

ELGIN

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La Grande High School and graduated from what is now Eastern Oregon University in 1986 with a degree in history.

He believes one of the Elgin School District's strengths is how much its staff reaches out to students.

"(They are) so caring and supportive," Smolkowski said.

He is the father of four children, two who earlier graduated from Elgin High School, one who will graduate from EHS later this month and a son who is an eighth-grader in the Elgin School District.

Smolkowski is a big supporter of many programs the Elgin School District has or is a part of, including the Eastern Promise, which allows high school students to earn credit from Eastern Oregon University. Students can earn the credits while still in high school for a reduced tuition rate. He said the program is allowing students from EHS to enter college after high school with as many as two years of credits.

Smolkowski is also a strong supporter of school district programs including its Career Technical Education program, which provides training for career fields including woodworking, home construction, welding and mechanical fabrication. The school district expanded its CTE program facilities two years ago with assistance from a \$378,000 state grant.

"Even though we are a small school district in a small town, we provide lots of opportuni-

ties for kids who are motivated," Smolkowski said.

He also is a big fan of the school district's alternative school, which opened in the 2016-17 school year. The school is for students who have different learning styles and don't feel comfortable in a traditional educational setting. Smolkowski supports the alternative school because he believes it is important to offer educational opportunities to all students.

He believes that every student can do almost anything if he or she receives the right educational opportunity.

"Education opens doors to new worlds," Smolkowski said.

Serving on the school board is something Smolkowski said he likes doing.

"I enjoy giving back and want to stay involved in what's happening. I want to help out," he said.

The Observer will be running a story about Smolkowski's opponent, Spikes, in an upcoming edition. Smolkowski said he has been impressed with Spikes and believes he would be a very good school board member because of his commitment to education. Smolkowski said he wishes he and Spikes could serve on the school board together.

"I wish we were running for different positions," Smolkowski said.

He said that regardless of the outcome of the election the school board will benefit.

"Whoever wins will do a good job. We both care a lot," Smolkowski said.

Ballots for the mail election are due back at the Union County Clerk's office by 8 p.m. May 21. ■



Audrey Smith holds the flag presented to Community Connection by Sen. Jeff Merkley at the town hall in La Grande April 25.

Courtesy photo

SERVICE

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nection for 36 years. "They might know us for our senior programs, or the food bank or transportation, but what I've discovered over the years is that until someone needs our services themselves, or a family member needs our services, they really aren't aware of what we do."

Community Connection's 2018 annual report reveals just how much the organization does for the area:

- Local food pantries provided more than 12,000 food boxes to 30,500 individuals
- Emergency programs provided assistance to 367 people in 175 households to prevent eviction or to establish permanent housing

Transportation programs provided 80,820 rides for senior citizens, persons with disabilities, and members of the public

Summer Lunch Program served 5,698 free meals to youth ages 1-18 in La Grande

Senior Meals Program served 45,000 meals to 1,098 adults older than 60

"Nearly 9,000 people in our region live in poverty — an alarming number," the executive director wrote in a statement for the annual report. "Our needs assessment highlighted the lack of access to food and lack of access to affordable housing as the top barriers people face every day."

In order to combat this problem, Smith said, Community Connection donates food to

nearly every local food pantry and attempts to reach out to those in need. She said she's very impressed with everything Community Connections is able to accomplish, and she hopes more people will seek out its services in the future.

"I try to go to the various town halls in the area, and I've seen other people be recognized for their work, and I definitely think Community Connection deserves the honor," Smith said. "It tries to really fill a lot of different gaps in the community."

For more information on specific services offered by Community Connection, visit www.cno.org or call the administration office at 541-963-3186 and they can appropriately direct your call. ■

CLEANUP

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Jessica Anderson, vice president of the Elgin Chamber of Commerce and Cleanup Day organizer, said Union County Commissioners have agreed to pay for a portion of the garbage bill this year.

"We just try to break even, but we never have broken even," she said. "This year, the county commissioners have donated \$2,000 so that might cut us really close."

Eckstein said while

Cleanup Day has dug into the city budget every year since its inception, the event is worth the small cost.

"I think it's a great program. It's been successful every year I've done it. It gives people a chance to get rid of big ticket items they might not be able to otherwise get rid of," he said. "We've worked really hard over the years to clean the city up, and it's shown."

The city administrator first became involved with Cleanup Day once he moved back to Elgin in

2012 after serving in the military and became the head football coach for Elgin High School. That year, he brought the team in to volunteer and help with loading tires into the semi to be dropped off at Les Schwab in La Grande. The team has helped every year since, and for their efforts, the Elgin Chamber of Commerce donates \$400 to their training camp each summer.

In addition to the football team, Anderson said at least 60 volunteers hailing from the City of Elgin,

Elgin Lions Club, the Elgin Fire Department, Boise Cascade, Community Bank and Elgin Electric helped with Cleanup Day efforts last year, and she expects a similar number again on Saturday.

For anyone needing physical assistance to dump their trash or large, bulky items, the Elgin Fire Department is offering home pickups on an appointment basis. Contact the fire department at 541-437-1828 to learn more about pickup qualifications and to set an appointment. ■

GROVE

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managing fractures, doing CPR, controlling bleeding and more.

Fox said Grove maintains a reassuring manner when assisting people who are hurting.

"He has a good bedside manner, (and) he genuinely cares. He is there to make your day better," Fox said.

Grove's wife, Vicki, said her husband as a firefighter saw many traumatic circumstances but he kept them to himself, never burdening her or their three daughters.

"He absorbed so much, but he shielded it from our family. He was given a heavy load," said Vicki Grove, who will celebrate her 39th wedding anniversary with Stan later this year.

Stan Grove worked as vehicle alignment specialist before beginning his career with the La Grande Fire Department. He made the move because he felt the need to lend a helping hand.

"I wanted to serve the community," he said.

Grove joined the fire department when it was on Washington Avenue, where it had been for many decades.

"There was so much history there," Grove said.

The fire department moved into its

present station off of Cove Avenue about 20 years ago. Grove said it offers many advantages including additional space and being more centrally located.

The new station also has an icon from the past: a fire pole to allow firefighters to more quickly reach the ground floor from their upstairs accommodations. Grove used the pole frequently. He said it is safe to use as long as one is careful to wrap their legs around it first.

New tools LGFD firefighters have gained access to since Grove started his career include thermal imaging cameras, which detect heat.

"They can tell you where people are in a burning building and where a fire started," Grove said.

Throughout his tenure with the department, Grove has continued to pursue one of his favorite avocations: playing rock and roll music on his bass guitar. He is not in a band but hopes to spend additional time in retirement playing music with his friends.

"It is a fun way to relax," Grove said.

A new hobby Grove will be taking on is collecting thunder eggs, which are rocks formed within volcanic ash. They are often the size of a baseball and appear ordinary from out-

side but sometimes have quartz and gypsum crystals inside.

"They are always intriguing. You don't know what you have until you look inside," said Grove, who added he has long been interested in geology.

Long-time avocations Grove will continue to pursue include bowhunting. Big game animals Grove has taken with his bow include a Rocky Mountain elk that had enough antler points to qualify for the Pope & Young Club's record book. The Pope & Young Club is recognized as the official repository for records on bow-harvested North American big game animals.

Grove enjoys bowhunting because he likes the challenge it poses.

"You have to get closer (to animals than when hunting with a rifle)," he said.

The mount of the bull elk that made the Pope & Young record book is displayed at the La Grande Fire Department's station. It is one Grove will see during the many future visits he will be making to the station to enjoy coffee with his colleagues, stopovers he would not dream of missing because of the bonds he has with department members.

"(The LGFD staff) is my second family," Grove said. ■

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Mental Health and Domestic Abuse

Victims of domestic abuse with mental health needs are **more likely to have visited their GP and A&E** before accessing support for the abuse:

GP	9%	83%
A&E	0%	22%

Victims of mental health needs were **more likely to have problems with drug and alcohol use:**

10% had drug misuse problems	2%	10%
14% had alcohol misuse problems	2%	14%

Victims with mental health needs were **more likely to be in financial difficulty:** 66% were struggling to pay for essentials or could pay for essentials with nothing left, compared to 54%.

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