

GRADUATION

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blaring and he knew first responders were a few minutes away.

“And then in that critical moment I froze. Indecision and fear gripped me and I watched. Watched as this woman’s life ebbed, as the paramedics arrived and tried and failed to save her life,” Fitzgerald said.

He said that scene haunts him today.

“It is a moment I am not proud of. I could have intervened and provided some measure of comfort to a fellow human being, no matter how fleeting,” he said.

Fitzgerald said that his failure to act profoundly impacted him.

“So I made a promise to myself, that from that moment forward, in moments of indecision, when instinct told me I should act, I would act,” he said. “That I wouldn’t allow fear to freeze me, but rather to propel and motivate me.”

Fitzgerald has kept the promise he made to himself. Since then the filmmaker said he has not let fear get the best of him. It has led to him being chased by soldiers in the Congo, sparring with Fur seals in Antarctica, negotiating with human traffickers in Southeast Asia, filming in Syria, filming at Mt. Everest and documenting people cutting open 250-pound bombs with hacksaws for the value of the TNT inside.

Fitzgerald said he does not recommend others put themselves in harm’s way as he has, and that some of what he has done could be described as mistakes.

“But the thing is, as you step out of here today and set out on your careers, you are going to make mistakes — and probably some big ones. Don’t let those mistakes define you. Instead ensure those mistakes define who you become,” he said.



Dick Mason/The Observer

Members of Eastern Oregon University’s 2019 graduation class are greeted outside Quinn Coliseum following commencement Saturday.

Fitzgerald told graduates that he credits the success he has enjoyed primarily to “hard work.” He said that he came to Eastern as a student from humble beginnings, as one who grew up near the tiny town of Monument in Grant County. His family lived 16 miles from Monument in a home without electricity or running water. At Monument High School Fitzgerald ran cross country and described himself as only average as a runner. He said his graduating class had just seven students and he was not even its top graduate and that several of his high school friends were far smarter than he is.

“We are not born with talent. We earn it through grit and a willingness to return to the task and do it better next time. We learn talent

through improvement and of craft and technique — the slow, incremental, personal evolution,” he said.

Fitzgerald, who graduated from Eastern with a degree in theater, was nominated for an Oscar earlier this year for his documentary “Lifeboat,” which is about refugees leaving Libya in rubber boats. It is one of a number of documentaries Fitzgerald and his company, Spin Film, have made about the plight of refugees and human rights issues, many of which have received positive reviews.

“And I have my time here at Eastern to thank for this. Professors in small classes nurtured my questioning nature instead of trying to shape it. They also challenged the notion that practical concerns should trump an internal

compass in life,” said Fitzgerald, speaking in Quinn Coliseum.

Eastern’s commencement exercises have over most of the past 25 years been conducted at Community Stadium on a natural grass football field. Saturday’s graduation exercises, though, were conducted in Quinn Coliseum to protect the stadium’s new artificial turf, installed in 2018, said Tim Seydel, EOU’s vice president for university advancement. Commencement may be moved back to Community Stadium in future years with adjustments that would protect the artificial turf.

Two EOU commencement ceremonies were held in Quinn Saturday because it was not large enough to accommodate all the graduates and spectators.

Fitzgerald was the keynote

speaker at both ceremonies. Another speaker students heard at both ceremonies was Cori Heymann, this year’s President’s Scholar, chosen by EOU President Tom Insko.

Heymann, who lives in North Carolina, earned a bachelor of science degree in anthropology online. She could not attend Saturday’s commencement but she did give remarks via a pre-recorded video played on a large screen.

Heymann opened by acknowledging that attending EOU while being on the East Coast posed challenges but they were far from insurmountable.

“EOU’s mountaineer spirit met no obstacles in finding its way east,” she said.

The President’s Scholar then used a needlework analogy to illustrate the varied experiences of the members of Eastern’s graduating class.

“Indeed our lives as students are like a patchwork quilt, pieces stitched together through each of our individual blocks of experience, which took place both together and apart the past few years. Here we now sit together, a piece of history, the class of 2019,” Heymann said.

The North Carolina resident pointed out that all of the graduates have learned of Eastern’s principles and values, which have been passed to them by its faculty.

“It’s now our turn to take these values into the world (and live and share them),” Heymann said.

Although separated by more than 2,000 miles, she concluded her remarks by saying she feels a kinship to the members of EOU’s class of 2019.

“In this crazy quilt of life, I’m happy to count you all as part of my academic family,” Heymann said.

B2H

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from 4:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday. Testimony will be taken about anything related to B2H, according to Sven Berg, a public information officer for Idaho Power. Idaho Power is leading the effort to get the B2H line built with the help from partners Pacific Corp and Bonneville Power.

One B2H issue sure to come up are the two routes Idaho Power is considering through La Grande, both in the Morgan Lake area. The Mill Creek route would be highly visible from La Grande, while the Morgan

Lake route would be much less visible.

“We are hearing an increasing amount of support for the Morgan Lake route,” Berg said.

Berg said that Idaho Power wants to work with the City of La Grande to help compensate it for any problems B2H may pose. These would include helping to fund upgrades at Morgan Lake Park.

The Mill Creek and Morgan Lake routes are now being examined by the state’s Energy Siting Council. Should the siting council determine that both proposed routes meet state standards, Idaho Power will select one,

Berg said. Final approval of the route would later have to be given by the Oregon Department of Energy.

Jim Kreider, a member of the Stop B2H Coalition Board, said that members of his organization will be at the hearing and will give testimony arguing that the transmission line is not needed because Idaho Power already has enough capacity to meet its energy transmission needs.

Specific points Kreider said Stop B2H Coalition members will also bring up include possible environmental damage that would be done in Union County by the heavy equipment

brought in to install the transmission line.

Concerns about damage to the environment and view sheds are reasons why the La Grande City Council issued a proclamation in April declaring its opposition to B2H. The city council’s proclamation asks that, if the B2H project does go forward, the Bureau of Land Management’s preferred route would be the one chosen. Kreider said a study by the BLM indicates this route would cause less environmental damage and make B2H’s power lines less visible than they would be on the Mill Creek or Morgan Lake routes.

The BLM’s preferred route is also known as the Glass Hill Alternate Route. It would come out of Ladd Canyon and run south of where the proposed Mill Creek and Morgan Lake routes are.

B2H towers would range from 100 to 180 feet tall and the typical height would be 140 feet, according to Idaho Power.

La Grande is one of five sites where Energy Facility Siting Council hearings are being conducted. The other hearings will take place Tuesday in Ontario at Four Rivers Cultural Center; in Baker City on Wednesday at the Baker City Veterans of

Foreign Wars Hall; on June 26 at the Pendleton Convention Center; and on June 27 in Boardman in the Port of Morrow Riverfront Room.

Each hearing will run from 4:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. local time

The B2H transmission line is needed, according to Idaho Power news releases, because economic and population growth is driving up the demand of electricity among customers of Idaho Power, PacificCorp and Bonneville Power. The claim is that while enough energy is being produced for the region, existing transmission lines don’t have the capacity to carry much more to customers.

FRONTIER

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Oregon, Idaho and Montana to WaveDivision Capital LLC, which will partner with Searchlight Capital Partners in the new agreement.

WDC is a private investment firm based in Kirkland, Washington, focused on the broadband industry, according to the release.

“The sale of these properties reduces Frontier’s debt and strengthens liquidity,” said Frontier President and Chief Executive Officer Dan McCarthy. “We are pleased to have a buyer with extensive experience building and operating advanced fiber-based

communications assets in these regions. We will be working very closely with the new owners to ensure a smooth, successful transition for our customers and the communities we serve.”

A representative from Frontier could not be reached for comment. A representative from WDC declined an interview due to the in-process transaction.

However, a press release from WDC said the change in ownership will not affect Frontier’s customers or employees.

“This announcement does not change anything for Frontier’s customers or the employees who support them,” said Steve Weed, CEO of WaveDivision. “All services con-

tinue without disruption, all offices remain open, and all contracts and rates will continue to be honored. We expect the transaction to close by the end of the year.”

Frontier, WDC and Searchlight have agreed to honor the existing customer commitments and contracts after the transaction is closed.

As of March 31, Frontier’s Northwest regional operations served more than 350,000 residential and commercial customers and accounted for \$619 million of revenue, \$46 million of net income, according to the Frontier release. The transaction is subject to regulatory approvals and other customary closing conditions.

“We are excited to be partnering with Searchlight on this opportunity to acquire Frontier’s operations in the Northwest,” Weed said. “We have a proven track record of customer satisfaction by providing fast, reliable internet connectivity combined with great service and support.”

Under the terms of the transaction, Frontier will receive \$1.352 billion in cash at closing subject to certain adjustments, including working capital, as compared to an agreed target, and certain pension and retiree medical liabilities, according to the release. Frontier has also agreed to provide transition services to the new ownership group following the closing.

Through this new company, customers in Union County may see better internet coverage.

“Our plan is to invest further in our markets, specifically by extending fiber to more homes and businesses, to bring them the high speeds they want,” Weed said. “Once the transaction closes, we will have more details to share.”

WDC and Searchlight are partial to the Northwest region and hope that shows in this new transaction.

“We grew up in this area, started and ran successful businesses here, and are excited to be able to continue to serve our community through this acquisition,” Weed said.

BEDS

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town or a county can do to help the next generation.”

Not that bed building is the only form of volunteerism that can be a benefit, he added. Cameron said any form of help — even cleaning a street in one’s hometown — can be a plus.

“I just believe if we don’t help (the youth) out, we’re all going to lose. That’s why I do it,” he said. “If you’re handy with your hands, you can do

a lot of things.”

Another volunteer, Arny Koski of Halfway, added that “nobody wants to see any kids sleeping on the floor, especially not in America. (This) gets the kids off the floor and gets them a nice bed to sleep in. Getting a quality night’s sleep is pretty priceless.”

This sentiment resonates with Alex Clemons, social media manager for SHP.

“My dad was a cop. He was a school resource officer, and (after hearing) some of

the stuff he saw and talked about, (I’m glad) to be a part of something to give back,” Clemons said.

The Elgin build isn’t the only one scheduled for SHP, either. Trick said the team is helping with a build in Hermiston later in June, as well as upcoming events with La Grande Rotary and Next Step Pregnancy and Relationship Center in La Grande in the coming weeks.

“We try to have one build a month,” he said.

Volunteers Needed!

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