



Dick Mason/The Observer

Ronnie Allen of La Grande, center, talks with Gail Carbiener, right, and Roger Blair of the Oregon-California Trails Association on Saturday. They are shown at a site on Hot Lake Lane honoring Oregon Trail pioneer Ezra Meeker.

Metal markers to be added to Oregon Trail

By Dick Mason
The Observer

La Grande historian Jack Evans passed away 13 years ago, but today his legacy is a growing force in efforts to preserve the Oregon Trail. Three metal markers bearing passages from Evans' 1991 book, "Powerful Rocky," which features entries from diaries of pioneers as they passed through Northeast Oregon, will be installed next spring along remnants of the historic trail between La Grande and Hilgard State Park. The markers, all made from old metal railroad ties, are being installed by the Oregon-California Trails Association. Each of the markers will bear an engraved passage from a pioneer diary. The passage will be a description of what the diary writer saw at the approximate site of the marker. The most eloquent of the three entries from Evans' book was written by Ester Hanna on Aug. 23, 1852. It reads: "On the mountains there are thick groves of yellow pine, some of these trees are very large & lofty. 'Tis delightful to enjoy the cool shade & tread on the rich carpet of nature's own weaving." The new markers will be the fourth, fifth and sixth put up in Oregon, said Gail Carbiener, a member of the Oregon-California Trails Association. Five years ago, two markers were installed near the Union and Baker county border at Powder Creek and Clover Creek, and one was put up at Birnie Park in La Grande six months ago. They also have diary passages from "Powerful Rocky."

Carbiener hopes that OCTA is able to set up even more trail markers in the future in Oregon. He said the markers will protect the legacy of the Oregon Trail by making it easy for people to see it. Future sites where markers likely will be installed with the help of OCTA include Dead Man Pass and Emigrant Springs State Park, said Mark Miller, park manager for the Blue Mountain Management Unit of Oregon State Parks. Miller is a big believer in the importance of adding historical markers. "They will put (the people seeing the markers) in the frame of mind for the time frame (of the Oregon Trail era)," he said. He admires OCTA's efforts, he said, because the markers help keep awareness of the Oregon Trail's history alive. Roger Blair of Pendleton, a member of OCTA, which met Saturday in La Grande for its fall meeting, echoed this sentiment. "(The markers) protect (the trail) by helping to identify it," he said.

Blair noted that clearly identifying the markers makes people realize that "we have a historic resource right here." Blair is one of the 12 founding members of the Oregon-California Trail Association, which was started in 1982. Since then the OCTA has taken many steps to protect the Oregon and California trails and other emigrant trails. It has also worked to protect and document the contents of about 3,000 pioneer diaries. OCTA has helped put up hundreds of the markers made from old railroad ties along trails. The ties are set in concrete. None has ever been vandalized, which may be because they are so strong, Carbiener said. The markers have an understated presence, Carbiener said, because OCTA does not want them to distract from what remains of the Oregon Trail. "We want them to blend in with the landscape," he said.

BOLEN

Continued from Page 1A understanding of the needs of his community. He explained that Bolen is adept at determining things like what shop skills students need to develop that will best help their community. Bolen grew up in Umatilla County and graduated from Umatilla High School, where he was a student FFA leader. He later attended Oregon State University and earned a bachelor of science degree in general agriculture and a master of science in general agriculture. He joined the Elgin School District in 2014 after teaching agricultural sciences and manufacturing at Colton High School in Clackamas County for five years. Bolen has long loved FFA because of

the educational opportunities it gives students. "It provides students with hands-on learning opportunities and helps them learn to succeed," he said. Bolen wants FFA to help others the way it did him. "It had a huge influence on my life," he said. Bolen has served as a substitute school bus driver in Elgin since joining the school district. He said he enjoys this because it gives him a chance to get to know students beginning in their elementary years. This means that when they come to EHS, their transition is a little easier because they already know one of the teachers, said Bolen, who also drives buses for FFA trips. Greif said Bolen's ability and willingness to drive school buses is welcome

because Elgin is periodically short of school bus drivers. Teaching, bus driving and FFA leave Bolen with little spare time but he does not let his responsibilities keep him from his wife, Kim, and their young children, Garrett and Isabella. "The great thing about FFA is that I can include my family in a lot of things," he said. Bolen noted that last weekend he was able to take his family with him to an FFA retreat. Bolen and his family are well on their way to establishing deep roots in Elgin. "I love small schools and the educational opportunities they provide," he said. "I look forward to many more years in Elgin and working in this great community."

ACADEMY

Continued from Page 1A campaign to raise funds for things the school needs." GRA is one of five private schools in the La Grande area. O'Reilly said there are several reasons parents may choose to enroll their children in private school. "There is a perception that classes are more rigorous," he said. "At GRA that is accurate, and you can see it in kids testing one or two grades above their level." The GRA director pointed out that private schools often offer smaller classrooms and more hands-on learning, which has been shown to result in better retention of the material students are learning. O'Reilly referred to the moral and ethical component that comes with a faith-based educational institution. He said often schools like GRA allow for broader education because they aren't limited by restrictions on teaching religious curriculum. "I found all these subjects come back to moral and ethical questions," O'Reilly said about his experience with teaching.



Sabrina Thompson/The Observer

The entrance to Grande Ronde Academy will highlight student work as the year continues in its expanded space.

OLLIE

Continued from Page 1A "I think that is one thing that made it so hard, it was just so unexpected," DeCoteau said. Even though Ollie couldn't see or speak, DeCoteau said, he had no limitations because of his father, Kent Hopkins. With his father's help, Ollie could skateboard and play guitar and loved being outside and in the water. "He had a lot of special needs, but there wasn't anything he couldn't do," DeCoteau said. Ollie was everything to his father, and in some ways he saved his life, Hopkins said. "He turned a would-be criminal, a drug addict, into a decent father," Hopkins said. To honor his son, Hopkins wrote a song that he performed at his memorial service and has posted it to YouTube to keep Ollie's memory alive. "I just love music, and Ollie did too," Hopkins said. "Some people go to therapy, but I use music to keep me strong." Ollie's extended family and friends have found their own way to keep his memory alive. Ollie loved loud toys, which is what inspired them to organize "Ollie's Obnoxious Toy Drive." On Sept. 13, Ollie's friends and their parents began organizing a toy drive to celebrate Ollie. They hope to get donations of the loudest, most obnoxious toys but will take any toy donations, such as a generous gift of 1,000 stuffed animals they have already received. "It's more to help the kids with the grieving process," DeCoteau said.

"We've tried to explain that even though he is gone from us, we can still celebrate all that he has taught us, like unconditional love." Since the drive began, the group has collected more than \$2,000 worth of toys and cash donations. All monetary donations go directly to purchasing toys that will be given along with the donated toys to OHSU Doernbecher Children's Hospital in Portland, where Ollie received medical treatments. "We want to make kids as happy as Ollie made us," DeCoteau said. "It is a way he can still bring smiles." Ollie's friends plan to drive to the hospital Oct. 12 to drop off their donations, and are accepting them until then. To donate you can contact DeCoteau at tashiadecoteau@gmail.com or 541-910-6814.

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