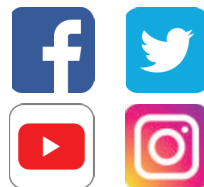


# THE OBSERVER

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Good day to our valued subscriber Roberta Greenlee of La Grande

## Future first responders hone skills in emergency preparedness

■ Six-week class is part of My Preparedness Initiative

By Dick Mason  
The Observer

Twelve Union County teenagers are short on life experience but long on heart, community spirit and a sense of adventure.

They are the young people completing a new federally funded emergency preparedness class for youths age 13 to 19 now being taught in La Grande. The students are learning about everything from the dangers posed by air bags inside automobiles that have crashed to the science of doing cardio pulmonary resuscitation.

The six-week class — which is part of the My Preparedness Initiative (MyPI), is an Oregon Youth Preparedness Initiative program coordinated by Oregon State University — is in its final week.

“The students are doing an awesome job,” said Robin Gerber, a longtime Union County 4-H leader who is co-teaching the course with her husband, Lou, who served as a medic in the National Guard for many years.

*“I’ve always wanted to help people.”*

— Dalton Derrah, LHS freshman

The students’ knowledge base was expanded Saturday by firefighters with the Imbler and La Grande rural departments who provided hands-on experience in how to rescue someone trapped in a car following an accident. The youths were shown how firefighters cut through vehicles with tools like hydraulically powered Jaws of Life to reach people quickly.

Before they got to the cutting process, though, the firefighters discussed in detail how important it is to first shut down a vehicle’s electrical system and dismantle its entire airbag system. Imbler Fire Department Chief Mike Barry explained that



cutting into a vehicle can trigger the deployment of airbags, which could break the necks and legs of rescuers.

“The same thing that can save lives (of vehicle passengers) can be hard on firefighters,” Barry said.

Barry was one of about five firefighters who participated in Saturday’s rescue demonstration. He was joined by Jon Loudon, Josh Holbert and Tyrel Arant of the La Grande Rural Fire Department and Ken Patterson of the Imbler Rural Fire Department. The firefighters taught the students how to dismantle a vehicle and provided an overview of how they work at and manage accident scenes.

A key point was the importance of being organized, as it is critical in the high-intensity environment at many accident scenes.

“We try to bring order out of chaos,” Barry said.

Firefighters from the Imbler and La Grande rural fire departments have been among many current and former first responders



Dick Mason/The Observer

Students in an emergency preparedness class learned techniques from firefighters for safely cutting into vehicles at accident scenes Saturday.

who have addressed the class.

“Our guest speakers have been tremendous,” Lou Gerber said.

Guest speakers on Saturday also included Bill Rautenstrauch, a former Observer reporter and retired National Guardsman who was an EMT in Wallowa County for 11 years. As a first responder, he made hundreds of ambulance runs, See **Youth** / Page 5A

## Solar power comes to Wallowa County

■ \$49,000 in grants bring renewable energy access to multi-family housing project

By Amanda Weisbrod  
The Observer

Solar energy is about to shine on Northeast Oregon in an innovative way.

Energy Trust of Oregon has awarded a \$10,000 grant to Wallowa Resources Community Solutions in partnership

with Fleet Development for a pilot project that helps low- and moderate-income Oregonians benefit from solar technology. Project developers also expect to receive a \$39,000 grant from the USDA’s Rural Energy for America Program in the coming weeks.

Fleet Development President Ryan Sheehy said the project, dubbed Park Street Solar, will involve installing solar panels on top of an 11-unit apartment building at 603 NW Silver St. in Enterprise. Construction will begin in June or July.

Betsy Kauffman, the renewable energy sector lead at Energy Trust, said while Energy Trust awarded eight other grants to solar projects across the state, the Wallowa Resources and Fleet



Courtesy photo

Fleet Development installed these solar panels at the Elkhorn Village Apartment building in Baker City last October. The Park Street Solar project will look similar.

Development plan is notably unique because it will bring the rewards of solar energy to people who may not traditionally have had access to it due to residing in multi-family housing.

“I’m interested to figure out how those families who aren’t in single-family homes can benefit from

solar,” she said. “Apartment buildings have a lot of roof space, and being able to figure out how to utilize that roof space and get some financial benefit to the people in the building from the solar panels is really intriguing.”

Sheehy said there are two advantages for apart-

ment tenants having access to solar energy.

“One is near term — the cost of energy the solar panel generates is fixed, whereas (traditional) utilities go up 2% a year,” he said. “Then there’s net metering, which means whatever excess is pro-

See **Solar** / Page 5A

## Increasing enrollment boosts Cove School District budget

By Dick Mason  
The Observer

The Cove School District’s general fund budget for 2019-20 is set to jump substantially and create a splash on the athletic front.

The Cove School Board is considering adopting a general fund budget of \$6.66 million, which would be up \$995,965 from the present year’s budget. The proposed budget was approved by the district’s budget committee last week and forwarded to the school board, which will later vote on adopting it.

The budget will allow the school district to maintain all of its personnel and programs, said Cove School District Superintendent Earl Pettit. He said the increase is due to rising enrollment and to a boost

See **Cove** / Page 5A

## Smoke plumes outside Baker City

By Jayson Jacoby  
WesCom News Service

A prescribed fire near Baker City produced an impressive plume of smoke Friday afternoon and evening, but on parts of the 236-acre area the blaze was more fizzle than fury.

“We probably accomplished about 50 percent of what we were hoping to get,” said Steve Hawkins, deputy fire staff fuels program manager for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. “That’s pretty typical of spring burning.”

The fire in Washington Gulch, about four miles west of town, was intended to burn piles of slash and other fuels left after a series of commercial logging and noncommercial tree-thinning projects about a decade ago, Hawkins said.

Another objective was to burn some of the young trees — mainly 6 feet or shorter — that have sprouted since the logging and thinning work, he said.

Those small trees can serve as “ladder fuels” — a route for flames to climb from the ground into the crowns of taller, mature trees, Hawkins said.

Friday’s fire burned into some of those thickets of

See **Fire** / Page 5A

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### WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section

**Tonight**  
49 LOW  
Partly cloudy

**Tuesday**  
72/46  
Some sunshine

### CONTACT US

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