

PROGRAMS

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advantages, all the impacts that athletics like baseball have on athletes,” Insko said.

And Fetz wasn't the only one.

Union County Commissioner Matt Scarfo — himself a former Eastern Oregon baseball player — was at the breakfast and announcement Saturday, and he told The Observer he has been making a case for baseball's return for years.

“Baseball literally brought me here from Phoenix, Arizona,” said Scarfo, who played in the mid-1990s. “I came here to play baseball, and look where I am now. I thank Eastern and Eastern's baseball (program) for giving me the opportunity. It made me who I am today.

“I kept going, ‘What's taking so long on baseball?’ I've been really pushing it. Really glad. Really excited about this.”

In the “State of the University” address given by Insko — during which he announced the additions — the president described the university as being in solid financial shape. He said he had to tell Fetz no on several prior occasions because “we weren't in a position to do it.”

Along with the improved financial status, Eastern also received a major financial boost in its efforts to add baseball and lacrosse.

“We were able to get an enhanced allocation in what's called sports lottery funding,” Insko said. “Sports lottery funding in the state of Oregon goes to the public institutions to support what they call non-revenue-generating sports.”

Insko said the university was able to get the additional funding through advocating to state legislators, including Rep. Cliff Bentz, Rep. Greg Baretto, Sen. Bill Hansell and Gov. Kate Brown, to name a few.

Insko told The Observer following the announcement that EOU received \$760,000 in funds from the state.

The one-time investment, he said, will offset the startup costs of the two sports. Insko anticipates that EOU will be able to bring on 40-45 student-athletes for the two sports by the beginning of the 2020-21 school year, and 20-25 more the following year.

Insko told The Observer that EOU “analyzed more than just two sports” but decided at this time baseball and lacrosse are the best decision.

“We looked at the potential for more, and ultimately what came out was these were the two that made the most sense financially, as well in terms of connection with the community or, in the case of lacrosse, potential for something exciting and new in the community.”

Weissenfluh added that the university will keep analyzing options to add other sports.

“We'll continue to look at sports and how to grow and be able to provide opportunities. It made sense for us to add lacrosse right now,” she told The Observer, noting that Eastern isn't the only school in the Cascade Collegiate Conference considering bringing the sport on. “A lot of schools are looking to add it.”

Community excited for return

Community support for baseball is something La Grande High School baseball head coach Parker McKinley has seen firsthand. The coach told The Observer he's excited about the reality of EOU reinstating the program.



Observer file photo

The Eastern Oregon University baseball team is shown during its final homestand in May 2006 before the sport was cut. The university announced Saturday it will bring baseball back after the 13-year hiatus. EOU will also add women's lacrosse.



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Eastern Oregon University President Tom Insko speaks during an announcement of the school bringing back baseball and adding women's lacrosse Saturday morning.

It creates a “sense of community pride in the kids and players when they know there's a lot of care about what they are doing,” he said. “I think all of our sports programs feel that. In baseball we've been fortunate to have that.”

Scarfo added that with the recent success of baseball programs in La Grande — the high school team reaching the playoffs on a consistent basis and winning state two years ago, and the Little League team making deep summer runs — baseball as a sport is strong in the area.

“We have a lot of good baseball (players) here (but) we had a university where they couldn't come play. Now we do. It's going to be fantastic. Now instead of maybe some of these high school students not going to college, they can stay here, stay home, and have baseball right here in La Grande, which I think is fantastic.”

McKinley added that EOU will have a solid local base to pull baseball players from.

“Not even just from our high school, but all our Eastern Oregon teams, we have a good group of baseball kids around that can contribute,” he said, speaking not only of local high schools, but of regional community colleges like Treasure Valley, Blue Mountain, Walla Walla and Columbia Basin.

EOU will also be able to take further advantage of the turf field installed at Community Stadium a year ago, as the lacrosse team will play on the new surface.

“We can leverage what we already

have,” Insko said.

The sport could also extend the reach of where Eastern can look to pull students as coaches recruit for the new program.

“It's going to be from areas where students traditionally aren't looking at EOU,” he said.

Fetz also spoke to the added draw Eastern will now have with lacrosse.

“It'll give a whole new set of student-athletes some place (to go),” he said. “Probably not too many lacrosse players come to Eastern for any purpose. That can change.”

The EOU baseball team, Insko said, will play its home games at Optimist Field inside Pioneer Park, the home of the LHS baseball team. He said the university will also look at options to play home games in Baker City.

In the long term, though, EOU will look to build a new baseball field on campus. With the university's new fieldhouse set to soon break ground at Snowflake Field — the Mountaineers' old baseball facility — Weissenfluh said the hope is for a baseball park to be built adjacent to Eastern's softball field.

“We are) hoping to make it a joint complex. That way they can share amenities,” she said, noting it would be where the current practice fields for soccer are.

And how soon could EOU add a baseball field?

“To be realistic, we're probably looking at a four-year plan,” Weissenfluh said. “We're going to be out there aggressively asking and cultivating people that are interested in helping us with that prospect. Hopefully it's sooner. But I'd say a four- or five-year plan.”

She added that the school is opening a nationwide search for both coaching positions and hopes to fill them by the end of the year to allow coaches time to begin recruiting.

“We'll have it open for 30 days,” the athletic director said. “We'll give people the opportunity to submit their materials and really open it up to whoever feels they are qualified to apply.”

Once the sports are in place, it will give the athletic department 15 sports. Baseball will be the seventh men's sport, joining football, basketball, wrestling, cross county, track and field and soccer. Eight women's sports will be available, as lacrosse joins softball, basketball, wrestling, cross county, track and field, soccer and volleyball.

EOU most recently added men's and women's wrestling, bringing them on in 2016. Men's soccer was added in 2015.



Dick Mason/The Observer

Roberto Arceo, right, a co-owner of the El Erradero Restaurant, receives a payment for a meal from Russell Lawson of Elgin, shown with his son Lane, on Saturday.

OPEN

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Island City where it had been since 2001, because Bearco Loop offered greater visibility.

The restaurant is part of a chain of El Erradero restaurants the Arceo family founded. The others are in Ontario, Baker City and Stanfield. El Erradero in Baker City opened in 1993, followed by the one in Ontario in 1998 and the restaurant in Stanfield in 2003.

“They have been successful throughout. Eastern Oregon has been very good to us,” said Arceo, who is a co-owner of the four restaurants along with his father and mother, Elvira.

The fire that struck the Arceos' La Grande El Erradero on Aug. 23 began outside the restaurant in a travel trailer parked in an adjacent storage facility.

Alfredo Arceo said if not for the quick action of firefighters from the La Grande and La Grande Rural fire departments, El Erradero would have suffered far more extensive damage. He said a portion of its roof had started to burn when firefighters

arrived but was then immediately extinguished. He shuddered to think what would have happened if the roof had been engulfed in flames.

“You are done if the roof starts burning (extensively),” Arceo said.

The water used to extinguish the blaze caused much of the damage to the kitchen and its equipment and the bathrooms. The impact would have been worse if not for a drain system in the kitchen that much of the water flowed into.

“Otherwise the water would have moved in a different direction,” Arceo said.

The smoke damage in the dining area was successfully addressed by cleaning its walls and carpet.

Arceo said there was never any doubt in his mind that El Erradero, which means the cattle brander in Spanish, would reopen.

The co-owner said that even if the fire had destroyed the building, the restaurant would have eventually reemerged.

“We are so committed to the community,” Arceo said. “We would have found some way to rebuild it.”

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STATION

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would be superior to the previous one on Willow Street also because it is only a block or two from important services. These include Cook Memorial Library where people can search for and apply for jobs via computers, a Northeast Oregon Public Transit bus stop and medical offices.

The new UC Warming Station, if no appeal is filed, would likely open next month.

“(Nov. 15) is our goal,” Smith said.

The shelter would remain open through the winter.

The UC Warming Station had 112 total guests in 2018-19, 75 of whom were La Grande residents, Smith said. Each guest stayed an average of 12.5 total nights at the shelter. Those who came included people who live in Cove but could not get home because roads were closed and individuals who did not have access to housing.

A number of those who stayed at the shelter were school-age children.

“None of them missed a single day of school (after spending the night at the shelter),” Smith said.

She explained that the

children were ready for school because they had a chance to wash up, eat a good meal and have a comfortable night's sleep. Many of these children would not have gone to school the next day if they had not spent the night at the warming station, Smith said.

Food the warming station will be stocked with this winter will include quick prep meals that can be prepared with a microwave oven or hot water. The UC Warming Station will always accept donations of food, Smith said.

Information on donating food can be obtained by emailing Cami Miller, one of the warm-

ing station's volunteer staff, at cmiller@neonoregon.org.

Smith said that the warming station board wants to be responsive to the needs of the community and welcomes any input from the public. People with ideas or comments about the warming station are encouraged to share them by emailing Miller.

Smith said the warming station is a step in the right direction but it is not the answer to meeting all the needs of those who do not have shelter.

“La Grande needs a bigger solution so that our neighbors don't freeze,” Smith said.



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