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Good day to our valued subscriber Kevin McCarthy of La Grande

Effort to awaken the past

■ Meeting held to bring passenger train service back to NE Oregon

By Dick Mason
The Observer

Cook Memorial Library's community room was probably as crowded late Saturday morning as the Union Pacific Railroad depot in La Grande was on Sept. 27, 1937, when people gathered there for the train carrying President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to arrive.

FDR was asleep when his train stopped in La Grande around 12:30 a.m., but First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt did appear and spoke briefly to the crowd.

Few if any of the more than 100 people at La Grande's library Saturday were the same ones who saw FDR's train arrive in 1937, but many lived here when La Grande had passenger train service. The desire to see passenger rail service return to Northeast Oregon is what drew the crowd to Saturday's Eastern Oregon Rail meeting, which was held to inform people how they could help bring back Amtrak's passenger service.

Those in the audience included an individual who wrote on a display paper asking people why they want passenger train service to return: "I'm 79 — don't know how much longer I can drive long distances. I need to travel monthly to Boise and Portland."

This 79-year-old and many others at the meeting learned what steps need to be taken to make this dream become a reality during a program put on by the all-volunteer nonprofit Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates, with help from All Aboard Washington. AORTA is proposing to revive at least the Portland to Boise portion of the old Amtrak Pioneer route, which was discontinued in 1997

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Girls get a taste for science AT STEM PROGRAM



Ben Lonergan/EO Media Group

La Grande Middle School students Weslie Seimears, left, and Jillian Nelson test a selection of powders during the 2019 Girls in Science STEM program at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande Saturday afternoon.

By Phil Wright, EO Media Group

The girls dipped the white plastic spoons into the white plastic buckets and scooped up the gelatinous zombie flesh. Protective goggles in place, they were careful to plop the slimy substance into plastic zip lock bags.

Eastern Oregon University biology student Brady Layman told the group they next had to "squish it." All part of preparing the yellowish muck to test for that basic component of life, DNA. Adrian Middle School student Delia Deroin squished away.

She was one of roughly 100 Eastern Oregon girls in grades sixth through eighth Saturday at the university in La Grande taking part in Girls in Science. The event since 2001 strives to provide girls a fun but education filled day with hands-on exploration using math, technology and science.

EOU chemistry professor Anna Cavinato explained the scenarios vary year to year but the focus is on using science to answer a mystery.

"I think it's a great opportunity for the girls to engage in the discovery process," she said.

Sometimes the students work through a crime scene, sometimes they have to solve an environmental problem. This year was more health based: Is a zombie apocalypse possible?

Students from as far away as Fossil in Wheeler County made the trip to figure out how "Dr. Digory Potshard, Distinguished Fellow of Anthropology" turned gray-skinned and limp, unable to do much more than cast a vacant gaze from the confines of a wheelchair.

The clues pointed to several possibilities. Could this be due to contact with mercury? Was it the sushi he ate? Perhaps some sort of poison?



Ben Lonergan/EO Media Group

Eastern Oregon University student Austen Kalivas, center, assists La Grande Middle School students Kallin Burgess, left, and Ella Johnson in measuring the freezing point of an unknown metallic liquid during the annual STEM event.

Had he provoked the ire of a Voudoun high priest and now existed under a curse?

The girls would need to check the evidence, run tests and create hypothesis about what happened to the good professor. And they had to act fast. The zombism was spreading. Cavinato told the students she found two wondering the halls of the science building and had them captive in her lab for testing.

That prompted a murmur among the students and questions.

"Are the zombies tame?" one girl asked? Another said she understands zombies "eat brains."

Cavinato assured the crowd these zombies were not rampant monsters. But she warned if anyone turns into a zombie, they might end up in the lab.

Working in three large groups, the students conducted an array of tests and experiments.

Brooke Eckstein of Stella Mayfield School, Elgin, and Malana Spencer of Sunridge Middle School, Pendleton, sought to determine if the white powder Potshard encountered could be the culprit. One deposited the powder into the testing tray, the other dropped vinegar over it, and

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Reaching beyond festival borders

■ Special screening at EOU shines spotlight on humanity

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

The Eastern Oregon Film Festival expanded its reach with a special screening at Eastern Oregon University Friday night. By inviting students and the community to view a short film and full-length feature, the festival organizers hoped to gain additional community interest in the 10th annual event, according to Festival Director Chris Jennings.

The films shown at EOU were "Tides," directed by Masami Kwai, and "I Am Human," directed by Taryn Southern and Elena Gaby. The special screening also featured a question-and-answer session with directors Kwai and Gaby, giving the audience a chance to hear about the process of creating the film.

"Tides" is about a family attempting to repair their relationships after a father returns to the family. In the film, a little girl navigates the new dynamics during a day at the beach, balancing the exploration of connecting to her father while maintaining her loyalty to her mother.

"I began making films because it would be living life beyond the barriers and forces of oppression," Kwai said.

The inspiration for "Tides" came from two sources: Kwai's personal experience going to the beach and connecting with her father, and Dignity and Power Now, a program out of Los Angeles that helps families with parents who are incarcerated navigate the effects of their imprisonment.

Many college students took advantage of the opportunity to attend the free event. One EOU sophomore studying biology, Madison Pittz, had particular interest in "I Am Human," a documentary, as it pertains to her major and studies.

"The trailer I saw said stuff about rewiring the human brain and connecting bodies to machines, and I was interested in seeing the research on that and the potential for the future," Pittz said.

"I Am Human" explores the evolution of biotechnology and humans and how it is happening together.

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