



2019: The Year in Review

A production of The Observer: Monday, Dec. 30, 2019



From the editor: Looking back and moving ahead to 2020

What a year. From flooding to arrests for murder to state high school sports champs, we have plenty to look back on.

The Observer does that with its “Year in Review.” This year’s package has our top 10 lists for local news and sports stories and some of the paper’s best photos of 2019. We also have top 10 lists for each of the preceding years of the decade along with summaries of major national international news and events for the last 10 years. For a bit of fun, we added some culture touchstones, such as the top grossing movies of the decade and championship teams in major professional sports.

We had a tight time frame to craft a top 10 list of 2019’s local news stories. The five members of our news team drafted their own lists, and we fine-tuned it from there. Some matters, such as La Grande obtain-



FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK
PHIL WRIGHT

ing a Quiet Zone free of train whistles, made all our lists, but some of us ranked that matter low on the scale of importance. Other news stories, such as the reopening of the grocery store in downtown La Grande, received a high ranking on a couple of lists and not at all on others. Some suggestions appeared only on one list. I compared and compiled the submissions, then we in the newsroom talked through and ranked the top 10.

An imperfect process, yes, but one we could manage with the time we had. And the turbulence of change did away with the luxury of creating a monthly summary of news stories the way The Observer has done

in some past year-end reviews.

The passing of 2019, obviously, marks the end of the decade. Thus we opted to create top 10 lists of news stories for each year of the 2010s. Some of that was simple — we pulled from past Observer top 10 lists. But not every “Year in Review” had such lists or monthly summaries, so we started from scratch, searching our archives and The Observer’s website for “fire,” “project,” “controversy,” “budget” and the like.

Even with such holes, patterns emerged. Crises and disasters, achievements and triumphs. Some of the list contain troubling stories. This isn’t about dredging up the bad but acknowledging a shared past, both good and ill.

Top 10 or-however-many lists are supposed to generate discussion, maybe even civil disagreement about what did and did not make the cut. We consider generating conversation

part of this year’s package as well.

Such reflections also provide us the opportunity to consider the future. For the newsroom, we might dump beat-style reporting and focus instead on issues. We’re a small unit — an editor/reporter, a sports editor/reporter, a news assistant and two news reporters. That’s not nearly enough people to spend much time covering public meetings and one-off events. And Union County, like so much in Northeast Oregon, is ripe with issues the community cares about, from homelessness to jobs to climate change.

Tackling issues instead of beats also means our newsroom would build expertise. That’s a key to building the trust of readers. I’m rather eager to try that out in 2020.

So from this crew at The Observer, we hope you enjoy this review, and we hope you had a good 2019 and will enjoy an even better 2020.

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