



Dick Mason/The Observer

Tom Colton says he originally planned to work as a letter carrier for five years when he was hired to work for the U.S. Postal Service in La Grande in 2004.

COLTON

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residents on his route.

"Tom knows his customers," Haefer said. "They love him."

Carreiro said Colton, who delivers to 720 addresses, is as meticulous as he is dependable.

The postmaster noted that Colton's work station, the place he sorts his mail every morning before beginning his route in northern La Grande, is perpetually clean and orderly.

"It always looks like this, nothing is out of place," Carreiro said Tuesday afternoon as he pointed to Colton's station.

Colton became a letter carrier in La Grande after a 26-year career in the U.S. Air Force, for which he flew F-4 jets. He said there are no parallels between serving in the Air Force and working as a letter carrier.

"They are totally different worlds," Colton said.

Colton has worked longer as a letter carrier than he anticipated. He noted that at his hiring he was asked by Dick Rogers, then La Grande's postmaster, how long he expected to work and he had answered five years. He does not hesitate when asked why he has worked 10 years longer than he planned.

"I like being outside and it keeps me in shape," Colton said.

The letter carrier walks a total of eight miles a day on his route and drives another 14. While walking he avoids covering more ground than necessary.

"I try to be as efficient as I can. Extra steps add up," he said. "You feel them at the end of the day."

At 67, the letter carrier appears youthful and has a spring in his step to match. Still, the physical nature of his job has taken a toll.

"Something always hurts (after a day on the job)," Colton said.

He credits his wife, Julie, with giving him a big boost each day during his postal career by bringing him coffee every morning.

"She is my support system," he said.

Dealing with dogs has been one of his biggest challenges. He has been bitten three times by canines. Although he was never seriously injured by a dog, canines are never far from his mind when doing his route.

"I am always thinking about it. You have to be aware of your surroundings," Colton said.

The cost of a first class postage stamp was 37 cents when Colton joined the U.S. Postal Service in 2004, and today it is 55 cents. That is not all that has gone up — so has the number of packages he delivers.

Some are quite large, including desks and chairs. Postal carriers deliver large items like this much more frequently now because people are ordering more items online, Colton said. This is making the job of a carrier harder.

"The job has been more physical than I thought it would be," Colton said.

He also noted that he delivers fewer letters than he once did and believes this is because so many people communicate today via social media.

Colton does not have any big immediate plans after retiring.

"I want to rest and then do some traveling with my wife," he said.

Carreiro said Colton is leaving a void that will be a challenge to fill, particularly when things get hectic.

"We are really going to miss him, especially during the holidays," the postmaster said.

La Grande's post office, Haefer said, is losing not only a top carrier but also an outstanding mentor.

"Everyone looks up to Tom," he said.

Data shows rapid rise in youth marijuana, vaping

■ Youth vaping increased 295% from 2017 to 2019

EO Media Group

PORTLAND — While overall use of marijuana among Oregon youth has remained flat, the primary way they're using the substance — vaping — has dramatically increased, according to an Oregon Health Authority analysis.

The findings, which were released on Thursday, adds to evidence that vaping is subjecting many more youth to addiction. New data shows one in four Oregon 11th-graders reporting vaping a nicotine product, with youth use of e-cigarettes, such as Juul, increasing nearly 80% between 2017 and 2019. Marijuana use changed dramatically as well, according to the data, with youth shifting from smoking marijuana to vaping.

Youth vaping of marijuana increased 295% — from 11% to 44% among 11th-graders using marijuana between 2017 and 2019 — even as 11th-grade overall marijuana use stayed constant at 20%.

The data comes from Oregon Healthy Teens, a survey of middle- and high-school students that OHA administers every two years.

"This is alarming," said Dr. Dean Sidelinger, health officer and state epidemiologist for the OHA Public Health Division. "It confirms what we've long known — vaping is putting a new generation at risk for addiction. These products can get young people started on using nicotine and marijuana, and it is easy to get hooked."

OHT and the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, a survey the Centers

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for Disease Control and Prevention annually administers in partnership with states, both found that nicotine vaping products are most popular among children and young adults: 23% of 11th-grade students and 13% of young adults, ages 18 to 24, use nicotine e-cigarettes versus just 3% of adults age 25 and older.

About half of Oregon high school students who currently use e-cigarettes report they never smoked conventional cigarettes — not even one time.

In Oregon, youth vaping overlaps with use of conventional tobacco and flavored tobacco products, the OHT analysis showed. More than half of Oregon eighth- and 11th-graders who use tobacco use flavored tobacco. Roughly half of all youth who currently use conventional tobacco products started with vape products. Nearly two in five Oregon 11th-grade vape users also currently smoke conventional cigarettes.

A February 2019 study in the journal JAMA Network Open, one of the first studies to track youth e-cigarette users over time, found that young people who vape e-cigarettes are nearly three times as likely to start smoking cigarettes as peers who don't vape.

DRIVE

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blood, I am going to keep giving it," Chandler said.

FBLA is a national career and technical skill education organization, teaching students business and career skills in middle and high school and at the college level. According to the

Elgin's FBLA adviser, Jennifer Smith, the organization strives to help students develop leadership and marketable business skills and build their confidence. Having a community service element gives students the opportunity to give back to their community, Smith said.

"By partnering with American Red Cross we are

learning how to communicate with organizations and how to have a business world perspective of it," San-nar said.

This year, the blood drive received donations from appointments and walk-in donors. The amount given means the donated blood will potentially save up to 93 lives.

AMTRAK

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its top money-losers. The long-distance routes are also plagued by poor on-time performance, largely caused by interference from freight trains on shared tracks. The Trump administration has tried several times to reduce Amtrak's federal subsidy, but Congressional budget writers reverse the proposed cuts every time — in part to preserve a modicum of train service to rural towns that have few other public transportation options.

Amtrak CEO Richard Anderson, who previously headed up Delta Air Lines and Northwest Airlines, favors a restructuring of the railroad's route map to emphasize more frequent service on short distance corridors between growing cities and "megaregions." But the railroad's leadership has moved slowly on restructuring because of predictable pushback from rural areas and lawmakers.

Nuxoll, who teaches high school history in Eugene, said a medium-distance route between growing Portland and booming Boise could fit with Amtrak's future strategy.

"That's part of the practical considerations," Nuxoll told public radio.

AORTA's strategy to launch its proposal down the tracks involves drumming up constituent letters to state and federal lawmakers. Another initial step is to find a sponsor in the Oregon Legislature who could champion a bill to do a state study



Oregon Public Broadcasting photo

Pacific Northwest passenger rail buffs are gathering in La Grande Saturday to drum up support to bring back part of a long ago canceled Amtrak route, the Pioneer.

of costs, ridership and what track owner Union Pacific might need to facilitate co-existence of passenger and freight trains on the route.

Scheduled speakers at Saturday's summit include AORTA board members, Oregon DOT Rail Division administrator Hal Gard, Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett and several members of All Aboard Washington, a sister rail advocacy nonprofit.

Bennett is slated to review past, unsuccessful efforts to revive passenger rail service in the Oregon Trail corridor. All Aboard Washington is working to bring back cross-state passenger train service over Stampede Pass, which would connect Seattle and Spokane via Ellensburg, the Yakima Valley and Tri-Cities. Nuxoll said the advocacy campaign in Washington state could be instructive for Oregon.

Family and Friends of
Leopoldine "Poldi" Williams

of Union are invited to join in a

90th Birthday Party
hosted by her children and grandchildren.

November 16th • 2 pm to 5 pm
at Island City Market's Urban Vine

10701 W. 1st in Island City

Please join us in celebrating!



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