

# WHIPPLE

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 school in Rogue River until he retired as master chief petty officer in 2003. He wore many hats during his years in the Navy, including anti-submarine air controller, air intercept control supervisor and anti-terrorism training officer.

Whipple said his experience in the Navy prepared him for his job with CHD in many ways. For one, veterans find it easier to talk to him once they realize he's a veteran, too. His role in the Navy also gave him experience helping others.

"As the chief petty officer, your job is to take care of your people," he said.

Whipple has achieved a lot in his time with CHD.

"He's doing what's right for the veterans," said Susan Cederholm, HR administrator at CHD. "He's such an asset to our community."

She recalled the very first year he worked at CHD, Whipple was awarded Service Officer of the Year by the American Legion Department of Oregon. She said since he started he has gone above and beyond to help veterans in Union County, and she will be sad to see him go.

"He's a pleasure to be

around, and he's also got a great sense of humor," she said.

It's difficult — even for Whipple — to list all of the projects that he has been involved in over the years. He helped organize the vision service plan van, which provided 50 eye exams and 50 pairs of glasses to veterans and their families at no cost to them. Whipple remembered it fondly.

"I still smile thinking about the day that the van came," he said.

He helped secure funding that created a program with Community Connections that helps get free transportation for veterans.

He has helped find housing for homeless veterans, given them the supplies that they need, and helped them connect with employers or get job training or a higher education.

Whipple helped create a ski day at Anthony Lakes where veterans and their families can come ski or snowboard for free, rentals, lunch and lessons included. Whipple said it's a fun day, but it's also an opportunity to connect veterans with more services.

"It's geared toward the younger veterans that we don't see a lot in the office," he said. "It's a way for us to reach out to them and see

what they need."

Whipple said although the big projects he's worked on have been rewarding, he also strives to help veterans with little things. He said some of his fondest memories are of helping one person with something as small as replacing a set of dentures for a veteran's widow.

"It's the little things like that where you can help people through a stressful situation and make their day," he said.

He said he has become so close with the community of roughly 2,300 veterans in Union County that he thinks of them as friends.

He is far from finished helping veterans, as he plans to volunteer during his retirement.

"This is not the end," he said.

Whipple is extremely humble when it comes to his achievements.

"The things I've accomplished, I could not have done by myself. I am a cog in the wheel of community partners," he said.

Whipple's successor, Brian Blaise, has worked alongside Whipple for almost two years now in preparation. Blaise, a veteran himself, said he first met Whipple when Whipple approached him to come into his office and learn about benefits and services.



Courtesy photo

A lover of the outdoors, Whipple worked leading excursions into the wilderness with packing mules before taking a position as Veteran Service Officer at CHD.

"He cornered me up at the university and said you've got to come in," he said. "It just blew my mind that there was somebody doing this, actually advocating for veterans. I told him right then and there 'I want to do what you do.'"

Blaise, who is from Union, said he was inspired by Whipple to get a degree in sociology and eventually apply to the position.

Oregon Senator Ron Wyden expressed his appreciation for Whipple's work.

"Byron has set the bar high when it comes to innovation and effectiveness that helps veterans in Union County," he said in a statement to The Observer. "I know rural veterans have long counted on Byron's ingenuity and work ethic to create strong outreach programs."

Wyden will honor Whipple's time with CHD at the April 13 Union County town hall at 5 p.m. in La Grande.

"I am glad Byron plans to continue volunteering and that his legacy over the past

decade provides a strong foundation for his successors to build on," Wyden said. "I very much look forward to honoring him this Saturday at my town hall in La Grande."

Whipple said he plans to focus on family — including his wife and five children — with his newfound time. He said he hopes to spend more time outdoors, and maybe go on vacation with his wife.

"It's time for the next adventure," he said. ■

# ELGIN

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 any evidence of inflow and infiltration, or the process of groundwater mixing with wastewater and overwhelming the waste treatment plant, although Elgin's sewers have had this problem in the past.

He also noted these are "record setting times." On Tuesday, he measured the waters at 15 inches above the high water mark he created in 2011 on a permanent structure on 3rd Street in Elgin. Although some Elgin citizens and Councilman Rocky Burgess recall the flood waters reaching an even greater height in previous years, Larman said, "This is the highest I've ever seen it."

No recent digital data was available to check this high water mark level on the FEMA Flood Map Service Center website.

Larman later thanked the Union County Sheriff's Office for lending a rowboat to the Elgin public works department, as the land surrounding the sewage treatment plant was so deep under water Larman and his team couldn't drive their pickups to check on the plant. They had to row there instead.

"The Union County Sheriff's office really helped us out," he said.

This imagery of the city workers in a rowboat drew a laugh from council members and citizens present at the meeting. Although the flooding seems bad, Larman encouraged those at the meeting it was manageable with his lightheartedness and good humor.

"We're taking in high flood waters, but it's nothing we can't handle," he said.

Elgin Mayor Allan Duffy

thanked Larman's public works team for its swift action with controlling floodwaters as best they can and acknowledged the support from Union County and even state Legislature representatives.

"Dan's crew is doing an exceptional job (with the floodwaters) on top of their regular duties," he said in the meeting. "I was pleasantly surprised to receive calls from Senator Wyden and Congressman Walden's offices, offering aid. Knowing they're there and we can just pick up the phone if we need anything is refreshing (compared to) where we've been before."

Larman joked that the Hu-Na-Ha RV Park in Elgin is now named the "Island of Hu-Na-Ha" as it is surrounded by high water. Elgin Parks & Recreation Director Bryan Jungling said although there are 18 guests currently staying in the RV Park, he has not yet ordered them to evacuate because there is no cause for alarm.

"There is a plan in place if we need to evacuate," Mayor Duffy said.

In other news, Elgin City Administrator and Recorder Brock Eckstein

said the city is currently working with Business Oregon to finalize a contract for the block grant Elgin received for renovating its sewer system.

He also announced Elgin Clean-up Day will take place from 8 a.m. to noon May 11 and the city's first budget hearing will be held at 6:30 p.m. April 15 at Elgin City Hall.

Tuesday night the council also moved to donate \$300 a year from its donation fund to the Friends of the Opera House to show its support — although, in a counterargument, the mayor and some councilors pointed out the city owns the Opera House and does not charge the organization rent. The city is also working hard to find grant money for Opera House additions and renovations in the near future.

"They're a big part of the community, and have increased the number of people coming here," said Mayor Duffy, who voted in the affirmative for this motion. "I want to show them support as they're trying to get their board going to finish the work to get their expansion." ■

# FLOOD

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 end of town caused the closure of 18th Street for several hours early Tuesday morning when water from a ditch spilled onto the road. Crews then used sandbags to divert the water back into the ditch, said City of La Grande Public Works Director Kyle Carpenter.

La Grande public works crews have also been working to prevent Mill Creek, which runs north down a hill to C Avenue and then through a culvert, from overflowing.

"We are closely monitoring its level," Carpenter said.

Crews have been checking Mill Creek day and night and removing large amounts of rocks and other debris from the stream with a backhoe to keep it within its banks. Carpenter said if the stream jumps its banks, crews will use sandbags to divert the water down to C Avenue.

No other streams in La Grande have been posing a problem, he said.

"Mill Creek is only one acting up," Carpenter said.

He said this may be because Mill Creek draws from many sources of water.

The threat of flooding will exist in Northeast Oregon at least through Friday. The National Weather Service

has a flood warning in place for streams and creeks in Union County and western Wallowa County through 4:45 p.m. today. The NWS also has a flood warning for the Grande Ronde River near Perry which will be in effect through Friday. ■

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