

## GUEST EDITORIAL FROM THE REGISTER-GUARD

### Making STEM accessible to all

A recent gathering of educators in Portland drove home the point that technology, like time, doesn't stand still and that public schools here and around the nation need to find creative ways to prepare students for the job skills they'll need to thrive in rapidly changing workplaces.

The conference, hosted by the Consortium of School Networks, drew technology leaders from industry and school districts across the country to explore the challenges facing educators — as well as some of the successes they've achieved in the classroom. There was plenty to provide inspiration for school officials in our region as they build and refine a curriculum suited for the Class of 2030 and beyond.

Two ideas are worthy of focus: Every student should be taught computer science, and every student should have an opportunity to engage in hands-on, do-it-yourself projects to enhance their understanding of science, technology, engineering and math. Both ideas are rich with potential for new and expanded partnerships with innovative businesses and universities in our region.

Conference-goers learned Springfield Public Schools in Massachusetts requires its kindergarteners to take computer science courses. Paul Foster, the district's public information officer, said it's important to start early because computational thinking is a valuable path to problem-solving, a skill that will serve the youngsters well as they progress from school into the workplace.

Introducing computer science at an early age, instead of as an elective later in a school career, has other benefits, according to Foster. "Children have made up their minds about what they're good at long before high school," he said. If they're exposed to computer science and tech-oriented courses early, they might find an interest and aptitude they wouldn't have otherwise.

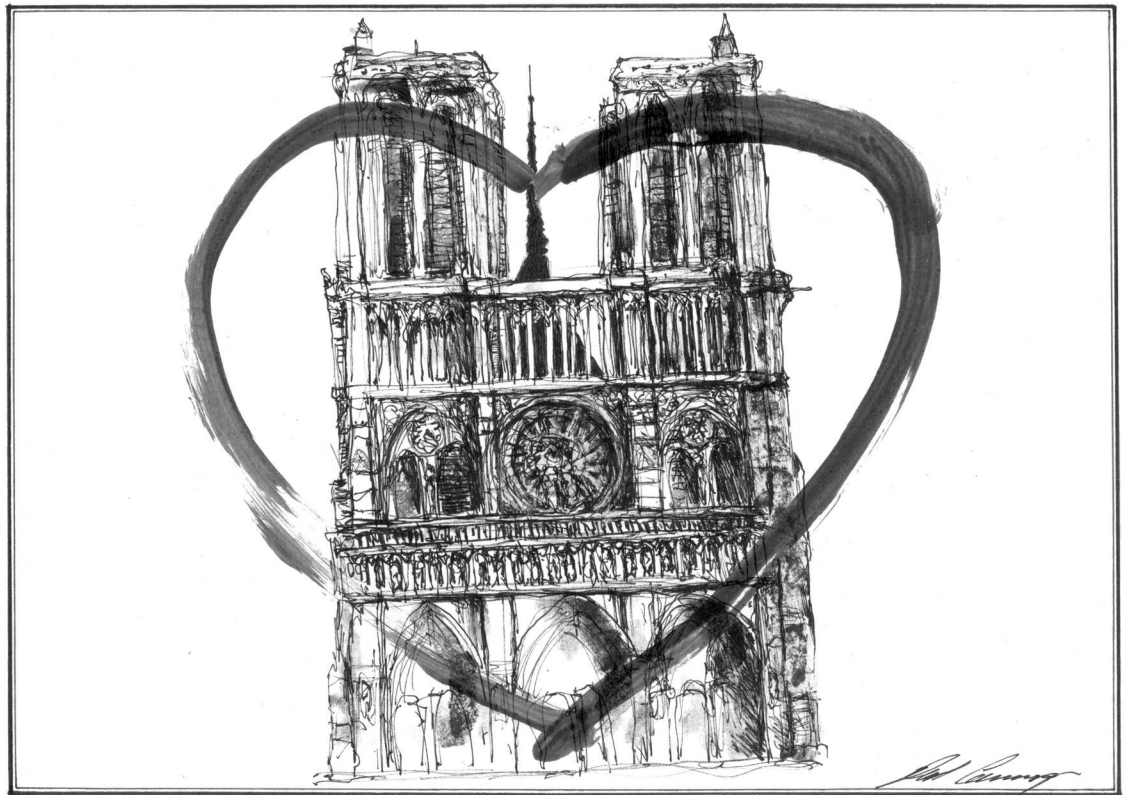
An early introduction is also critical to closing race and gender gaps in technology. Male students, typically white or Asian-American, tend to fill computer science and other tech-related classrooms in high school, a visible sign that young girls and people of color don't see those fields as welcoming or well-suited for them.

Part of the problem is that the teachers standing at the front of the classroom are mostly white men, according to a study presented at the conference. In U.S. public and private K-12 schools, 93 percent of technology leaders are white, and 72 percent are male — and the number of women in information technology positions in schools is on the decline.

School officials need to be more aggressive in recruiting a diverse mix of candidates for IT jobs. They also should bring in more women and people of color from the business community and local universities and colleges to show students that STEM fields are open to everyone. The University of Oregon's Girls' Science Adventures, which partners women graduate students with elementary-school girls for hands-on science lessons, can provide a creative model for how to break the gender bias and gap in tech fields.

In fact, the hands-on approach in that program and similar ventures across the country could benefit all students as they prepare for work in an increasingly complex world. Many students thrive in tactile learning environments, where they can actually see the concepts under study instead of being told about them. Students thrive — and build lifelong passions — when they're having fun.

Parents who want to get their kids engaged in the sciences or computer programming also have many summer camps and after-school programs from which to choose. Programs serve all ages and experience levels and can give students a leg up or a chance to decide one topic isn't for them, but maybe something new is.



## Your views

### Richter: Mail carriers are appreciated?

To the Editor:  
We are writing this letter in tribute and appreciation to our mail carrier, Sheila (and all mail carriers). No matter what the weather, there she is, her arm out an open window reaching for the mailbox during rain, snow or freezing temperatures. Then she must negotiate her pull-out onto the main road each time.

Although we try to keep the snow removed from in front of our box and the door to the box free of frost for easy opening, the roads she navigates during the winter months are at times treacherous. Yet she manages, and

always has a friendly wave when she passes our house.

We just wanted to thank her and all the mail carriers for getting the mail to us through all these years.

Ivan and Judi Richter  
Elgin

### Roberts: Easter is celebration of God's gift to us

To the Editor:  
Thank you for keeping our newspaper, The Observer, printed and delivered three days a week. It is greatly appreciated.

April 21 is Easter, a blessed holiday we observe in giving praise and glory to our loving savior, Jesus Christ. We praise him

for the blessed sacrifice he made for all of us and for giving his all when he stretched his arms out on the cross and took on all our sins so we may have his free gift of eternal life.

What an awesome God we serve!

"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

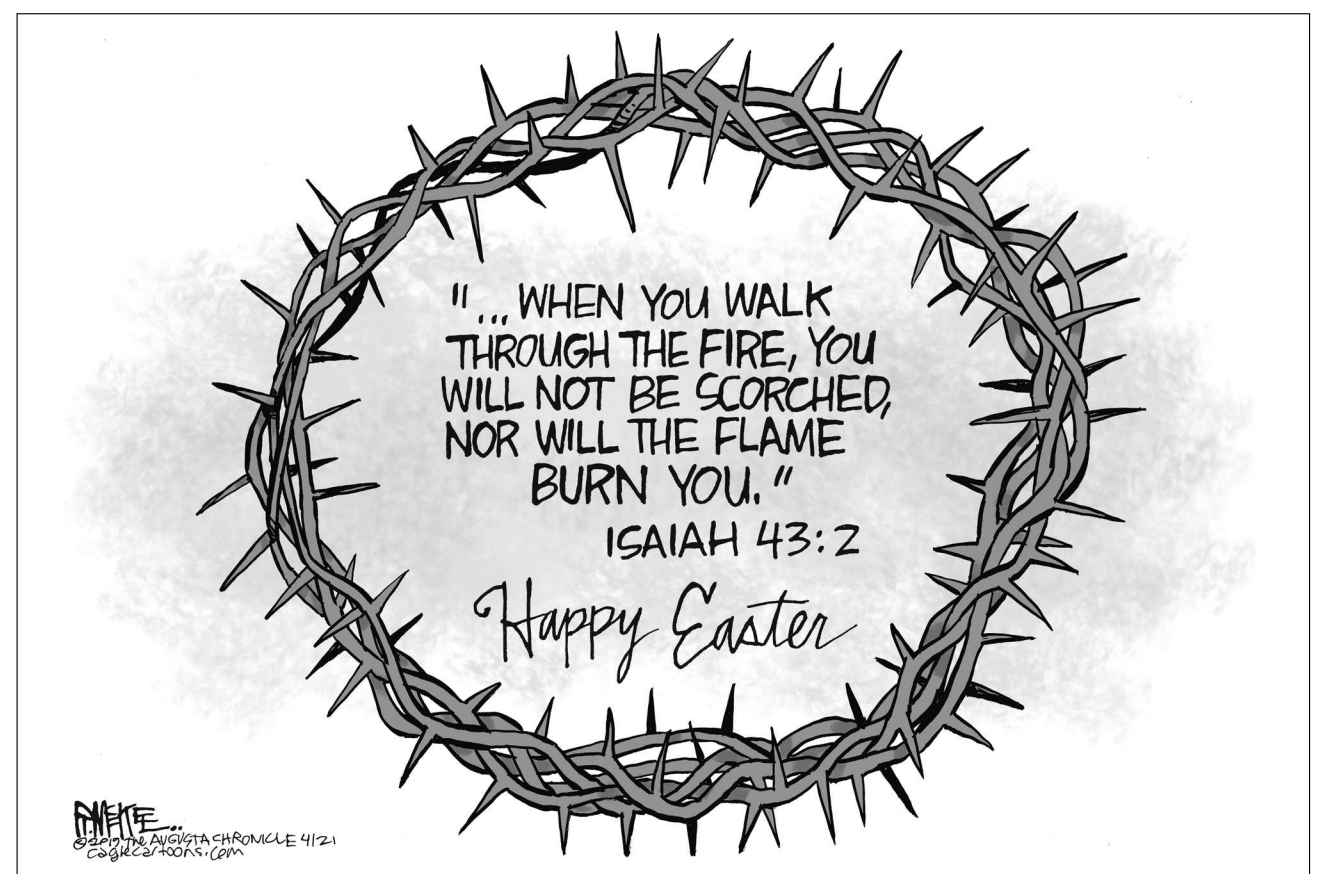
May our loving and gracious heavenly father bless each of you this Easter season and keep you in his care — this is my prayer.

Janice Roberts  
La Grande

### Write to us

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. Letters are limited to 350 words and must be signed and carry the author's address and phone number (for verification purposes only). Email your letters to [news@lagrandeobserver.com](mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com) or mail them to La Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande, 97850.



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