the fall of 2016, then the spring of 2017, but was tabled by the council, according to the ordinance packet provided by La Grande City Hall. The legislation defines "rights-of-way" as public streets, alleys and

highways that are owned or controlled by the city, so under the proposed ordinance, utility providers wanting to run lines or access those areas would pay a fee to the city.

City Manager Robert Strope compared the agreement between a city and its utilities providers to the lease agreement between a renter and the property owner.

"It's a common practice to enter into a franchise agreement that sets the parameters for (utility providers') operation in the right-of-way, and part of that is a franchise fee," he said. "Think about it like you're renting an apartment and you have a lease agreement, and it tells you what you can do with the apartment and if something breaks it outlines who has to fix it. A franchise agreement is really similar to that."

Under this ordinance, which passed unanimously Wednesday night, utilities providers must apply for a license to operate in right-of-way areas, and are expected to pay a 7 percent fee to the city based on gross revenue. Utilities subject to this fee include electric, gas, general communications, water, sanitary sewer, garbage and others. Cable providers,



Photo by Stu Spence, La Grande Parks & Recreation director

Members of the La Grande Rotary Club were honored at Wednesday's meeting for their urban forestry project of replacing the crab apple trees in the yard of Art Center East in La Grande with golden ginkgo trees.

meanwhile, will pay only a 5 percent fee, as mandated by the FCC.

However, this license fee is "reduced by any franchise fee paid by the utility," according to the packet. For example, because La Grande's gas and electric utilities already pay a 5 percent franchise fee, they will see only a 2 percent increase (two cents per dollar) in their payments in order to reach the 7 percent fee outlined by this ordinance. Water, sewer, telephone and telecom providers will not experience a fee increase because they already pay a 7 percent franchise fee.

In a story published on Nov. 21, 2016, The Observer reported OTEC

administrators wrote an editorial to the paper concerning this rise in operating costs should the ordinance pass. At the next regular session of the city council on Dec. 14, 2016, during the ordinance's second reading, The Observer reported "packed council chambers and passionate public statements" as this proposed ordinance "caused citizens to be as vocal as (the mayor) can remember," in a story published on Dec. 16, 2016.

But the second reading of the 2019 utilities licensing ordinance did not cause the same uproar.

Strope said this is because the

See LGCC / Page 5A

UC Fair Association requests help from county

By Dick Mason
The Observer

The Union County Fair Association is asking for help from Union County in paying its liability insurance premium.

UCFA President Amy Horn, an Observer employee, made the request at a meeting of the Union County Board of Commissioners Wednesday. She said the UCFA pays \$7,400 annually for its portion of liability insurance under the county's policy and explained that financial assistance would help the Union County Fair Association complete badly needed maintenance.

"We are facing some challenges on the grounds this year that require immediate attention for the safety of those who attend the fair yearly and use the

See Fair / Page 5A

Nonprofit builds beds for children in need

Saturday craft fair benefits Blue Mountain chapter of Sleep in Heavenly Peace

By Francisca Benitez
The Observer

On Saturday there will be a fundraiser at the Riviera Activity Center for the Blue Mountain chapter of Sleep in Heavenly Peace, a nonprofit that builds free beds for children who need them.

The Blue Mountain chapter of Sleep in Heavenly Peace was established in January and isn't yet active. Elgin residents Katie and Pete Trick are co-presidents.

The fundraiser is a craft fair, and there will be a raffle with prizes from local businesses as well as vitits with the Easter Bunny from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. There will be a display with one of the beds that Sleep in Heavenly Peace builds,

and the Tricks will be there to answer questions about the organization.

The Tricks said they personally know Luke Mickelson, who originally created the nonprofit in 2012 in Twin Falls, Idaho, and realized the mission of the organization could benefit Eastern Oregon.

"We started looking around and we saw there was a big need to take care of kids in the town and the whole county," Pete said.

For many families, children's beds are a luxury, leaving many kids sharing with their siblings or their parents — some even just sleep on the floor.

Sleep in Heavenly Peace's motto is "No kid sleeps on the floor in my town." There are now 137 chapters of the organization in the U.S. The organization builds the beds with the help of volunteers and delivers them to homes complete with mattresses and bedding — all for free.

Mickelson was featured in CNN's Heroes series in December. In the CNN report, he said he started the organization because he met children who were sleeping on the floor in his community. At the beginning, the nonprofit consisted of a



Photos courtesy of Katie Trick

Sleep in Heavenly Peace has delivered over 4,000 beds since its founding in 2012. BOTTOM: Volunteers for Sleep in Heavenly Peace build beds.

group of friends who made and delivered 11 beds. Now the organization, which has no paid staff members, has delivered more than 4,000 beds.

The Tricks said when they established the Blue Mountain chapter in January, they took a trip to Twin Falls to the Sleep in Heavenly Peace headquarters to build beds and deliver them to families. They described their visit as a heartwarming experience.

"When you take the time to go deliver it to these kids and set it up, they climb up on their bed and they don't want to come down. That's when it gets you the most," Pete said.

For his full-time job, Pete owns and operates Red Roof Construction, where Katie also holds a full-time position as an HR manager. The couple has been married for seven years and is originally from Northern

See Beds / Page 5A

Ethics commission investigates Enterprise's executive session actions

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

The Oregon Government Ethics Commission is moving forward with an investigation

to determine if the Enterprise School Board violated executive session laws, including if it discussed the job performance of former Enterprise Athletic Director Larry Wells in executive session without giving him an opportunity to request a hearing.

Wells resigned from his position Feb. 22 — announcing the intent to do so Jan. 4 — citing what he claimed were unethical actions by the school board and Superintendent Erika Pinkerton regarding the athletic eligibility of Enterprise High School senior Justus Even.

The investigation comes after OGECE conducted a preliminary review of a complaint filed Jan. 30 by Ilene Wells, wife of Larry Wells, into the actions of the board. In its preliminary review, which was provided to The Observer by Larry Wells, the ethics commission stated it doesn't have jurisdiction over, and therefore didn't address, several

of Ilene Wells' complaints. The commission, though, does have jurisdiction over at least three of the allegations, including that "the statutory authorities cited by the board for the executive sessions did not match the topics discussed in those executive sessions ... (that) board made a final decision while in executive session ... and the board discussed the employment-related performance of an employee without providing that employee with notice or an opportunity to request an open hearing," OGECE wrote in its preliminary review.

The review summary recommended an investigation into possible violations of ORS 192.660 by the Enterprise School Board, which includes Chair Kate Fent and board members Heather Melville, Mandy Decker, Mike Wiedeman and Adrian Harguess.

"The board is working with the state to address the concerns that have been raised. We look forward to resolving the matter through the appropriate channels, but will otherwise not comment while the investigation is pending," Fent told The Observer.

The ethics commission voted on March 7 to move

See Ethics / Page 7A

INDEX

Classified.....4B Dear Abby.....8B Opinion.....4A
Comics.....5B Lottery.....2A Outdoors.....1B
Crossword.....5B Obituaries.....3A Sports.....8A

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Friday 34 Low
Mainly cloudy

Saturday 55/43
Showers around

Sunday 55/42
Spotty showers

CONTACT US

541-963-3161

Issue 40
2 sections, 18 pages
La Grande, Oregon

Email story ideas
to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info
on Page 4A.



8 51153 00100 6

MONDAY

SCHOOL-BASED COUNSELORS NEEDED

Online at lagrandeobserver.com