

DAILY PLANNER

TODAY

Today is Friday, May 10, the 130th day of 2019. There are 235 days left in the year.



TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT

On May 10, 1994, Nelson Mandela took the oath of office in Pretoria to become South Africa's first black president.

LOTTERY

Megabucks: \$1.2 million
22-35-40-41-45-46

Mega Millions: \$295 million
3-6-34-54-63-19-x3

Powerball: \$235 million
1-45-53-64-66-PB 3-x3

Win for Life: May 8
1-15-18-77

Pick 4:

May 9
• 1 p.m.: 8-6-5-6
• 4 p.m.: 7-0-8-5
• 7 p.m.: 3-7-6-9
• 10 p.m.: 5-2-9-9
Pick 4: May 8
• 1 p.m.: 7-1-9-2
• 4 p.m.: 9-1-9-6
• 7 p.m.: 0-9-2-3
• 10 p.m.: 9-0-0-0

ROAD REPORT

Numbers to call:
• Inside Oregon: 800-977-6368.
• Outside Oregon: 503-588-2941.

NEWSPAPER LATE?

Every effort is made to deliver your Observer in a timely manner. Occasionally conditions exist that make delivery more difficult.

If you are not on a motor route, delivery should be before 5:30 p.m. If you do not receive your paper please call 541-963-3161.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"When your mother asks, 'Do you want a piece of advice?' it is a mere formality. It doesn't matter if you answer yes or no. You're going to get it anyway."

— Erma Bombeck, *American humorist (1927-1996)*

Travel Oregon Road Rally comes through NE Oregon

By **Jayson Jacoby**
WesCom News Service

Jan Copeman gazes through a picture window at the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, the green fields of Baker Valley backed by the brilliant white peaks of the Elkhorns, and she can, with a certain creative license, imagine her home of Queensland, Australia.

The verdant valley is familiar enough.

So is the unblemished blue sky on this fine early May morning.

But the jarring intrusion on this otherwise recognizable scene is the one that many people might choose as the most beautiful.

It's that white mantle draped over the Elkhorns.

"In Queensland we don't have snow," said Copeman, a freelance travel writer and editor who works for Travel

Associates, a large travel agency based in Brisbane, Queensland's capital.

But they do have mountains.

Known as the Great Dividing Range, the mountains that span most of Eastern Australia, including parts of Queensland at the continent's northeast corner, are not dramatically different from some of the ranges Copeman has seen this week during her first visit to Oregon.

Nor is topography the only similarity, Copeman said.

Just as the vast majority of Australia's population is confined to several cities along its eastern and southeastern coasts — Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide among them — have about 55 percent of the country's inhabitants —

so is Oregon's population density vastly greater in the Willamette Valley than elsewhere.

But travelers don't venture halfway around the world just to see places that remind them of home.

And one reason Copeman, along with about 30 other journalists and travel business operators from many countries, took in that stirring vista from the Interpretive Center Thursday morning was so they could try to entice their readers, and customers, to follow in their footsteps across Oregon.

This several-day "Road Rally" is an annual event coordinated by Travel Oregon. The purpose is to introduce, or in some cases re-acquaint, international writers and tourism officials with all Oregon has to offer visitors.

The ultimate goal, naturally, is to encourage people to visit.

"It's an exciting opportunity," said Timothy Bishop, Baker County's contract tourism director, who accompanied the group to the Interpretive Center.

The visitors, who started in Portland and traveled across the Cascades to Bend and then through Central Oregon to Grant and Baker counties, spent Wednesday night in Baker City. They strolled downtown streets and sampled restaurants and shops.

Copeman, who writes articles for her company's quarterly travel brochures, among other publications, said she is "quite blown away by Oregon."

She believes Travel Associates will be able to sell Oregon, including Bak-

er County, as a destination — particularly clients who already intend to visit California.

Copeman shares a chuckle with Greg Eckhart, director of global sales for Travel Oregon and one of the Road Rally guides.

"Oregon is above California," Copeman says, meaning in a geographic sense.

"Above in every way," Eckhart completes a joke that has been repeated during the group's journey across the state this week.

Copeman said Oregon "ticks quite a lot of boxes" that her company's clients are interested in when planning a travel destination.

"There is a lot of history, culture and obviously a lot of scenic beauty here," she said, gesturing toward the sylvan scene outside the Interpretive Center. ■

BUS

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"This is so exciting," said Angie Peters, Northeast Oregon Public Transit's Union County manager.

NEOPT will be able to provide free fares because of additional funding from a new Oregon payroll tax. It is set to receive at least \$725,000 over a 2-1/2 year period through the tax, which takes .001% of a person's earnings.

Almost all of this is additional money people in Union County will have paid under the new payroll tax. The state is required to send payroll tax back to the counties it came from, Peters said.

NEOPT decided to eliminate fares based on input it received during a series of community meetings throughout Union County in 2018 and responses to an online survey. The community meetings and survey were conducted to find out how the public wanted NEOPT to spend the new tax money.

NEOPT will also be using the

payroll tax money to expand its services. This will include boosting the number of buses running on its fixed route in La Grande and Island City from one to two and expanding the number of stops.

Presently one bus runs on the fixed route from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturdays. The bus stops approximately once an hour to pick up and drop off passengers at sites including Fourth Street and Adams Avenue, Safeway, Eastern Oregon University, the Integrated Services Building, the Riviera Activity Center and Walmart.

Beginning July 1, two buses will be running on the route.

"This means buses will be stopping at pickup and drop-off sites every 30 minutes," Peters said.

The bus route will also include new stops such as Grande Ronde Hospital, Bi-Mart and Bearco Loop.

Current bus fares are \$1 except for military veterans and Eastern Oregon University students, who ride for free.

Peters said the \$1 fare charge is deceptively impactful.

"One dollar seems low until you have to pay it every time you go somewhere," she said.

She noted that many people using public transit actually have to spend \$2 since it costs \$1 to travel each way.

NEOPT will also be making improvements at its pickup sites with the payroll tax funding. The upgrades will include:

- installing solar-powered lights at all NEOPT stops, which will help people using the stops especially during the late afternoon in the late fall and winter

- adding new shelters at three pickup sites — one will be at Safeway and the sites of the other two are now being determined.

- cutting the curb at the NEOPT's Riviera Activity Center pickup site, which will help people with mobility issues.

The payroll tax funding will also be used by NEOPT to allow people to ride for free via its CAT (Connecting All Towns) Link service, which

will begin running July 1. CAT Link will provide rides to all communities in Union County. Its drivers will travel directly to and from the homes of people who need transportation in Union County for almost any reason, including going to the grocery store, getting to a medical appointment, visiting a food bank or going to visit a friend.

Peters said CAT Link, which will be available to everyone, is being started due to input received during community meetings.

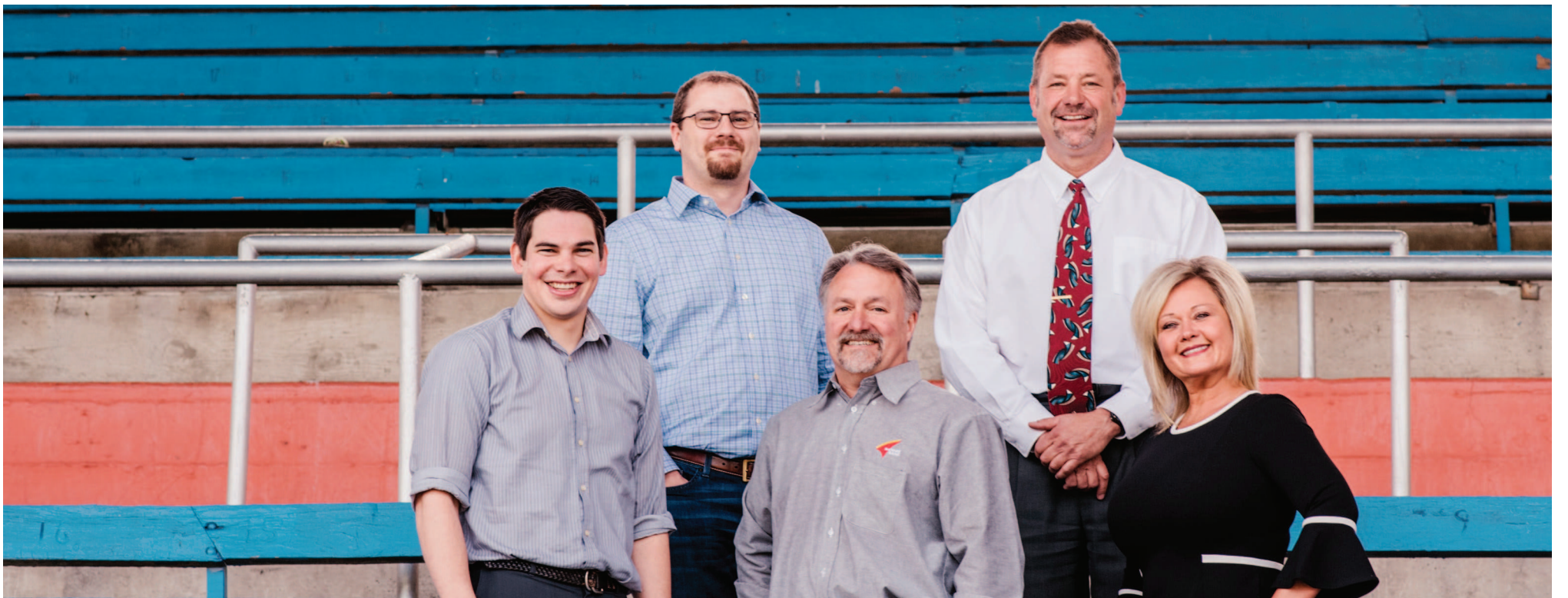
"Problems like senior isolation were brought up," she said.

Peters said CAT Link is needed because people are not always able to get the many resources available in Union County.

She said that being able to provide new transportation services in Union County is gratifying.

"It's awesome," she said. "This is a wonderful time to be in public transit."

For information on Northeast Oregon Public Transit call 541-963-2877. ■



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