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WEDNESDAY • December 11, 2019 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Susan Snow of La Grande

Friend recalls former neighbor

■ Life of man found dead in storage unit remembered

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Larry Miller met Stephen Slodowski when they lived two doors apart in an apartment complex in Beaverton. Slodowski was intense and passionate about music, Miller said, and the two got along and were good neighbors.

Slodowski, 59, was found dead last week in a unit at Eastern Oregon Storage, 1410 21st St. La Grande. Lt. Gary Bell of the city police department reported Slodowski had been living in the unit. He also said the investigation did not reveal much about the man.

“Slodowski information was challenging to get,” Bell said.

Slodowski was born Oct. 11, 1960, in Washington County, according to police, but neither police nor Miller knew much about his early life.

“He was a man who kept to himself, but he was friendly,” Miller said.

He added the last few years of Slodowski’s life had been a struggle.

Miller and his wife moved to Cove in 2016, and Slodowski soon followed despite Miller’s warnings to Slodowski that it wouldn’t be a good fit.

“He didn’t drive, and just had a bicycle,” Miller said. “I told him that it is a harsh winter here in Eastern Oregon and would be difficult to get around.”

Slodowski arrived in La Grande in the spring of 2017. He soon had issues with landlords including missed rent payments. Slodowski received monthly allowances from his mother in Sweden, according to what he told Miller. However, as his mother aged and developed Alzheimer’s, payments became less frequent. By the time he moved to La Grande, See **Neighbor** / Page 5A

LA GRANDE SET TO SILENCE WHISTLES



Staff photo by Sabrina Thompson

A train Tuesday passes behind Calvary Chapel in downtown La Grande. Train whistles are an all-day occurrence that routinely interrupt sermons at the church. This will change on Dec. 27 when La Grande’s Quiet Zone finally becomes official.

By Sabrina Thompson, The Observer

LA GRANDE — Life in La Grande is about to get a bit quieter. The city announced the train whistle Quiet Zone will take effect Dec. 27 at 12:01 a.m.

“I am ecstatic,” Mayor Steve Clements said after the Dec. 5 city council meeting when he announced the approval for the whistle ban. “It shows the commitment of the city, and how when we had something we needed in place, we followed the rules and it got done.”

Conversation about the ban on most train whistles goes back to the early 1990s, and the city officially began discussions on the matter in the early 2000s, according to Father Hank Albrecht, former pastor of the Our Lady of the Valley Catholic Church. Strides toward the installation of safety devices and measures required began in 2017, with the completion early this fall.

To qualify for a Quiet Zone — in which trains are not required to blow their whistles at traffic crossings — the intersection of railroad tracks and roadway must be safe enough for vehicles and pedestrians to cross without being warned by a train whistle. To receive Federal Railroad Administration approval, the city installed barriers to prevent cars from going around the arms and made any needed improvements within the Quiet Zone — encompassing the crossings at Fir, Greenwood, Cherry and Willow streets, and H Avenue.

The need for a Quiet Zone has been the subject of much debate. Some long-time residents told The Observer previously they did not want the Quiet Zone, stating they got used to the sound and didn’t notice it.

Online, many people posted they would like the whistles to remain, saying the sound doesn’t bother them and they are needed for safety reasons.

“I lived right next to a train station,” Faith Amanda commented in a previous Observer Facebook post about the Quiet Zone. “I’m so used to the horns, I would hear him everyday at 5 in the morning getting ready to leave.



Observer file photo

Train whistles throughout the day and night are on the verge of extinction in La Grande. The new Quiet Zone prohibiting most train whistles in town goes into effect Dec. 27.

“I am ecstatic. It shows the commitment of the city, and how when we had something we needed in place, we followed the rules and it got done.”

— Steve Clements, La Grande mayor

They would blow and blow and blow and never stop. It’s important to have the whistle. It’s for safety, to let people know they’re coming. I’ve always loved them. I can still hear them. It may be faint where I live now but I can hear them. See **Whistles** / Page 5A

Levy seeks seat in House

■ Echo woman seeking to fill seat vacated by Cove’s Greg Barreto

By Kathy Aney
EO Media Group

ECHO — Barbara “Bobby” Levy announced Tuesday she will run for the Oregon House of Representatives.

Levy hopes to replace Rep. Greg Barreto, R-Cove, who said in November he won’t seek re-election. She said her bid to represent District 58 stems from a desire to give Eastern Oregon a strong voice.

“Eastern Oregon is too often overlooked and undervalued by Salem,” she said. “People here know better than anyone how special our land and resources are and how to best utilize them.”

Levy, whose resume includes farming in Echo, rejects the stereotypes thrust upon farmers and ranchers.

“There is a misconception that if you are a farmer or rancher that you’re not a conservationist,” she said.

See **Levy** / Page 5A

Liberty Complex taking shape

■ Putnam Building could be ready in the spring

By Dick Mason
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Liberty Theatre soon will have a complementary sidekick, just as Paul Newman had Robert Redford in the 1969 film classic “Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid.”

Renovation of the historic Putnam Building, which is next to the Liberty Theatre on Adams Avenue in La Grande, will be finished by early spring of 2020, said Dale Mammen, who owns the building with his wife, Ginny.

The Putnam will be part of the future Liberty Complex, made up of the Mammens’ building and the theater, which closed in 1959 but will reopen in late 2020 after extensive renovation work.

Dale Mammen said his See **Liberty** / Page 5A

Buehler announces congressional run

■ Former candidate for Oregon governor seeks to replace Greg Walden

By Kyle Spurr
EO Media Group

BEND — Knute Buehler, an orthopedic surgeon who represented Bend in the state House until an unsuccessful run for governor in 2018, announced Tuesday he will seek the Republican nomination for Oregon’s

See **Buehler** / Page 5A



EO Media Group file photo

Oregon Republican Knute Buehler, who said in October he was considering running for retiring U.S. Rep. Greg Walden’s seat in Congress, declared Tuesday that he has officially entered the race.

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
38 LOW
Rain



Thursday
46/34
Cloudy, showers

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La Grande, Oregon

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