

PALS

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and a shortage of bikes. Children normally ride their own bikes to Willow but this year it was discovered late in the week that some children did not have bikes to ride or helmets so parents from other families stepped forward to provide extra bicycles.

"It was pretty cool, (the way) the parents got things rolling," Ogburn said.

Ogburn said the program has been a success in recent years in large part because of the help she has received from Wagner.

"She has been wonderful," Ogburn said.

Ogburn has long urged her students to write their letters in cursive, something many are not very familiar with. She said it is good for children to write cursive because it takes more time, which results in more thoughtful

letters being written.

"It makes them think," Ogburn said.

The third-grade teacher also noted it helps children develop better signatures.

Ogburn smiles when recalling how students' writing often looks as they first learn how to write in cursive.

"It sometimes looks like hieroglyphics," she said.

The students are also taught how to fold letters, address envelopes, attach proper postage and mail them.

Ogburn is moved every year at how excited students get when they receive a letter from their pen pal.

"It is as if they are getting unopened Christmas presents," she said.

Students in their letters normally share basic information about themselves. Ogburn said there have been a number of instances in which pen pals have



Dick Mason/The Observer

Island City Elementary School third grader Jordan Sain, center, talks with her Central Elementary pen pals Riana Bokna, left, and Danika Elliott on Friday.

gone on to become good friends.

Ogburn began her Pen Pal Biking program early in her career, when she taught fourth grade at Willow Elementary School and set up a pen pal exchange with Island City Elementary.

Ogburn was transferred to Central Elementary in 2006, where she continued the program and kept the Island City connection. The status of the program today is now uncertain because Ogburn will retire in June after a 40-year career with

the La Grande School District.

During the many years Ogburn has operated her program, there have been students in the participating pen pal classes who do not know how to ride a bike. Ogburn and Wagner have spent time each school year teaching these children how to ride.

Central Elementary School Principal Suzy Mayes has helped Ogburn run her program since becoming Central's principal four years ago. She said watching her teach children to ride bikes is a delight.

"The joy on the students' faces as they learn to ride is so rewarding, and it is most certainly a confidence builder," Mayes said.

Mayes, who attended Friday's meeting of pen pals, is also a big fan of Ogburn's program.

"It is a very special event and most certainly (creates) memories that last a lifetime. This program is extremely rewarding to watch in action," the principal said. ■

ARTIST

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This comic series was dubbed Abtuss and follows Miller on a heroic journey as he explores TeTe's home — a purple planet called Spinder — and learns of the aliens' customs and struggles, some that are very similar to the problems faced by humankind.

Chris Jennings, co-owner of hq, has helped Miller compile his Abtuss comics into a special edition graphic novel, "The Knowledge of Spinder," which will be on sale at the gallery opening May 24.

Jennings said his mission of bringing art in its various forms to downtown La Grande is furthered by this gallery installation, which was completed in part due to a \$500 grant the venue received from the Union

County Arts and Cultural Coalition.

"In terms of the retail downtown, small niche gallery stuff, there have been pop-ups and different business have tried little walls to try and keep that flowing through, but there's not a lot of opportunity to show art," he said. "The mission behind hq holding a space is to create a gateway for student artists, regional artists and traveling artists to have one more place to show and engage with an audience."

Once Miller's exhibit retires in July, Jennings plans to feature work from a new artist. He wrote in a press release that the rotating exhibits will create "an additional avenue for community engagement" and "give people one more reason to attend an event" at the venue, which regu-

larly features live music and film screenings.

"We're going to do a big opening reception," Jennings said of the Abtuss exhibit. "Charles will be here to sign books, and there will be beer and wine. We'll have time as a community to look at art and talk about art and have conversations and really make it fun," he said. "Hq is a great platform for opportunity."

At the gallery's first exhibit, Miller's science-fiction-inspired pieces will be accompanied by works of art based on experiences he's had with "people who have been dead for years."

One of these spectral visitors is Joe Son, a Quaker who lived in the South during Civil War times. Although he was not a soldier, Miller said, the young man told him he bought a rebel uniform to go un-

dercover and speak with Confederate soldiers for a book he was writing.

Before Joe could publish his manuscript, however, his sister threw it away. Miller said Joe told him she threw it out because it was "too messy looking."

So, Joe appeared, with his little dog Lit, to Miller, hoping the artist could tell his tale. "Joe wanted everyone to know what his story was," said Miller, who painted a black and white photorealistic portrait of the young man and his furry companion.

Because Miller lives with a disability impairing his ability to read and write, he couldn't tell Joe's story through the written word — but he was able to capture the young man's spirit through a visual medium.

"I want people to know the wonderful art I can

do," he said. "People say, 'You can't read and write, how can you do all this art?' and it makes me feel bad. I want to show people I'm intelligent and I can do this work."

Whether aliens, ghosts

or dreams are the inspiration, art has always been Miller's refuge, a way he can truly express himself and his encounters. The hq gallery is just one way for him to share his mind with the world. ■

POW WOW

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The members of Bad Soul were among about 100 Native Americans who participated in the event, officially titled the EOU Indian Arts Festival Spring Pow Wow & Friendship Feast. The Native Americans who attended the pow wow on Friday and Saturday were primarily from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Warm Springs Indian Reservation and the Yakima Indian Reservation.

Other tribes represented included the Chippewa, of which Elysa Nason, a student at the Oregon Health Science University School of Nursing at EOU, is a member. Nason, like Russell, said the drumbeats heard throughout the pow wow are integral to the culture of Native Americans.

"The drumbeat is our heart," said Nason, who is originally from Minnesota. The drums are an integral part of Native American dances, which are always circular. Nason said this reflects the cycle of life, for we all eventually return to the earth we came from and then the process starts anew.

Native Americans who participated in the weekend's dancing competition included Rod Begay, a member of the Yakima and Navajo tribes. Begay said dances can be taxing.

"(Native American dancing) is pretty physical," he said. In most competitions

there are four or five dances of five to seven minutes for a single group with a minute break between each. Participants are judged on many things including posture, rhythm and whether or not they overstep, which dancers lose points for. Begay said overstepping occurs when a dancer does not come to a complete stop when a song ends.

"You have to know the song," he said.

Begay always enjoys participating in Native American dance competitions and the atmosphere of pow wow's like the annual event at EOU.

"It is fun," he said. "That is why I'm here."

The public address announcer for the pow wow was Mackie Begay, of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and a relative of Rod Begay. Mackie Begay said the EOU Spring Pow Wow is one of at least four conducted on university and college campuses in the state. Oregon campuses where pow wows are also conducted include Blue Mountain Community College, Portland State University and Oregon State University.

There are many other pow wows not conducted on college campuses, including ones in Pendleton at the Wildhorse Resort and Casino and in Joseph. Begay said pow wows on col-

lege and university campuses tend to be smaller than regular pow wows because those putting them on have fewer resources.

Begay reminded Native Americans entering Quinn Coliseum to be careful not to let any of the eagle feathers in their regalia fall off. He gives such warnings because only Native Americans are allowed to possess eagle feathers in the United States and they take this privilege seriously.

He said whenever an eagle feather falls to the ground, a short Native American ceremony is conducted before it is picked up. The feather is then sent back to the tribe of the individual from whom it fell.

The EOU Spring Pow Wow has been put on each of the past 49 years by Speel Ya, EOU's Native American club. The club's advisers are Katie Harris, Eastern's Native American Program coordinator and a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and Linda Reed-Jerofke, a professor of anthropology at EOU.

Jerofke said the pow wow is a wonderful event because it is family friendly and gives outsiders an opportunity to learn about Naive American activities.

Nason said former Speel Ya advisers will be recog-

nized at the 2020 pow wow, which will be the 50th. The late Jackie Grant, who died five years ago, will be among those saluted.

"She loved Speel Ya," Nason said. "It wasn't just a club for her, it was her family."

Nason said she had such high regard for Grant that she named her daughter after her.

Plans are also being made to install teepees on campus for the 2020 pow wow, said Bennie Moses-Mesubed, EOU's director of student diversity and inclusion. This will be done to give the public a better look at Native Americans culture.

Moses credits the longevity of EOU's pow wow to the dedicated members of Speel Ya, all of whom understand the importance of the annual event.

"It gives Native American students a chance to showcase their culture," Moses-Mesubed said.

Sponsors of the Indian Arts Festival Spring Pow Wow include EOU, the Wildhorse Foundation, the Union County Cultural Coalition, Blue Mountain Graphics, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Elkhorn Media Group, the Jerofke family, Pepsi, Safeway, Sodexo, Stangel Livestock LLC and Starbucks. ■

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