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Good day to our valued subscriber Theresa Kirby of La Grande

Candidate believes legal knowhow a plus

By Dick Mason
The Observer

A legal background can serve a school board member well.

Kevin Smolkowski, who has a law degree, believes this and says it is a reason why he is running to remain on the Elgin School Board.

Smolkowski, a 1989 graduate of the University of Oregon Law School, grew up in the Grande Ronde Valley and is completing his fifth year on the Elgin School Board.

“A law background helps you as a school board member because you often review policies and procedures to make sure they are legal,” he said.

Smolkowski, a candidate for Position 4 on the Elgin School Board, is running against Rod Spikes in the May 21 mail election. Smolkowski currently holds Position 2 on the school board but cannot run for reelection for his current seat because he is in the process of moving inside the Elgin city limits.

Position 2 is open to people who live in the Elgin School District but outside Elgin’s city limits, while Position 4 is open only to people living within the city limits.

Smolkowski previously worked for the Internal Revenue Service as a staff attorney and now is an executive adviser for CVS, a national drug store company. He grew up in La Grande and has lived in the Grande Ronde Valley most of his life. Smolkowski is a 1981 graduate of
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Captain Stan Grove of the La Grande Fire Department is retiring after a 28-year career with the department.

A firefighter and a mentor

By Dick Mason
The Observer

In an age of thermal imaging cameras, self-contained breathing apparatuses and robotics, it is easy to forget that firefighting is not only a science but also a craft.

An art that Captain Stan Grove of the La Grande Fire Department has spent much of the past two decades helping other firefighters master.

“He is dedicated to his craft and leading new people to it,” said Capt. Robert Tibbetts of the La Grande Fire Department.

Grove has been a member of the La Grande Fire Department for the past 28 years and now is leaving his department in the hands of many firefighters he helped train.

“He has been a great mentor. He wants to see people be successful in a job he is very passionate about,” said Jennifer Fox, LGFD’s administrative assistant.

Tibbetts said Grove has the perfect demeanor for a mentor: “He is patient and always kind.”

Grove is stepping down to get a break from the physical and psycho-

logical stress he regularly confronted as a firefighter.

“It is a young man’s job,” Grove said. “It is hard missing sleep and always staying ready.”

He said that arising in the middle of the night to respond to an emergency is always challenging but aided by a feeling of urgency.

“He is dedicated to his craft and leading new people to it.”
— Robert Tibbetts, Captain, La Grande Fire Department

“You get an adrenaline rush coming out of a deep sleep,” Grove said.

Such shocks to one’s system take a toll, and in a sense firefighters rarely completely wind down.

“Strong adrenaline is still there continually,” Grove said.

The firefighter, 59, said he began realizing it was time to consider retiring when he saw an increasing age discrepancy between himself

and the youngest firefighters.

“I’m old enough now to be the grandfathers of some of them,” he said.

LGFD firefighters work 48-hour shifts followed by 72 hours off. Firefighters off duty, however, are always on call in case there is a major emergency in which additional first responders are needed. They must sleep with their pagers on so they can respond at a moment’s notice.

Grove’s family has become accustomed to hearing calls on Stan’s pager, according to his oldest daughter, Lisa. She said her family is looking forward to seeing what evenings will be like without hearing emergency dispatch calls.

“We may or may not miss being awakened by the pager sounds. Probably not,” she said at a retirement party for her father on Wednesday.

Like all full-time firefighters with the LGFD, Grove is an emergency medical technician who has made countless calls to provide medical assistance. He had been responsible for accessing and stabilizing the condition of patients,

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Spring cleaning

■ The City of Elgin to hold its annual Cleanup Day this Saturday

By Amanda Weisbrod
The Observer

The Elgin Chamber of Commerce is hosting its eighth annual Cleanup Day May 11, collaborating with local clubs and student athletes to beautify the city.

Anyone living in the 97827 zip code can take advantage of the program, which allows Elgin citizens to dispose of trash, furniture, batteries, tires and other difficult-to-throw-out items at a discounted rate from 8 a.m. to noon at the Elgin City Dump.

New this year is a \$5 minimum donation per load, a \$2 fee for regular tires and a \$5 fee for truck and tractor tires. Each household can drop off a maximum of 10 tires, and the tires will be accepted only until 11 a.m.

Brock Eckstein, city administrator and recorder, said the \$5 donation per load was put in place to offset the cost of Cleanup Day.

“At first the chamber was doing it for donations only at the gate, but we started having people with six to seven loads and they weren’t paying anything so it got out of balance,” he said. “We’re hoping this will rein it in a little bit.”

According to a press release from the chamber, the 2018 garbage bill added up to nearly \$3,600. While donations at the gate and sponsor money helped to offset this cost, the city still owed more than \$1,500 at the end of the day.

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Local organization recognized by Sen. Merkley for service

By Amanda Weisbrod
The Observer

For 50 years, one local organization has been providing vital community services and has largely gone without praise or recognition. But on April 25, it received a much deserved thanks.

Community Connection of Northeast Oregon was recognized for its outstanding service to Baker, Union and Wallowa counties by Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) at his town hall in La Grande in late April. Merkley shook the hand of Audrey Smith, Union County manager and regional food bank

manager for Community Connection, and presented her with a flag that has flown over the U.S. Capitol.

“I’ve been with Community Connection now for two years, and I’ve learned it’s uniquely responsive to the needs of our community,” Smith said at the town hall. “We’re very happy to celebrate our 50th anniversary this year, and I want to thank Sen. Merkley for honoring us.”

In a follow-up email, Merkley noted his reasoning for honoring Community Connection was due to the vast range of services it has

provided for half a century.

“I congratulate Community Connection on their 50th anniversary, and was happy to honor them at the town hall,” Merkley wrote. “Countless Oregonians in this area have been helped thanks to their work over the last five decades. We need groups like Community Connection to continue providing essential resources to rural communities, and I am committed to being a strong federal partner by supporting the range of programs that enable them to do just that.”

Community Connection, with

its seven locations and about 90 employees, strives to best “advocate for and assist senior citizens, children, low-income persons, and persons with disabilities in attaining basic human needs and in becoming more self-sufficient,” according to its mission statement. Margaret Davidson, Community Connection executive director, called the organization one of the community’s “best kept secrets.”

“I don’t think people have any idea of the array of services that we provide,” said Davidson, who has worked with Community Con-

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

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541-963-3161
Issue 53
2 sections, 16 pages
La Grande, Oregon

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