

Knight gets jail time, probation for arsons

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Kael Christopher Knight of Imbler will serve jail time and probation for committing arson in 2019. Knight, 19, appeared Friday morning in Union County Circuit Court, La Grande, and pleaded guilty to three counts of arson in a deal and avoided prison time. According to the authorities, Knight set the fires on Sept. 21 and 24. The fires on Sept. 21 were in unoccupied structures, a barn at 67214 Brooks Lane, Imbler, and an abandoned home at 64073 Courtney Lane, Summerville. The Sept. 24 fire was in a protected property, a warehouse that stored crops at 410 Railroad Ave., Imbler. At Friday's sentencing, the barn's owner, Dick Royes, shared some of the history of the property and how much was lost in the fire. He said the barn was built shortly after his family moved to Imbler in 1871. "It was just amazing," Royes said of the old barn. "It hadn't been kept up well, but it was still fixable, (and) it had historic

value. That barn had another 150 years." Despite losing a part of his family's history, Royes said he wishes no ill will to Knight and hopes to see him improve his life. Others who spoke at Knight's hearing Friday echoed this sentiment. Many understood Knight was a troubled boy, as his lawyer Rick Dall and special deputy district attorney Gregory Baxter termed it. Those who spoke said they hoped the sentencing would help Knight become a more productive member of society and keep the communities safe. An owner of the warehouse, Michelle McLean, said people could have been hurt in the warehouse fire. "He had to know people were there," McLean said. "What worried me most was the escalation and the fact a human life could have been damaged." Imbler Fire Chief Mike Barry also addressed the court. "What is concerning to me is I have 16 firefighters in our department who do it basically for free because they love their community," Barry said. "Every

time a fire happens, it puts them at risk. When it happens intentionally, it is an unnecessary risk." Dall said at his first meeting with Knight, the young man did not make excuses or was not looking to get away with what he had done. He expressed remorse and wanted the best possible solution to pay for his actions. Circuit Judge Thomas Powers sentenced Knight to 364 days in county jail minus the time he has been behind bars since his arrest Sept. 25. Once out, Knight must serve five years probation, including GPS monitoring, mandatory substance abuse and mental health evaluations. He also faces two-and-a-half years in prison should he fail to adhere to his probation. In making the plea bargain, the state dismissed charges of tampering with evidence and first-degree arson. Knight at the sentencing said he felt it was too late to apologize because it wouldn't change what happened. "I feel like giving an apology would be a slap in the face," he said.

LOCAL BRIEFING

From staff reports

'Resource Wednesdays' starts this week

LA GRANDE — Small businesses and entrepreneurs have a new way to make connections and find answers about running a business. The Northeast Oregon Economic Development District announced the start of "Resource Wednesdays" on the last Wednesday of the month from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Ignite Center for Entrepreneurship, 104 Depot St., La Grande. The first event commences this Wednesday. Representatives of Eastern Oregon University Small Business Development Center, the city of La Grande and the development district will be available to answer questions and provide information about programs and resources that can help small businesses start, grow and succeed, according to the announcement. Other resource providers will be available at each gathering in an open house-style event. Business owners can come and leave at any time during the events. Lisa Dawson, executive director of the development district, stated Resource Wednesday will not be formal but provide the opportunity to meet with others and get the information.

Island City Elementary getting new principal
ISLAND CITY — The La Grande School Board at its recent meeting named Brett Smith at the new principal for Island City Elementary School. Smith takes on the role starting July 1. Smith for the past one-and-a-half years has worked as he assistant principal at La Grande High School. He will succeed John Tolan, who will retire at the end of June. Tolan has served as Island City's principal since 2002 and is completing his 40th year with the La Grande School District. Smith joined the district in the summer of 2018 after spending six years working as an educator in Texas. He came to La Grande from Waller High School where he was its assistant principal. Waller is 42 miles northwest of Houston. Smith was born in La Grande and grew up in Baker City. He is a graduate of Brigham Young University and Lamar University, "I'm very excited to have this opportunity," he said. He praised the work Tolan has done as principal. "He will leave some very big shoes to fill," Smith said. He said leaving La Grande High School will be difficult because he has enjoyed working with its staff, students and parents.

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Doralee (Puckett) Powell

Union
1935-2020
Doralee Powell, 84, of Union, died Jan. 17 at the residence of her daughter, Sherry Knop of Union. A viewing will be held 5-7 p.m. Jan. 31 at Loveland Funeral Chapel. A funeral service will begin at 2 p.m. Feb. 1, also at Loveland Funeral Chapel. Nicknamed "Rosey," Doralee was born Dec. 4, 1935, in La Grande, to Ralph and Gladys Puckett. She resided in Cove, Portland and Union. Doralee graduated from Cove High School and attended Fagan's Beauty School in Portland. She married Ronald G. Powell on Sept. 24, 1955. Doralee was a beautician and worked as an instructor at Beau Monde Beauty School in Portland. She also worked as a telephone operator and did scheduling for Kaiser Hospital of Portland. She enjoyed family events, traveling and dancing. She and Ronald were longtime members of the Elks Lodge. Surviving relatives include her daughter and son-in-law, Sherry and Randy Knop of Union; sons and daughters-in-law, Brian and Bobbie Powell of Portland and Robert and Barbara Powell of Vancouver, Washington; sister and brother-in-law, Gay and Duane Zander of La Grande; brothers, Ray Puckett of Cove



and Jim Puckett of Enterprise; eight grandchildren; 13 great-grandchildren; two great-great-grandchildren; and 20 nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her husband, Ronald Powell; daughter, Sandy Cresap; parents, Ralph and Gladys Puckett; brothers, La Dell Puckett and Iron Puckett; and sisters, Wy Lane, Connie Marks and Zelda Marshall. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Opal Foundation in care of Heart 'n Home Hospice, 1100 NW 12th St., Fruitland, Idaho 83619. Online condolences may be made to the family at www.lovelandfuneralchapel.com.

Loren L. Fihn

Formerly of La Grande
1945-2019
Loren Lyle Fihn, 74, formerly of La Grande, died Oct. 15, 2019, at his daughter's home in Silverton. Burial of cremains will be held at 5 p.m. April 3 at Island City Cemetery, followed by a reception dinner. Contact Loren's son, Brian, at 503-707-5155 or fihner@gmail.com for more information. Arrangements were under the direction of Farnstrom Mortuary of Independence. Loren was born April 13, 1945, in La Grande, to Lois J. and Lyle E. Fihn. He



grew up enjoying hunting and fishing and graduated from La Grande High School in 1963. Loren studied at what is now Eastern Oregon University, where he earned a bachelor's degree. In 1967, Loren married Coreen Magnuson, a La Grande High School classmate, class of 1965. Together they had a son, Brian K., and a daughter, Donna "Renee." In 2001, Loren married Cindy Straus, and they lived in Salem. Loren, who loved green and manicured lawns, was the groundskeeper at the Island City golf course for many years. He insisted all through life that a lawn reflects the love inside, shown outwardly with fine lines and green healthy grass. The last few years, Loren took to the road himself in an RV. He spent time in Palm Desert, California, and Yuma, Arizona, until his health started to decline. Loren passed away with his "Princess" dog Muffin snuggled by his side. Memorial donations may be made to Silver Creek Fellowship, P.O. Box 8, Silverton, Oregon 97381, to celebrate his journey to accept the teachings of the Lord.

Joyce L. Beeman
La Grande
Joyce L. Beeman, 76, of La Grande, died Jan. 25 at Grande Ronde Hospital.

Loveland Funeral Chapel and Crematory will be handling the arrangements.

Donna R. Patterson

Union
Donna R. Patterson, 83, of Union, died Jan. 24 at her home. Arrangements are under the direction of Daniels-Knopp Funeral, Cremation & Life Celebration Center.

Bobby D. Weaver

Union
Bobby D. Weaver, 89, of Union, died Jan. 23 at home. Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory will be handling the arrangements.

UPCOMING FUNERALS AND VISITATIONS
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Feb. 3 & Feb. 4 Thomas Hartley:
4-6 p.m. viewing and 6 p.m. Recitation of the Rosary on Feb. 3, and 2 p.m. funeral on Feb. 4, all at Our Lady of the Valley Catholic Church, La Grande.

Feb. 8 Justice Clark:
4 p.m. celebration of life, Presbyterian Friendship Center, La Grande; casual dress preferred.

PUBLIC SAFETY REPORT

FRIDAY
La Grande police at 7:34 a.m. received a report of drug paraphernalia at Cove Avenue and Cherry Street. An officer responded and disposed of the material. A caller at 8:49 a.m. complained about a barking dog on the 2900 block of Misty Avenue, La Grande. The animal enforcement officer contacted the caller. A caller at 11:15 a.m. complained about a barking dog at Depot Street and Y Avenue. The animal enforcement officer talked to the caller about options. La Grande police at about 3:30 p.m. arrested William Griffin Thomas, 32, of La Grande for misdemeanor and felony failure to register as a sex offender. Thomas was easy to track down — he has been in the Union County Jail, La Grande, since Jan. 15 on a parole violation. La Grande police at 7:37 p.m. received a report of possible drug law violations and notified the Union County Sheriff's Office and Oregon State Police.

SATURDAY
La Grande police at about 1 a.m. responded to a disturbance on the 2100 block of Alder Street. Police counseled the person and helped put safety plan in place. La Grande police at 2:55 a.m. received a report of domestic violence on the 1300 block of Fifth Street. Officers and medics responded.

A caller at 9:12 a.m. reported vandalism to a vehicle on the 400 block of Third Street, La Grande. Another caller at 9:47 a.m. reported more vehicles were the targets of vandalism on the first block of University Boulevard. And a caller at 10:45 a.m. reported vandalism on a vehicle on the 900 block of C Avenue. A dog harassing livestock on the 300 block of Church Street, Summerville, prompted a call at 9:26 a.m. to law enforcement. The Union County Sheriff's Office arrested Jeffery Scott Hill, 34, of La Grande, for driving under the influence of intoxicants. A resident on the 1800 block of 26th Street, La Grande, at 2:34 p.m. reported a burglary. Police took a report. Police and firefighters in La Grande at about 7:15 p.m. responded to Aries Lane and Taurus Avenue for a vehicle fire. The fire department squelched the blaze, which caused serious damage to the vehicle.

SUNDAY
La Grande police at 12:08 a.m. received a report of that someone threw eggs on a vehicle on the 1300 block of Z Avenue. Complaints about loud music and partying came in minutes apart from separate neighborhoods in La Grande. Loud music on the 1900 block of Z Avenue, La Grande, prompted a call for the law

at 1:13 a.m. A Union County sheriff's deputy handled that and counseled the noise makers. The next call came in at 1:20 a.m. about a loud party in the area of Jakob Avenue and 16th Street. La Grande police warned the subjects for excessive noise and parking issues. La Grande police and Union

County sheriff's deputies at about 2:15 a.m. responded to the 2200 block of Adam Avenue for a fight. Law enforcement counseled the people involved. And firefighters responded to nine calls for medical assistance on Sunday, seven on Saturday and eight on Friday.

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