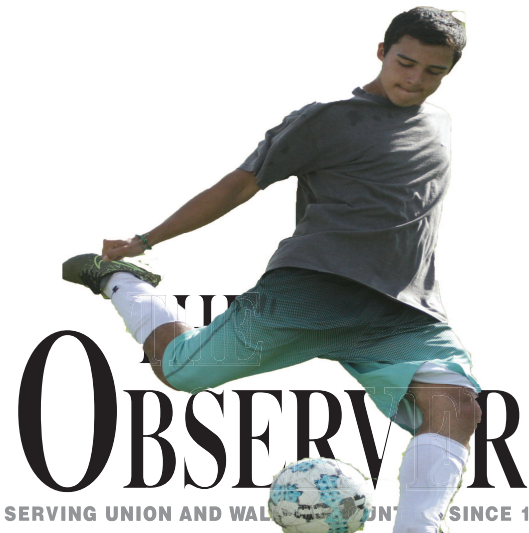


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Good day to our valued subscriber Bill Hermann of La Grande

Daughter of missing La Grande woman still seeks answers

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

Leona LeClair Kinsey went missing from La Grande in October of 1999. For the last 20 years her daughter, Carolyn DeFord, with the help of the La Grande Police Department, has been trying to find out



Kinsey

what happened to her mother.

"She had her whole life (in La Grande). She loved that town," DeFord said of her mother. "It was home for her."

Who was Leona Kinsey?

Kinsey moved to La Grande in 1978. She married DeFord's stepfather a few years later and set up her life in the town. According to DeFord, her mother loved being outdoors and going hunting and huckleberry picking. DeFord talked fondly about the

drives they would take as a family to old homesteads and of her mother's love for history and antiquing. DeFord said her mother also had a passion for gardening.

"She always had a garden, sometimes two, and she was giving what extra things she grew to the ladies

across the street or to my grandma," DeFord said. "You know, if she had extra, she was sharing and giving it to people."

Kinsey was part of the Puyallup American Indian tribe. DeFord said the spiritual connection it provided

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Business upgrade nears its finish

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

Countertop Solutions received an upgrade thanks in part to La Grande Urban Renewal Agency funding. The custom manufacturing and retail business redesigned and renovated a space in its building to help handle the increase of business in La Grande.

"The project was going to happen whether we were awarded the funding or not, so having it to offset the cost was nice," said co-owner Sam Jacobson.

Nine years ago, Jacobson, along with business partner Chris Loman, purchased the building at 1417 Jefferson Ave. that houses Countertop Solutions. Since then, a portion of the building has remained unused except for storage.

Countertop Solutions builds custom countertops, cutting granite stone, acrylic and laminate to service Baker, Willowa, Umatilla and Union counties. Previously, the business used a shop in Pendleton, but when that closed down the owners decided to turn the vacant room into their own local shop for cutting counters.

"When he shut down we decided we needed to have good granite happening out here still," Jacobson said.

Funding received by the Urban Renewal Agency, which totaled \$36,789, went toward pouring new concrete floors, updating plumbing and electricity and making

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Career reflections



Cherise Kaechele/Observer file photo

Devin Cornford, right, is retiring after working for the La Grande Fire Department for three decades.

By Dick Mason
The Observer

Devin Cornford retired Wednesday morning after a three-decade career as a firefighter for the La Grande Fire Department.

Rest assured though that Cornford's commitment to the La Grande Fire Department, like a timeless ember, will never be extinguished.

Cornford plans to continue working as a firefighter for the LGFD, filling in on calls when the department is shorthanded and even covering shifts when needed.

"I want to help out when I can," Cornford said.

This means that an impressive set of family ties will remain in place at the La Grande Fire Department, for Cornford's brother, Emmitt, has worked for the fire department for almost four decades.

"We are so fortunate to have someone with Devin's skills and experience available. It will make a big difference," said Emmitt Cornford, who is in his third stint as the LGFD's interim director.

Emmitt Cornford said the City of La Grande's nepotism rules have prevented him from working with his brother on the same shifts and they have not often seen each other on the job.

"I really wish we could have worked together more," Emmitt Cornford said.

All firefighters in the La Grande department, including Devin Cornford, are also paramedics, individuals who make more ambulance runs than they do responses to fires.

Jennifer Fox, the LGFD's adminis-



Courtesy photo

Emmitt Cornford, right, interim chief of the La Grande Fire Department, presents his brother Devin with a certificate of appreciation from the City of La Grande for his years of service.

trative assistant, said Devin Cornford is among the firefighters known for his ability to extend emotional support to people during medical emergencies.

"I hear a lot about the empathy he has," Fox said.

Emmitt Cornford said that being able to provide emotional support like his brother does is critical in emergency situations.

"People need to know they have a friend, to have someone show they care," the fire chief said.

Devin Cornford is also well known within the department as an outstanding teacher, adept at taking new firefighters under his wing.

"He is very good at working with people one-on-one," Fox said.

Cornford began his career as a fire-

fighter in 1989 when he started serving as a volunteer for the La Grande Fire Department. He served in this capacity for five years before being hired as a full-time firefighter.

The La Grande Fire Department was located on the 1200 block of Washington Avenue during Cornford's initial years with the department before it moved to its current location at 1806 Cove Ave. Cornford said the new station has outstanding facilities but he sometimes laments having to leave the station on Washington Avenue.

"I miss the old place. It had a lot of character," he said. "It is where I grew up (as a firefighter)."

La Grande firefighters now work 48-hour shifts and then have 96 hours off. Cornford said that when he

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Should LGSD annex be restored?

By Dick Mason
The Observer

What place does the 95-year-old annex building have in the La Grande School District's future?

The La Grande School Board began taking a serious look at this Wednesday during a work session. The board discussed a range of options regarding the building, which was built in 1924 and now houses a gym used extensively by the school district.

The board wants to determine if the annex, about 20 feet north of La Grande Middle School, should receive moderate or major restoration work or be torn down.

The board agreed Wednesday to have the school district hire an engineering firm to conduct a structural analysis to evaluate the condition of the building.

"We need to have a better understanding (of what needs to be done)," said school board member Joe Justice. "We need to look deeper."

Several board members said they did not want the district to begin repairs on one aspect of the building only to discover that many other portions of the annex need major upgrades.

Board chair Merle Comfort agreed that the board would not approve any work until the district knows if it can afford them.

Joseph Waite, the La Grande School District's bond and facilities manager, said it would probably cost between \$2,000 and \$3,000 to have a structural analysis of the building is done.

The annex's gym receives the most use of any portion of the building. The gym is used most often by La Grande Middle School for physical education classes. It is one of two gyms LMS uses. The other comprises the west side of the middle school.

LMS Principal Kyle McKinney said the annex serves a valuable role.

"If we didn't have the two

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