

# Kennedy remembered for his voice, good works

By Dick Mason  
The Observer

Sportscasting was an art for Ken Kennedy. He needed only a microphone to make sweeping brushstrokes.



Kennedy

“Ken would often listen to recordings of his (radio) broadcasts to learn how he could improve. For him, it was a craft,” said La Grande High School Football Coach Rich McIlmoil, who is also an art teacher at La Grande Middle School.

The smooth, enthusiasm-filled voice Kennedy used for years to paint exciting word pictures for Grande Ronde Valley sports fans fell silent Sunday. Kennedy, 50, died at a care center in Vale.

Kennedy, who was inducted into the La Grande Tiger Booster Hall of Fame 1-1/2 years ago, broadcast La Grande High School football and basketball games and Eastern Oregon University football games from 1997 until 2017 before he was sidelined by health issues, which included a heart problem.

Kennedy called hundreds of LHS and EOU games, but for many he is best remembered for the seemingly countless young people whose lives he touched while coaching La Grande Middle School and Optimist football and broadcasting LHS athletic events.

“He did so much for the community. He was genuine. He

really did care about the kids,” said La Grande Middle School social studies teacher Klel Carson, who coached LMS football with Kennedy.

Patty O’Reilly, a secretary at LHS, saw this firsthand 15 years ago when her oldest son, Denny, was playing football for the Tigers. O’Reilly was worried about the direction in which her son was going until Kennedy took him under his wing. Kennedy helped redirect the course of the young man’s life with friendly but persistent guidance.

“He was always checking on him,” O’Reilly said.

A bond was formed that did not fade with time. For years after graduating from LHS in 2004, Denny O’Reilly, who has been in the U.S. Coast Guard for 11 years, would meet with Kennedy every time he returned to La Grande. Patty O’Reilly said many parents have similar stories to share about the connections Kennedy made with their children.

“He kept in touch,” she said. “He really got to know the kids.”

Carson, who is also the LHS wrestling coach, said Kennedy was always eager to do anything to help La Grande schools and the community.

“It was pretty cool. He was a good guy,” Carson said.

Scott Carpenter, the La Grande School District’s director of educational programs and formerly

LHS’s assistant principal, said Kennedy was not one to seek the spotlight.

“It wasn’t about his personality. His focus was on the kids,” Carpenter said.

Kennedy had an even keel, but he could get excited.

“He was fiery (and) he liked competition. He could give a (impassioned) pep talk,” McIlmoil said.

The LHS football coach also said Kennedy was enormously popular.

“My players loved him,” he said. “He was very personable.”

Kennedy was so committed to helping LHS that he kept offensive statistics for the football team during games. After games, he would often listen to recordings of his broadcast to double-check his notes.

McIlmoil said Kennedy was an avid outdoorsman who often accompanied him on hunting trips. His interest in hunting, however, did not overshadow his passion for his job and the community.

“His job was his life. He loved to work on the radio,” McIlmoil said.

Matt Wolcott, an assistant La Grande High School football coach and an LHS health and physical education teacher, said he believes Kennedy often traveled to LHS road games without being fully paid for his time or expenses just because of his commitment to the community.

“He did this to allow the community to be a part of away games, to have the opportunity to listen and cheer,” Wolcott said.

Kennedy often traveled to the away games on the team bus.

“The (LHS) players thought of him as one of the coaches because he was around so much,” said Mark Shelden, of Union, who served as a game analyst for Kennedy in the broadcast booth for many LHS and EOU football games.

Kennedy and Shelden had some unforgettable moments on the road, including a basketball game in Baker City in which the mascots of the BHS Bulldogs and LHS Tigers got into a fight. Shelden tried to break it up but got punched by the BHS mascot in the process (he wasn’t injured). Shelden credits Kennedy with giving a noteworthy account of the incident on the radio as it was happening. He said this was an example of how Kennedy could easily jump from one subject to another.

“He could change gears quickly,” Shelden said.

Kennedy was considering changing careers and becoming a history teacher before his health began to fail.

“He would have been wonderful (as a teacher). He loved kids and had a great rapport with them,” Shelden said.

Kennedy was a 1987 graduate of Malad High School in Malad,

Idaho, and a 1997 Eastern Oregon University graduate. He worked for KCMB and KVBL radio, for which he also was a newscaster. He also called LHS games for La Grande Alive TV during the 2018 football season.

Kennedy was broadcasting EOU football games when Tim Camp became the Mountaineers’ head football coach in 2007. Camp said the assistance Kennedy provided by publicizing the football program helped elevate it to its present status — a team that is often nationally ranked and a frequent contender for the Frontier Conference title.

“We probably would not be where we are today without his help,” Camp said.

Kennedy was not able to travel with the Mountaineers and broadcast their postseason games in 2016 after they made the NAIA playoffs and advanced to the semifinal round during the best season in school history. Camp said it would have been very meaningful if Kennedy had broadcast their postseason games that year.

“That would have been super special for us,” the EOU coach said.

A memorial service for Kennedy will be held at 10 a.m. April 13 at the La Grande Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Online condolences may be made to the family at [www.love-landfuneralchapel.com](http://www.love-landfuneralchapel.com). ■

## Oregon offers \$2 billion for schools as teachers plan walkout

By Sarah Zimmerman  
The Associated Press

Oregon legislative leaders laid out their plan to raise billions in dollars in revenue for schools, as teachers are readying themselves for a walkout to protest a chronic disinvestment in the state education system.

Co-chairs of the Joint Committee on Student Success said Thursday they’ll be able to raise approximately \$2 billion in extra revenue each biennium to fund school initiatives focused on early education, increased class time and addressing mental and behavioral health issues in the classroom.

Educators praised the plan, but didn’t say if it was enough to put an end to a planned teacher walkout in May. The Oregon Education Association, the state’s largest teachers union, said they are monitoring the outcome of the legislature’s revenue proposal.

“Oregon schools are in crisis,” said John Larson, president of the Oregon Education Association in a statement. “If the legislature is able to fully fund their Student Success Act, we could make game-changing investments in all students, including students of color, low-income students, and students from other historically disadvantaged backgrounds.”

The money will come from a new commercial activity tax, which takes a portion of a business’ total revenue. Legislators are still working out the final details, but Rep. Greg Smith, a Republican from Heppner, said the tax is meant to be “spread very thinly across all businesses,” with exemptions or smaller fines for small businesses.

The \$2 billion in expected revenue will go to a newly created “Student Success Fund,” which will fund additional educational programs and other school initiatives including smaller class sizes and more counseling services.

At least 20 percent of the Student Success Fund money will be invested into early education, including special education and the state’s preschool programs. Another 30 percent will be earmarked for statewide initiatives, including universal free meals and bullying prevention measures.

The rest of the money — approximately \$1 billion every two years — will go directly to schools to be used

to improve educational outcomes in a state that suffers from one of the lowest graduation rates in the country.

To access that money, schools will have to submit proposals on how they will use the funds. The plans must address mental and behavioral health needs, and work to reduce educational barriers for students of color and other underserved students.

Educators have said that a lack of funding has forced schools to cut programs, expand class sizes and lay off staff. Schools have also reported not being able to afford enough counselors or other resources to address their students’ complex mental health needs, a problem that has only gotten worse over the past decade.

Teachers have reported an increase in violent behavior from students, and a survey of 2,000 Oregon teachers found that 56 percent of educators have evacuated their classrooms at least once in the past year because a student was considered a threat to others.

“Education is almost the last thing that our schools are doing because they have kids who come in who are food insecure, who are housing insecure, who are dealing with untreated mental and behavioral issues,” said Rep. Barbara Smith Warner, a Democrat from Portland and one of the co-chairs of the student success committee. “Schools have become the de facto provider for all these services, yet we aren’t funding them.”

The state will monitor how effectively schools are using the money and whether districts are meeting their performance goals. Struggling schools will be given more resources and technical assistance to boost student success.

“We’re very supportive of this plan,” said Jim Green, executive director of the Oregon School Board Association. “We have underfunded our education system for 30 years and this is a great attempt at trying to address that.”

Gov. Kate Brown expressed disappointment that the plan didn’t include extra money for higher education, including community colleges and universities. She told reporters that higher education is essential for the state’s plan to provide quality education from “cradle to career.” ■

## ETHICS

Continued from Page 1A

forward with an investigation, and plans to hold a meeting on the matter Aug. 23, according to an email to Wells that was shared with The Observer.

According to the preliminary review, the school board met in executive session on five occasions from Nov. 14, 2018, through Jan. 30, 2019, to discuss Even’s hardship request. In early October 2018, Wells had determined the student would be ineligible to participate in athletics for his senior year at EHS and didn’t put the hardship request forward to the District Athletic Committee. Even had previously competed in football, basketball, and track and field.

A March 15 Observer article reported Even left Enterprise in late August to attend school in Southern California, but transferred back to Enterprise Sept. 11. Based on OSAA regulations, Wells determined the same day — Sept. 11 — that Even was considered a mid-year transfer and thus ruled ineligible for one calendar year. Wells later received supporting documentation — including family letters — for Even’s hardship request, but said in an Oct. 4 letter to the family and OSAA that the original ruling stood.

Even, in the meantime, proceeded to miss 14-1/2 of the next 18 school days, including 10 days in a row, which led to in his automatic withdrawal from school in early October.

Despite this, in November, the board chose to hear Even in executive session regarding his desire to regain eligibility, and put an action plan in place. On the recommendation of the school board, Pinkerton put forward a hardship request on behalf of Even in late January. The request was ultimately voted down by both the District Athletic Committee and the Oregon School Activities Association in February.

In a Dec. 3 executive session, the board discussed and voted on a response letter that would be sent to Evens’ family regarding the handling of his case, which in part was critical of actions by both Wells and En-

terprise High School Principal Blake Carlsen.

This vote — and other actions in that Dec. 3 meeting — are among the potential violations mentioned in Ilene Wells’ complaint and will be further investigated by OGE.

ORS 192.660(6) “prohibits governing bodies from taking final action or making a final decision while in executive session,” according to the commission’s preliminary review, and the complaint by Ilene Wells contends the vote on the letter regarding her husband violated this rule.

Within the preliminary review document, attorney Luke Reese of Garrett Hemann Robertson, who is representing the school board, refuted claims that ORS 192.660(6) was violated.

“The Board sought consensus on whether to continue discussions on a letter to this student or to send it to legal council first,” asserted Reese’s statement, saying the decision on how to move forward “with respect to the student’s eligibility was previously made on Nov. 14, 2018, and a vote was held in open session.”

The Commission’s preliminary review concluded: “There appears to be a substantial objective basis to believe that violations of the executive session provisions of Oregon Public Meetings law may have occurred on Dec. 3, 2018, when the Board may have taken final action in executive session in violation of ORS 192.660(6).”

The OGE determined the matter required more in-depth examination, particularly the school board’s handling of “employee-related performance.” The original complaint by Ilene Wells argues the athletic director’s due process rights were violated.

“The justification for the Dec. 3 executive session was related to employment-related performance,” the complaint states. “Presumably, this was focused on the athletic director. However, this violates due process, as the athletic director was not notified that the session would occur, nor given an opportunity to request an open hearing.”

Reese conceded that Larry

### ► Other rules cited properly or used unnecessarily, and explained

The OGE’s review found that at least two of the executive session laws — ORS 192.660(2)(f) and ORS 322.061 — were correctly cited and used by the Enterprise School Board, but also ruled that the board unnecessarily cited OAR 581-021-0250 and 34 CFR § 99.30.

ORS 192.660(2)(f) “permits a governing body to hold an executive session to consider information or records that are exempt by law from public inspection,” and 322.061 allows executive session by a school board “concerning expulsion of a minor student or matters pertaining to a student’s medical records and educational program,” according to the reviews summary of the laws. OAR 581-021-0250, meanwhile, directs “educational agencies to adopt policies governing the disclosure of student identifiable information,” and 34 CFR § 99.30, which is part of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, addresses the conditions under which prior consent is required to disclose student identifiable information. ■

Wells was discussed in the session, but countered that “the Board was not providing a formal evaluation, nor was it considering dismissal or discipline. As such, it was not required to provide direct notice.”

While the ethics commission resolved to further investigate whether the discussion of Wells was in violation of executive session law, it also wrote that, due to the brevity of the minutes taken from the executive sessions, the “commission staff (does) not yet have sufficient information to determine the nature of the discussion.” ■



Reed & Associates for  
excellent service **LOCALLY!**

Nicole Cathey

10106 N. 'C' • Island City

541-975-1364

Toll Free 1-866-282-1925

[www.reed-insurance.net](http://www.reed-insurance.net)



An Independent  
Insurance Agency

Medicare, Auto, Home  
insurance and Annuities



Kevin Reed