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County votes to assist Union County Fair

By Dick Mason
 The Observer

The Union County Fair Association received a meaningful boost on Wednesday.

The Union County Board of Commissioners voted to provide the fair association with \$7,400 to cover its liability insurance premium for 2019-20.

The commissioners made the decision following a request by UCFA President Amy Horn, an Observer employee, at the April 3 meeting. Horn said the UCFA pays \$7,400 annually for its portion of liability insurance under the county's policy and explained financial assistance would help the fair association complete badly needed maintenance work it has not been able to do because of its tight budgets.

"Projects that have been ignored for years are definitely catching up with us," Horn told the commissioners Wednesday.

Horn said it is important to keep the fairgrounds in good condition not only because of the annual county fair, but also because its facilities are used year-round. She noted the fairgrounds houses many activities including search and rescue training sessions, the Eastern Oregon Beer Festival, a Grande Ronde Hospital picnic, and events for 4-H members and their families.

"The fairgrounds benefit all of Union County, not just the fair," Horn said.

The commissioners had postponed their decision in part because they wanted to find out

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ODOT fair teaches children how to stay safe

By Francisca Benitez
 The Observer

On Wednesday and Tuesday, the Oregon Department of Transportation hosted the 17th annual Safety Fair for children in Union County.

The age group alternates every year between kindergarten through 3rd grade and fourth grade through sixth grade. This year, the age range was kindergarten through 3rd grade.

Students from schools all over Union County were bussed in to attend the fair. Homeschooled students and children from Heidi Ho and the Grande Ronde Academy also attended. Between the two days, 1,264 children attended in total.

The kids watched short presentations at several stations set up in the Blue Mountain Conference Center.

Billie Jo Deal, Region 5 transportation safety advisor for ODOT, said the topics covered at the safety fair are chosen by a small ODOT committee each year after the committee analyzes data and statistics.

"We try to focus on the things that have been occurring the most in the community," she said.



Francisca Benitez/The Observer

A representative from the Union County Sheriff's Office teaches children how to interact with a stranger's dog safely.

An animal control deputy from the Union County Sheriff's Office ran a presentation about animal safety with the use of a life-size stuffed dog toy. The deputy explained the etiquette of approaching a strange dog, and how screaming or running from an angry dog could escalate the danger of being bitten or attacked.

Representatives from OTEC ran a presentation about electrical safety. They had a miniature model of power lines that even had electricity running through them during the demonstration to show how various hazards — like flying a kite or climb-

ing trees too close to the power lines — can cause a shock.

A representative from the La Grande Fire Department, Robert Tibbetts, ran a presentation about the importance of wearing a seat belt. He used a piece of mechanical equipment called "The Convincer."

It demonstrates what can happen to a child in a car accident at the speed of 25 miles per hour. A doll was seated in a chair and traveled a few feet until the seat jerked to a stop. With the seat belt, the doll remained in its seat, but without the

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Flood watch

■ Rapid snowmelt and rain forecast has led to officials monitoring river levels

By Dick Mason
 The Observer

The National Weather Service has not issued a flood warning for Union and Wallowa counties since the warning last week expired, but the possibility that rivers and streams in this area could jump their banks in the days ahead looms.

"It is something to keep an eye on, but (flooding) is not imminent," said Jim Smith, a forecaster for the National Weather Service office in Pendleton.

Rainfall and snowmelt caused rivers and streams in Union and Wallowa counties to overflow last week. Their levels dropped late last

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One of Elgin's 'unsung heroes'

■ Multiple Lion's Club members honored during annual awards banquet

By Amanda Weisbrod
 The Observer

It was cold when Everett Grandeen rolled into town at 1 p.m. on Jan. 3, 1966. Only 5 or 10 degrees, in fact. The logger, 22 years old at the time, drove his two-wheel drive pickup to Northeast Oregon from his hometown of Corning in Northern California, looking for work and

adventure as a "footloose and fancy-free" young man.

Grandeen, who was also an amateur rodeo star back in the day, decided Elgin was the place for him as it was full of "cowboys, mill workers and loggers" like himself.

"It was a wild town back then," he said with a laugh, reminiscing about the old and rowdy days of Odie's Steakhouse and Bronco Room, once a popular Union County destination for more than two decades.

While it was the type and quality of people that initially drew him in, Grandeen said it was the town itself that made him want to stay put in Elgin for more than 50 years. And



Courtesy photo

Everett Grandeen, a member of the Elgin Lion's Club, was named "man of the year" at the Elgin Chamber of Commerce's annual banquet for his dedication to his community.

ever since he retired from his job as a delivery driver for Franz Bakery, he has had even more time to give back to his community.

At the Chamber Awards Banquet in mid-March, the Elgin Chamber of Com-

merce recognized all of Grandeen's efforts when they named him "man of the year."

"The reason he was chosen for man of the year was because of his civic duty and how much he does

through the Lion's Club and Grande Ronde Hospital," said Kathy Rysdam, treasurer of the Elgin Chamber of Commerce. "He's very community minded and very active."

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Town hall warns of the dangers of underage drinking

By Francisca Benitez
 The Observer

On Thursday, the Center for Human Development and Union County Safe Communities Coalition hosted a town hall titled "Parenting is Prevention" in the La Grande Middle School commons, educating parents and students about the dangers of alcohol.

Speakers included Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen; Sheriff's deputy and school resource officer Tony

Humphries; Kevin Loveland, owner of Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory; and Robin Wortman, Union County Safe Communities Coalition coordinator. Karrine Brogiotti, regional publisher of The Observer and former Union County Chamber of Commerce president, and Stu Spence, the City of La Grande's Parks & Recreation director, introduced the event and the speakers.

The town hall was funded by

a state grant for programming aimed at preventing teen drinking and prescription drug misuse. About 15 parents and children were in attendance.

The town hall started off showing an educational video about teen drinking. It depicted a classroom with the teacher dispelling some common misconceptions about teen drinking.

Then, Wortman presented data from the 2018 Oregon Student

Wellness Survey. The data showed that among 11th-graders, Union county students drank less than the state average. In the survey, 15.9% of 11th graders in Union county reported having at least one alcoholic beverage on one to two days out of the last 30 days. The state average was 18.8%.

However, Wortman pointed out that for students in sixth and eighth grade, Union County is

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