

DISPLAY

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the inspiration needed to set up this year’s display, which took 40 hours to complete. The award the McCraws received was 12 years in the making since they have been putting up their decorations since moving into their home on Serenity Lane in 2007. Each year they have been adding to the lights in their display. The McCraws will receive a custom ornament from Boylan Studios and Birddog Glass and a \$200 energy credit for winning the Best House of Union County award.

The chamber’s 2019 Holiday Decorating Competition also named the La Grande Country Club as the winner in the business category.

The country club will receive a \$50 Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative energy credit and a trophy. The country club won the award based on its energy-efficient lighting and “overall sleek appearance,” said chamber director Suzannah Moore-Hemann.

Dana Londin, general manager of the country club, was excited to learn of the news.

“This is awesome,” he said.

Londin said the country club’s decorative lights are energy-efficient LEDs, the type of lighting the club uses throughout its building. He also said the streamlined look of the decorative display was by design.

“We wanted something that was simple but still stood out,” Londin said. “We wanted it to be classy.”

Moore-Hemann said the judging in the business category was “incredibly close,” with a number of very competitive businesses. She said the Union Carnegie Library and Blue Mountain Barbers were close behind the La Grande Country Club. She credited the library and the barber shop with displays exhibiting unique charm and



Staff photo by Dick Mason

The home of Joel and Jill McCraw in Union placed first in the residential category for Union County in the Union County Chamber of Commerce’s 2019 Holiday Decorating Competition.



Staff photo by Dick Mason

Simplicity and energy-efficient LEDs helped the La Grande Country Club win the business category in the Union County Chamber of Commerce’s 2019 Holiday Decorating Competition.

eye-catching decorations.

The Best Town award went to Island City for having the highest percentage of its population participate in the contest. La Grande’s nearest neighbor will receive an award certificate and a trophy.

The Best Block/Neighbor-

hood award went to the G Avenue and Cedar Street vicinity in the 400 to 600 block area, La Grande.

The Chamber of Commerce teamed with John Howard & Associates and Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative to conduct the contest. The competition

Best Houses

Cove: 60670 Love Road (Randall and Linda Botham)
Elgin: 1299 Division St. (Ronald Aiels)
Imbler: 250 Main St. (Glen and Karen Olsen)
Island City: 10712 McAllister Road (Kevin and Penny Hampton)
La Grande: 1812 Foley St. (Pete and Stacey Candlish)
North Powder: 740 Fifth St. (Joseph and Marcia Maddox)
Summerville: 201 Highland (Lyle & Iris Mann)
Union: 222 W. Bryan St. (John and Norma Pepper)
Overall Union County Grand Champion: 780 Serenity Lane, Union (Joel and Jill McCraw)

committee judged entrants on creativity, energy efficiency, creative non-energy decorations, theme and overall showmanship.

CLOSURE

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generalized,” McHaddad said, and thus less likely to give to a clearinghouse type of model instead of directly to organizations and causes they value. United Way of Eastern Oregon on its 2016 tax filing reported total revenue of \$78,011 and total expenses of \$53,157, leaving an excess of \$24,854. But the following year’s tax filing shows revenue dropped to \$73,482 and expenses leaped to \$104,654, putting the organization more than \$31,000 in the hole. The organization on its 2018 tax filing shows revenue plummeted to \$52,777. Total expenses dropped as well, to \$60,814, but that still left a deficit of \$3,539.

“We lost some sources of revenue in 2017, but we didn’t make changes to the budget,” McHaddad said.

Changes in federal tax law made charitable donations less appealing for corporations, he said, and United Way of Eastern Oregon in recent years lost some major corporate sponsors, including The Observer, which contributed to the charity’s annual September golf tournament. But the real hit to the bottom line, he said, came from Oregon’s change that nixed employee payroll contributors.

The charity’s board notified partner agencies on Oct. 25 about shutting down but did not reveal

the decision to the public until last week. McHaddad said that was in part because there was a chance operations could continue. He said the board held out hope some federal funding would come through, but that did not happen.

“If it wasn’t for all the structural things falling through, we probably could have survived,” McHaddad said. “But this is not the end of United Way being here.”

United Way of Eastern Oregon already has passed through the money it received for specific organizations, McHaddad said, while money without a designation will go to various charities. He said any remaining funds will be seed money for whatever takes over the United way for the counties.

“We are trying to save as much money as possible when closing so that we can have more to give to the community,” McHaddad said.

United Way Worldwide is working on which branch could assume coverage of Union and Baker counties, he said.

Boise and Bend have United Way operations, but the nearest is the United Way of Blue Mountains, which has offices in Walla Walla and Pendleton. That branch came about in the summer, when the United Way of Umatilla and Morrow counties merged with the United Way of Walla Walla and Columbia counties.

TRAINOR

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At 38, Trainor is noticeably self-assured, but conscious of how he is perceived. He appears private about the inner workings of the federation, declining through a spokesman to allow a reporter to shadow him at work.

But in a recent interview, he spoke at length in response to questions about his background and issues facing workers.

Trainor thinks workers, and particularly younger workers, are increasingly turning to the labor movement because they don’t know who else is on their side in the face of growing income inequality, housing costs, and student

loan debt.

A national Gallup poll in August showed unions are gaining popular support. Trainor said workers feel left behind despite a booming economy.

“Workers are at a point where they can’t be pushed further,” he said.

Today’s economy, Trainor said, is “more fissured, more precarious, I would argue, than the economy 14 years ago when Tom took over.”

“Young workers have been sold, in many ways, sold a bill of goods that, if they go to college and they rack up all this student debt, they’re going to be able to get out of it in no time and realize the American dream,” Trainor said. “And unfortunately, that’s just not working out for them.”

Trainor said the definition of a “workers’ issue” is expanding beyond the traditional realm of wages, hours and benefits, to include issues like affordable housing and sexual harassment.

Automation and other efforts by the tech industry to “capitalize on innovation” — for instance, by hiring rideshare drivers as contractors instead of as employees — pose yet another obstacle for Oregon workers.

“It’s our job to always ask, what about the workers?” Trainor said. “What are workers getting out of this?”

The overall rise in workers’ collective action is exciting, Trainor said. But he says it’s up to organized labor to seize that opportunity.

COLD CASE

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Biggs also includes writings on other subjects and poems by Wright in her book, “The Unsolved Murder of John Mayfield and other stories and poems by Jerrold Winter Wright.”

The new book provides a biographical sketch of Mayfield in Wright’s words and information about the murder Biggs uncovered. She said Mayfield is believed to have been killed by a .30 caliber bullet found by investigators. Coe had a rifle in his home that fired .30 caliber bullets but a firearm investigator from Portland determined the rifle hadn’t been fired in at least a month at the time of the murder, Biggs said.

Biggs said local keepers of the law at the time, Union County Sheriff John Breshears and Deputy Hugo

Klinghammer, did much of the investigative work on the case. Breshears was elected to eight four-year terms, serving as Union County’s sheriff from 1925 to 1957. Breshears was known for having a domineering presence, retired Oregon State Police trooper Bob Routt of La Grande told Biggs. Routt said that years ago a friend told him: “If there was a bar fight and Breshears walked in all he had to do was clear his throat and there was silence.”

Breshears said in a 1927 Observer article that evidence at the scene indicated the bullet that killed Mayfield came from outside Coe’s house. The evidence was a small hole in a front window and glass fragments inside, indicating the gun had been fired from outside. Breshears said the gunshot was not fired next to the window because if it had been, most

of the window would have shattered.

Biggs’s investigation appeared to take an intriguing twist when she learned several years ago a rifle buried under a sidewalk in the 1920s in Summerville was uncovered in the course of home renovation work. That raised Biggs’ eyebrows.

“The assumption was that the only reason something that valuable was buried was because it was used in a crime,” she said.

She said she now believes the found gun was not connected to the 1927 Imbler murder because the Summerville homeowner told her it was a .22 caliber rifle, which could not have fired the .30 caliber bullet that killed Mayfield.

The absence of the case file and the coroner’s inquest report have hampered Biggs’ research. The two documents

likely have detailed information. Biggs said neither the Union County District Attorney’s Office nor the Union County Sheriff’s Office have the documents. She said she hopes someday both can be found in the Union County archives.

The work is Biggs’ seventh book and her first about crime. Her previous books have been a family cookbook and ones about history and people with unusual life stories.

“I like to be a storyteller,” Biggs said. “I don’t think of myself as a great writer. I am someone who discovers great stories.”

Writing books is an avocation for Biggs, who runs a full-time business — Kitchens by Terrie, which provides cabinetry and interior designing for homes. Biggs has run the business since 1995 and plans to continue for years to come.

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