



Dick Mason/The Observer

Firefighters show a student, right, how to use Jaws of Life to cut into a vehicle.

YOUTH

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many late at night.

"It was an exciting time," Rautenstrauch said.

His most memorable calls include one in which an injured hunter had to be pulled in a sled for three miles after his bleeding was stopped.

Rautenstrauch said despite Wallowa County's relatively small population, the life of an EMT there could be hectic.

"It is surprising how lively things would get," he said.

In addition to what life is like as an EMT, the many skills the MyPi students are learning include how to extinguish small fires, conduct light search and rescue operations, set up medical treatment areas, assist emergency responders, identify hazards, reduce fire hazards in the home and workplace, help

reduce survivor stress, assist with crowd control, assist with evacuations and more.

Students attending the class have a variety of goals. La Grande Middle School student Ethan Jacobson said he wants to use the skills he is developing to help him someday become a member of the Anthony Lakes Ski Patrol.

Imbler High School student Elexis Pierce said she hopes the training she is receiving will help her become a wildland firefighter. She comes from a family with a firefighting legacy, since a number of her relatives have worked for the Imbler Fire Department.

Dalton Derrah, a LHS freshman, said he is taking the class because he wants to be able to reach out to his community.

"I've always wanted to help people," he said.

Derrah said one of the most challenging parts of

the class for him is memorizing the different procedures to be followed when administering CPR. For example, the number of chest compressions and breaths a child should receive is different from those of an adult.

"It is a lot more complicated than I thought," he said. "It opened my eyes." All students in the class, which has been meeting since April, will take a certification test this week.

Lou Gerber has been impressed with how much effort the students have put in.

"It has been a big commitment," said Gerber, who with his wife, Robin, received extensive training on teaching the course from the Oregon Youth Preparedness Initiative program.

He added he is thankful for the valuable support the class received from sponsors and the community. ■

COVE

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in overall funding the state is now providing Oregon school districts.

The Cove School District's enrollment is now about 295, up 22 from 2017-18. This increase is significant because school districts receive at least \$6,000 per student from the state.

The school district's proposed budget calls for the addition of a high school swim team in 2019-20. The new program would cost the school district between \$10,000 and \$15,000 a year. The bulk of this would be transpor-

tation costs, Pettit said.

Pettit said the swim team is being proposed because of strong student interest. He added that the team would have a volunteer coach.

Should Cove add a swim program, it would become only the second district in Union or Wallowa counties to have one. The only other is La Grande High School, whose boys and girls teams are perennial state contenders.

The swim team would be the second district-funded extracurricular activity program the school district has added at its high school in the past two years. A year ago it added a speech team.

The school district's proposed general fund budget

includes money that will be spent to build a new dining hall. The building, which would be about 30 feet east of Cove Elementary School, would cost between \$1.5 and \$1.8 million. Pettit said all of this money will come from the school district's capital improvement fund, which the district has been contributing to consistently over an extended period.

The superintendent noted the school district will not be taking on any debt to construct the building. Pettit hopes construction of the dining hall building will begin in July.

"It should be finished about a year from now," Pettit said.

The proposed budget also includes funding to cover a significant increase in its Public Employees Retirement System expenses. The cost that Cove and all Oregon school districts must pay into PERS is scheduled to jump dramatically in 2019-20. The Cove School District's PERS cost is expected to be \$118,000 higher than it was in 2018-19.

To reduce the level of future PERS cost increases, the school district's proposed 2019-20 budget also includes a side account feature. The side account would be used by the Cove School District to prepay some of its PERS expenses,

allowing it to pay at a reduced rate.

The Cove School Board is expected to vote on adoption of the 2019-20 budget at its June 17 meet-

ing. The vote will be made following a public hearing on the budget. The school district, under state law, must adopt a 2019-20 budget by June 30. ■

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Jayson Jacoby/WesCom News Service

A prescribed fire produced a plume of smoke Friday afternoon in Washington Gulch, about 4 miles west of Baker City.

FIRE

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young trees, but in other places the flames didn't take hold on ground still damp from recently melted snow, he said.

"It was a patchy burn," he said. Washington Gulch is a vital cog in

the Forest Service's strategy to protect the nearby Baker City watershed from wildfire, Hawkins said.

Over the past 20 years or so, the agency has done several thinning and prescribed burning projects near the boundaries of the 10,000-acre watershed.

Last spring, the Forest Service

burned about 100 acres near Marble Creek, several miles northwest of Washington Gulch.

Washington Gulch is a challenging place to light prescribed fires because the proximity to Baker City increases the chances that smoke will drift into town, Hawkins said.

Weather forecasters expected winds to push most of the smoke to the south, away from the city, but a brief switch in the wind direction that lasted for about two hours late Friday ushered smoke into town, Hawkins said.

The air quality index peaked at 102 late Friday, which is in the "unhealthy for sensitive groups" category.

Saturday's average was in the "good" category.

"We had a little more smoke in town than we wanted," Hawkins said.

The Forest Service probably will plan a second prescribed fire on the same area of Washington Gulch. Friday's first reduced the fuel load enough that a later fire could be ignited when the ground is drier and flames more likely to spread. ■

SOLAR

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duced in the summer will roll over (as a) bill credit for the winter, which is a huge advantage for people on a fixed income."

Sheehy also said the solar panels will save the building owners money in energy savings over time, so tenants will eventually see their rent costs go down.

"Owners of affordable housing projects have a fixed return they can take, so if cost goes down, they

have to lower the rent," he said. "That's why there's not much solar on these projects because there's not a lot of financial incentives to do it."

The importance of bringing solar power to low- and moderate-income families stems from the imbalance of renewable energy resources between socioeconomic groups, according to Kyle Petrocine, program manager at Wallowa Resources Community Solutions, which is a subsidiary of Wallowa Resources.

"The next step is to try and expand to make the benefits from renewable energy more general," he said. "We want to bring the benefits of energy choice, savings and reduction of carbon footprint to all types of different socioeconomic backgrounds."

If the Park Street Solar pilot project turns out to be a success, Petrocine and Sheehy hope to work on similar projects in the future.

"It'll be a win for further development, and if we can make this one successful

there's a lot of repeating we can do," Petrocine said. "Proving the innovative model is what's exciting."

"This is a pilot project we're putting together to show how this can be done throughout the state," Sheehy said. "There's a lot of impact that we're looking for out of this little project." ■

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