



Dick Mason/The Observer

Dale Mammen points out where the staircase to the balcony of the Liberty Theatre will be built as part of a restoration process.

LIBERTY

Continued from Page 1A generate a buzz in the community," O'Toole said.

The bricks at the entrance might look familiar to many area residents, because they are from the gym of the old Central Elementary School at K Avenue and Sunset Drive. The school and its gym were built in 1954 but were torn down about two years ago after the new Central at Second Street and H Avenue was constructed.

"I can't stress enough how fortunate we are to have the bricks," O'Toole said. "So many people went to school (at Central)."

The old Central School was taken down because it was in poor condition overall due to its age. The same cannot be said for the bricks inside its gym. They are in excellent shape because they were not exposed to the elements, Mammen said. He is delighted that the bricks will help preserve memories of the old school.

"It is nice to be able to help keep Central's legacy alive," he said.

Crews are also continuing to do extensive work on restoring the interior of the Liberty Theatre, which was built in 1910 and closed in 1959 after which its facade and lobby were torn out to accommodate retail establishments. Work being done now includes rebuilding the lobby and re-

storing utilities such as water and electricity. Work to be conducted in the future includes restoring the floor and balcony seating, building a staircase to the balcony, renovating the stage and much more.

Mammen hopes the Liberty Theatre will someday look as it did in the 1920s when it was in its second decade of operation and named the Arcade. Mammen and his wife, Ginny, selected the mid-1920s because that was when the Liberty Theatre was at its peak in terms of elegance and because they have the blueprints for major renovations made at the theater in 1923, which were found at the University of Washington. They also have photos of the theater taken that year, two inside and one outside. These photos are helping the Liberty Theatre Foundation restore the inside and outside of the building to what it looked like in the 1920s.

Long-range plans call for the Liberty Theatre building and the now vacant and historic Putnam building next to it to be part of the Liberty Complex. The Putnam building, which the Mammens own, will include a bakery, an extensive kitchen and eating area, a stage for entertainers, skylights, a dressing room for theater performers, offices, living quarters and much more. Work on the Putnam building, which like the Liberty

Theatre will have a mid-1920s look, is being funded by the Mammens.

Much of the Liberty Theatre and Liberty Complex work is being funded by grants, including one for \$200,000 received earlier this year from the Oregon Main Street Project. Mammen said \$100,000 of this grant went to the Liberty Theatre and \$100,000 went to the Putnam building restoration.

Mammen, who has lived in La Grande with his wife, Ginny, since 1967, first learned of the Liberty Theatre in 2009, when the owner of the building housing it showed it to him. He said he was overwhelmed with a feeling of excitement and concern the first time he saw the theater.

"At that time I said to myself, one of two things will happen: It will be restored or will be demolished (because of its age and the valuable space it occupies)," Mammen said.

He said his life has not been the same since then, explaining that he and Ginny had been "bitten by the historical preservation bug earlier, but this enhanced it to a new level."

Mammen, who retired as an attorney 15 years ago, has been working feverishly to help restore the local treasure.

"I did not expect my retirement to be this exciting," Mammen said.

Pendleton man honors brother by winning championship buckle

By Kathy Aney
East Oregonian

Rod Retherford gazed down at his 17-year-old brother's coffin and felt heart-broken.

A horse named Headlights had kicked Rick Retherford in the head as he somersaulted to the dirt during the 1974 Oregon high school state finals saddle bronc competition. On the day of the funeral, 15-year-old Rod bent close and placed the championship calf riding buckle he'd won in junior rodeo gently on his brother's chest. He softly made a promise.

"I'll win a bronc riding title for you someday," he said.

Life would take Retherford far away from rodeo for a time, but after 45 years, the Pendleton saddlemaker made good on his vow.

In the aftermath of his brother's death, young Rod struggled with the immensity of his loss. The boys had been close. Rick, a popular and handsome teen with an easy smile, had demonstrated a knack for rodeo until that final ride. The two brothers had formed a band that played rodeo dances in which Rick played lead guitar and sang, and Rod played drums. They loved to cruise in Rick's electric blue Galaxy 500, smoking Swisher Sweets and dreaming of the day they would road trip to professional rodeos.

In addition, Rick had served as a protector for Rod, who stood only 4-feet-11 and weighed 82 pounds as a freshman. Rod went home from the funeral and found a belt buckle nearly identical to the one he had placed in Rick's coffin and wore it every day as a way to feel connected to his brother.

He set about following Rick's example in rodeo, riding bucking horses and bulls and later turning pro. It seemed he was on his way to winning that saddle bronc title for his brother.

Then football got in the way.

Retherford played his senior year in high school and proved to be small but mighty at free safety. His brother had also played football, so it was yet another way to feel close to Rick. In Rod's last year at Treasure Valley Community College, after a growth spurt, he tried football again with great success. The next year, he walked on to the Washington State University football team and eventually got a full-ride scholarship. By that time, he weighed 185 pounds, still small for college ball, but he wasted no time worrying about his lack of bulk. Retherford credits his father for infusing him with tenacity.

"That man convinced me I was as big and bad as anybody else," Retherford said. "He instilled in me the ability to believe in myself."

Just after transitioning from walk-on player to scholarship athlete, Retherford

suffered a huge setback. A teammate found Retherford's "varmint pistol" under the front seat of his car and accidentally discharged the gun, shooting Retherford. The blast left him without the use of his right arm and with a bullet lodged in his neck.

He fought his way back to health, got back on the team and finished out his college football career as if the accident had never happened. In one game against University of Oregon, Retherford intercepted a 54-yard pass to cement the win.

The book "Rod" chronicles Retherford's extraordinary life. A stack of the books sits on the counter in Retherford's saddle shop next to photos of him playing football and riding broncs.

The book, however, doesn't describe the latest chapter in Retherford's life.

With his eye on making good on his long-ago promise to Rick, Rod got back into rodeo at age 54.

"I hadn't been on a bucking horse in 25 years," he said. "I didn't practice. I just entered and got on."

He had a rough first ride. Coming out of the chute, the bronc banged Retherford's shoulder against the fence and then flung him to the dirt. He lay on the ground with a broken hand and two crushed vertebrae, before rising gingerly to his feet. The cowboy refused the offer of a re-ride, then reconsidered after his brother-in-law (who Retherford said didn't realize the seriousness of the injuries) called him a "daisy." In pain, he climbed on the next horse and rode to second place.

"I wasn't no daisy," Retherford said.

He healed and continued to ride bare-back, transitioning eventually to saddle bronc, Rick's event. Last month at age 60, Retherford entered the Buckeye Senior Rodeo in Buckeye, Arizona. The bucking horse he drew ran a short ways and veered to the left, jumping and kicking. Retherford held on tight.

"Rick was always on my mind," he said. "I just had it in my head to get this done no matter what."

Retherford prevailed. The championship buckle he won bears an extra inscription that reads, "For Rick." The new buckle replaced the old calf riding one he had worn for years to remember his brother.

On a day following the rodeo, Retherford was tooling a belt in his saddle shop when a thought came out of the blue. It had taken 45 years to fulfill his promise. It dawned on him that Rick's football number at Grant Union High School was 45. It felt like a sign that everything had worked out just right.

Retherford still misses Rick every day. "He was a good kid that everybody liked," he said. "He was a friend to everyone. He was a cowboy."



Katherine Stickroth photo

Pilot Lucas Stangel will display his grandfather's Bird at the 2019 Wallowa County Fly-In.

FLY-IN

Continued from Page 1A amount of time. You get to see stuff from a different perspective."

The event is hosted by North East Oregon Aviation Federation, a non-profit that was established to support aeronautical and aviation sciences at the high school level in Northeast Oregon.

"Aviation education and the aviation industry is being depleted by retiring employees, so they are looking for younger pilots to get involved," Wallowa County Fly-In's

public relations director, Katherine Stickroth, said.

A program at the Joseph Charter School, led by Toby Koehn, has become the primary source of aviation education in Wallowa County. The funding for this program comes from grants and funds raised from the fly-in. Money also goes toward funding scholarships for graduating seniors who are looking for a career in aviation.

"It is just always fun to get together with people interested in aviation and get to know what they're flying and what they do," Lucas Stengel said.

CHIEF

Continued from Page 1A as a volunteer in November of 1980. Just half a year later, an opportunity arose for a staffed firefighter position, and Cornford was hired July 7, 1981, according to an April 2016 Observer article.

He was promoted to engineer Oct. 14, 1986, and moved up the ladder to become captain on July 13, 1982. He served in that position for more than 33 years until

Strope appointed him interim chief Oct. 1, 2015, until a new chief came on board March 28, 2016.

The city manager feels fortunate to have someone with Cornford's skills and experience to draw upon.

"He has tremendous people skills, is an outstanding

leader and very respected. We are getting a supremely qualified individual to help out," Strope said.

La GRANDE AUTO REPAIR
975-2000
www.lagrandeautorepair.com

MOST ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY AVAILABLE
ACDelcoTSS

Joe Horst

Happy 9th Birthday Ralphie!

♥ Jan & Steph Team Ralphie

Luxury Senior Living
Assisted Living • Retirement Living

You're Gonna Love it Here!

Retirement Living has never been more customizable!

Meals, housekeeping, and entertainment based on the retirement plan YOU choose.

GRANDE Ronde

Retirement & Assisted Living
1809 Gekeler Ln. • La Grande
541-963-4700



Enjoy a 30-day, risk-free trial of the latest technology, the Signia Nx!

Toll-FREE: 888.231.4460

LA GRANDE OFFICE: 1807 Cove Avenue

MY HEARING CENTERS