

SCHOOL

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George Mendoza also credits careful spending in the past with boosting its economic situation.

“The La Grande School District has a long history of fiscally conservative budgeting and finds itself in a better position financially than many other districts across the state,” Mendoza wrote in his budget message.

The budget would cover a \$573,000 increase in what the school district will have to pay into the Personal Employee Retirement System in 2019-20. This will raise the school district’s total PERS expenses in 2019-20 to \$1.773 million. La Grande and all school districts in Oregon are facing steep increases in what they must pay into PERS.

The budget would also pay for \$529,847 in negotiated wage increases for teachers and classified staff such as cooks, custodians and secretaries. The school district’s classified staff union negotiated the wage increases. The classified staff employees recently approved the wage increases, which bargaining teams for both parties had approved, and the school board will soon hold a vote to officially ratify the new contract.

The budget also calls for a physical education teacher to be added at Central Elementary School. The PE position would replace that of a certified librarian position

at Central, an opening created by a resignation. Presently the La Grande School District has physical education teachers at its high school and middle school but none at its three grade schools.

Mendoza said he hopes to eventually add PE teachers at both Greenwood and Island elementary schools. Justice shares this sentiment.

“It is our hope to ultimately have PE teachers at all of our grade schools,” Justice said.

Currently, elementary school counselors teach grade school PE in the district. Adding the teachers would allow counselors to spend more time with high-needs students and others in need of one-on-one attention. It would also make it easier for the district to meet state requirements that call for school districts to increase the amount of time students receive instruction from certified PE teachers, Panike said.

Several members of the budget committee, including Joel Goldstein, urged the school board to hire PE teachers for Greenwood and Island City as early as this year because of the need to free up counselors. Goldstein said this is critical because the number of students in the school district with behavior problems is increasing.

Mendoza said that PE teachers for Greenwood and Island City could easily be hired once House Bill 3427, the Student

Success Act, takes effect. HB 3427 would raise an additional \$1 billion a year for schools via a tax of businesses and corporations. The Student Success Act could be repealed though, should an initiative petition seeking to overturn it be placed on an election ballot and be approved by voters. Mendoza said he doubts voters would reject the measure.

“I don’t think people will vote down a measure that would do so much good for our schools,” he said.

The superintendent said that if the PE teachers were hired for Greenwood and Island City and the Student Access Act were repealed, the La Grande School District would face a budget crunch.

Justice said if the district were faced with that situation, it would have to look at cutting from other areas of the budget including its capital improvement fund. He noted that the school district has worked hard for years to build up its capital improvement fund to ensure that buildings are properly maintained.

The budget committee will continue discussing this issue when it convenes May 29 for its second meeting. The committee may vote at the meeting to recommend a 2019-20 budget to the school board. Once the school board receives a recommended budget from the committee, it will vote on adoption following a public hearing. ■



LHS Marching Band New Uniform Unveiling & Band Performance June 2nd, 10:30am Riverside Park & Pavilion

The LHS Marching Band invites donors and community members out to see the **NEW** uniforms and hear the Band in action, with student musicians ranging from **incoming freshman to 2019 graduates!**

The LHS Marching Band is a featured guest at the **Soroptimist Int'l June Breakfast**. Individuals interested in purchasing breakfast may buy a ticket at the event, which runs **7am-11am**. Proceeds support educational scholarships.



Contact Tressa at 541-910-4318 for more info.



COUNTY

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and a full-time position in the Community Corrections Program, which, according to the county’s website, provides supervision of felony parole, post-prison supervision, and probation offenders and person-to-person misdemeanor offenders.

The half-time position in the Union County District Attorney’s Office will be for someone who will make and catalog audio recordings of grand jury proceedings. Burgess said this position is necessary because recordings of grand jury proceedings in the future will be mandated under a new state law.

The full-time position to be added for the Community Corrections Program will be for a case aide to assist its manager.

Funds are also included in the proposed budget to allow for software upgrades and the replacement of computers in accordance with a developed schedule, Burgess said. Additional funding for the purchases of new software for the Union County Clerk’s office and the Union County Sheriff’s Office is in the budget.

In the recommended budget, 65% is for personnel and 29% is for materials and services. Union County’s department heads addressed the budget committee on Tuesday and Wednesday and again on Thursday prior to its vote on the budget.

Union County Public Works Director Doug Wright updated the committee on the status of the U.S. Forest Service Rappel base at the Union County/La Grande Airport, which

is now almost complete. The county built the base, which will be rented by the U.S. Forest Service, primarily with a \$3 million loan from Business Oregon, a state agency that promotes economic development. The loan will be paid off by the county with rent paid by the Forest Service. Each month’s rent payments will be a little more than what each month’s loan payment is.

The base, now in use, is for helicopter rappelling flights. Helicopter rappelling is a means of quickly delivering firefighters to remote areas. Once dispatched, a helicopter and its crew fly to the location of a wildland fire.

Features of the rappel base, a 7,000-square-foot building, include several helipads, which are landing sites for helicopters. It replaced a rappel base at an older building at the airport that had been operating for about two years. A grand opening for the rappel base will be conducted in July.

The status of the Buffalo Peak Golf course in Union was also addressed at the meeting. The county’s goal is to have the golf course in a position where its operating expenses and revenue will be at least breaking even in five years. Burgess said it appeared that the golf course was making significant progress toward reaching this goal until inclement weather hit in late winter and in the spring. This wet weather decreased the number of people playing the golf course, reducing its revenue for 2018-19.

Burgess said small increases in course fees have not had a negative impact on the number of people playing the course while

helping to boost revenue.

The Union County Board of Commissioners will later vote on adoption of the budget recommended by the budget committee following a public hearing on the spending plan. The county must adopt a budget before July 1.

Union County Commissioner Paul Anderes said he feels good about the county’s financial outlook. He credits much of it to the county’s department heads, who he said spend money carefully and consistently stay within their budgets.

Anderes, who is in his first-year as commissioner, praised the county for making the budget process easy for him to navigate. He said Burgess, the county’s department heads and the members of the budget committee, which in addition to the commissioners includes Bob Coulter, Gene Hardy and Stacey Candlish, “did the heavy lifting.”

The commissioner said Burgess’ knowledge base makes a big difference in the budgeting process.

“The institutional memory she brings to the table is amazing,” Anderes said. “It is such an asset.” ■

BAND

Continued from Page 1A could afford to give, along with notes describing their experience in the band 40 or 50 years ago.

“It was cool to see everyone get behind that (fundraising effort),” said Leavitt. “There’s tremendous support in the community for music, and that’s a unique thing to our valley. You can’t find that everywhere.”

Community members can see the official unveiling of the band’s new uniforms at the La Grande Soroptimist Pancake Feed June 2 in Riverside Park, where the band will play two selections from their upcoming 2019-2020 half-time show, the Avengers theme song and a few other standards. ■



Jordan Null, daughter of fundraiser co-chair Heather Null, wears one of the uniforms that will be retired.

GUNS

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Brown on Thursday commended coach Keanon Lowe, a former University of Oregon star wide receiver, for “his very selfless act last week preventing what I think could have been a very horrible situation.”

Several student protesters came to the Oregon State Capitol on Thursday, but Brown said she would not be meeting with them.

“But I’m absolutely thrilled that they’re here in the building,” she told reporters. “I think it’s so critical, if we’re going to continue to make progress around firearm safety, that students remain engaged.”

The bill closes a loophole that allowed domestic abusers to hold on to their

firearms. House Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson, who sponsored the measure, said a 2015 bill didn’t lay out exactly how courts would take away firearms. Some domestic abusers were able to hold on to their weapons by avoiding court hearings.

The new bill prohibits a person subject to certain court protective orders from possessing firearms if the person didn’t request a hearing, failed to appear for one or withdrew a hearing request.

On average, over 45 women in the United States are shot and killed by intimate partners each month, according to testimony from Trish Garner of the American Association of University Women of Oregon. Roughly 4.5 million women say an in-

timate partner has threatened them with a gun, she said.

Lift Every Voice Oregon, an interfaith group that backs gun control, presented to lawmakers on May 15 a letter signed by over 150 faith leaders in Oregon supporting gun control measures, including the one that was killed.

“Youth have cried out for an end to gun violence; in some recent cases, youth have even felt compelled to sacrifice their lives to save their classmates,” the group wrote. “We as adults must do more to protect them.”

Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick, who sponsored the gun measure that was sacrificed, has vowed to work on gun reform in the future. ■

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