

MICKEY

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knew of the situation, but all were sworn to secrecy.

“Security was very tight. We couldn’t go off the base. We were in lockdown,” Mickey said.

The security restrictions added to an already taut environment.

“We did not know what was going to happen hour by hour,” he said. “It was very tense.”

The base remained on high alert about a week after which military officials determined that there was no longer a threat. Mickey felt a sense of relief.

“There was a possibility (during the potential crisis) that anything could happen,” Mickey said

The missile crisis added high drama to the final portion of Mickey’s four-year stint in the Air Force. Despite the high stakes tension during the high alert, Mickey has fond memories of his time in the Air Force, for that was when he learned to fly.

“I don’t see how I could have gotten any better instruction,” said Mickey, who served in the Air Force Reserve for four years after his honorable discharge.

He was inspired to enlist in the Air Force because he wanted to serve his country and learn to fly.

“I told my recruiter that I didn’t want to be a ground pounder,” Mickey said.

Since leaving the Air Force Mickey has continued to fly, both professionally and for



Ellis Mickey photo

Ellis Mickey learned to fly while serving in the U.S. Air Force more than 60 years ago.

recreational purposes. Earlier this year he flew from La Grande to Alabama and back to visit family members, traveling a distance of 4,000 miles over the course of five days.

At age 85, Mickey speaks like he will never tire of the wonder of flying.

“Flying is one of the best ways to look down and see what God does,” he said.

In 1973, Mickey also flew for one year commercially for Shell Oil Company. He spent that year transporting Shell officials to oil pumping stations around the United States. Mickey said that was a challenge because many of these sites were in mountainous areas.

“There are a lot of difficult weather systems in mountainous areas,” he said.

Mickey left Shell in 1974 to accept an offer to take over a struggling KFC restaurant

in New Mexico. He enjoyed the experience and had far more than a taste of success. In 1983 he received an award from KFC for having the top sales of any KFC restaurant in New Mexico.

He credits the success of his franchise to the hiring of excellent employees and a philosophy he has adhered to his entire life.

“I believe you should do something right or you shouldn’t do it all,” he said.

Mickey, who later operated a KFC restaurant in Lake Tahoe, said that running restaurants was “very demanding but very fulfilling.”

Mickey and his wife of 24 years, Theora, moved to Union County about 20 years ago. Today he is an active member of the flight community and is striving to introduce young people to flight. His efforts were recognized by the Experimental Aircraft Association in 2017 for taking the second highest number of youth between the ages of 10 and 17 on flights in that calendar year. The number he took up was 34, all in his Piper Super Pacer.

“I enjoy it very much. I want to serve young people,” he said. “I want to introduce them to the beauty of flight and help them develop themselves.”

Mickey has now been flying for 62 years. He doubts he ever would have become a pilot if not for the Air Force because he would not have been able to afford flight lessons.

“I owe it all to the Air Force,” Mickey said.

BANQUET

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“The names of many amazing people are on this trophy,” Baker said.

Baker is a rancher with little spare time, for he is also the owner of Eagle Carriage and Machine.

Two Distinguished Service to Agriculture awards were presented at the banquet. The recipients were Mike Miller and Jeff Lathrop.

Miller worked for Blue Mountain Seeds of Imbler for 45 years before recently retiring.

“Mike is truly an exceptional person. His passion for his job was amazing,” said Bill Merrigan, general manager of Blue Mountain Seeds.

Miller praised Merrigan for being a great person to work for and said that his time with the Imbler business passed quickly.

“It was a long time but it didn’t seem that long,” Miller said, explaining that one of the reasons is he learned something new almost every day while at Blue Mountain Seeds.

Lathrop also has an impressive legacy with one company. He has worked for Wallowa County Grain Growers for 45 years. Lathrop, who is based at the company’s Island City office, sells customized fertilizers and other products farmers apply to their fields to boost crop production.

Mike Hayward, CEO of the Wallowa County Grain Growers, said this is a major expense farmers face, and they have tremendous confidence in the advice provided by Lathrop.

“This is very much a trust business. Jeff has earned this trust,” Hayward said.

The Young Farmer of the Year award went to Zeb Grove. He was praised by the work he does to reach out to the community by Jed Hassinger, president of the Union County Farm Bureau. Hassinger, who presented the award, noted that Grove led an effort by the Union County Farm Bureau to award an annual scholarship to a young person in the community.

Grove said he was gratified by the honor.

“I am so excited. This means so much,” said Grove, who grows crops including wheat, grass, hay and alfalfa.

Courtney Ranches of Union County was honored with the Ecological Restoration and Conservation award. Sherry and Kevin Ludviksen received the award on behalf of their ranches from Jesse Steele, executive director of the Grande Ronde Model Water-



Andrew DeLeon photo

Ashley O’Toole, above, was co-emcee of the 2019 Farmer-Merchant Banquet with Karrine Brogoitti, publisher of The Observer.

shed. Steele praised the work the Ludviksens have done in managing Courtney Ranches in a way that protects the environment and creates strong riparian zones.

“They have been good stewards of the land,” Steele said.

Timber producers Maurizio and Allison Valerio were saluted at the banquet as the recipients of the Forest Steward of the Year award. Jamie Knight of the Oregon Department of Forestry commended the Valerios for their efforts to create an excellent setting where people can learn about sustainable forestry practices. The Valerios grow ponderosa pine, Douglas fir and western larch near Medical Springs.

Allison Valerio praised the Oregon State University Extension Service for being among those who have provided important assistance for their operation.

“We are truly honored,” Maurizio Valerio added. “It is hard to believe they could find nobody better than us to receive the award.”

He then spoke of a dream for the forest operation he and his wife run.

“My ultimate goal is that 80 years from now people will come (to the forest they now operate) and say, ‘Wow, isn’t this beautiful,’” he said.

The theme of the 71st annual Farmer-Merchant Banquet, which was emceed by Brogoitti and Ashley O’Toole, was The Roots of Union County. Musical entertainment was provided by the La Grande High School A Cappella Choir and the BlueMountaineers.



Observer File photo

The location of the Union County Warming Station is facing serious debate over the appeal filed by Al Adelsberger on Oct. 18. The City of La Grande will hold a public hearing about the Shelter Dec. 4 at La Grande Middle School to listen to both sides of the argument.

DEBATE

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the Third Street building, she said she thought people should question why the service has already had to move twice. She said homeowners who are paying their mortgages and have children should not have to live near a homeless station.

“Metro areas are busing people out to rural Oregon, and they’re coming out here as one of the destinations,” McLeod said. “(The homeless population) has become a detriment to the community. It is a drug and alcohol problem, not an I-can’t-find-a-job issue.”

While McLeod acknowledges this is an issue across America, as a local business owner she is concerned about the effect having a place for homeless people to stay will have on downtown.

“The warming center is allowing people to habitate where it is causing harm, and in this neighborhood it already has,” she said.

McLeod was one of the people who signed Adelsberger’s appeal, which he has stated was meant to help in facilitating a long-term solution for the homeless problem

in La Grande. Adelsberger is not against having a warming station in La Grande, but he does not like the Third Street location, according to his appeal. He believes more businesses downtown should have received notification of the warming station’s approval, and the location in question is too small.

Those who agree and disagree with the appeal have taken to social media, in particular, Facebook, to voice their opinions and stance on the issue.

Of the 101 responses to The Observer’s Facebook post about the warming center’s appeal, 44 were in favor of the warming station and nine were against it (45 responses were neutral).

“Leaving people out in the cold is wrong,” Geri Hall said on Facebook. “Don’t file an appeal that leaves people out in the cold and pretend you are doing it to help them.”

Christopher John McKaig was in the other camp on Facebook and claimed the warming station “will attract the wrong people to our town. ... We should put the money towards people who contribute to society.”

Mayor Steve Clements said

in a comment posted on his behalf to the Facebook post about the appeal, “During an appeal, the Council takes input from City Staff in the form of a report (written and oral), then proponents of the appeal provide input, followed by opponents. The Council must base its decisions on findings of fact which should include data and relevant facts. In the coming appeal, the Council will need to decide if there is a significant adverse impact of the appealed land use.”

The appeal’s hearing on the shelter’s permit is Dec. 4 at La Grande Middle School.

The city’s planning department will accept written feedback from the public on the appeal. Input received by Nov. 15 will be given to the members of the city council a week before the Dec. 4 hearing as part of a staff report. The public can submit written comments at La Grande Planning Department at city hall, 1000 Adams Ave., or mail them to P.O. Box 670, La Grande, 97850.

The planning department also will bundle comments that come in after Nov. 15 and provide those to city councilors at the hearing.

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