

## Small-business & Ag HAPPENINGS

### Union County Farm Bureau announces inaugural scholarship

LA GRANDE — In its inaugural year, the Union County Farm Bureau scholarship is offering up to \$1,500 in funds to Union County high school graduates and returning college students.

The scholarships are open to students who plan to further their education or a college or university to attain an agriculture, forestry, environmental, natural resource science or vocational degree. To be eligible, the applicant must have been a resident of Union County during high school years or attended high school in Union County, or the applicant or his/her parents must be a member of the Union County Farm Bureau.

Applications must be postmarked by April 1. Applications are available through the county's school guidance counselors or from the Union County Farm Bureau.

### NEOEDD Seeks civic projects

ENTERPRISE — The Northeast Oregon Economic Development District is seeking project submissions for its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

March 16 is the deadline for city and county governments and nonprofit organizations in Baker, Union and Wallowa counties to submit economic and community development projects. Transportation projects should only be included if there is a strong link to economic development. Private projects are not eligible.

The economic development district, which is updating its five-year plan, seeks information about projects that will have a positive effect on economic and community development and that are likely to be implemented in the next three years. The district's board will consider adding new projects at its March 26 meeting.

The 2018-2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and 2019 update are available at [www.neoedd.org/ceds](http://www.neoedd.org/ceds). To submit project information, go to <https://bit.ly/39b0yvj>.

### Bank of Eastern Oregon celebrates local anniversary

HEPPNER — This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of Bank of Eastern Oregon, based in Heppner. The bank in a news release announced it will celebrate the anniversary with open houses throughout the year at each of its 20 branches. The week of March 16-20 the celebration comes to the La Grande Branch, 2514 Cove Ave., La Grande. The week-long open house will feature an historical video, and cake will be served on Friday.

According to the announcement, a group of farmers and ranchers in 1945 saw a need for a bank in Eastern Oregon and founded the Gilliam County Bank in Arlington. The bank expanded in the 1950s, changing its name to Bank of Eastern Oregon, and moved its headquarters to Heppner. BEO now operates 18 branches, six loan production offices, and a mortgage division.

"Our current mission hasn't changed from what our founders established in 1945," CEO Jeff Bailey said in a written statement. "We still serve the needs of our rural communities, our local markets, by providing them financial services. In some areas, we're the only bank in the county. And we take pride in that."

### Hot Top presentation focuses on customer service

LA GRANDE — La Grande Main Street Downtown is hosting a Hot Top gathering Wednesday at Le Bebe Cakes Bakery Coffee House, 1101 Washington Ave., La Grande. The interactive presentation, "Providing Excellent Customer Service," begins at 8 a.m.

Hot Topics are short, pertinent topics on downtown-related themes. This week's speakers will be Hailey Durrant of Community Bank, Jason Isaacson of Carpet One and Justin Rock of Rock and Sons.

### Liberty Theatre Foundation elects new officers

LA GRANDE — Following the resignation of longtime chairman Michael Jaeger, the board of directors of the Liberty Theatre Foundation elected Ashley O'Toole, real estate agent and property manager at John J. Howard and Associates Real Estate. Jeff Clark, real estate agent at Blue Summit Realty Group, was elected vice chairman.

Construction work on the theater is moving ahead, according to the foundation, which set a goal having the theater in a usable condition by this fall.

O'Toole said he is hoping to expand the board this spring. Anyone who has an interest in serving on the foundation board is encouraged to send a letter of interest to O'Toole at Liberty Theatre Foundation, P.O. Box 3057, La Grande 97850, or email him at [asotoole1985@gmail.com](mailto:asotoole1985@gmail.com).

# New vet clinic opens soon



Staff photo by Dick Mason

**Contractors work Tuesday on the exterior of the new animal hospital at 2400 Adams Ave., La Grande. The 3,000-square-foot Grande Ronde Animal Hospital is set to open in April and could treat more than 120 animals a day.**

By Dick Mason  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A new small animal clinic soon will open at 2400 Adams Ave. in La Grande.

Grande Ronde Animal Hospital, whose 3,000-square foot building is almost complete, is set to begin operating next month.

"We hope to be open in three to four weeks," said Lee Darch, a North Carolina veterinarian who is building Grande Ronde Animal Hospital.

Darch, who has a daughter who lives in Union County, will bring 42 years of experience as veterinarian La Grande.

"I enjoy what I do," said Darch, who said he takes great satisfaction in helping people take care of and enjoy their pets.



Staff photo by Dick Mason

**The new Grande Ronde Animal Hospital at 2400 Adams Ave., La Grande, is in the location of the old Quail Run Motor Inn, which a fire destroyed April 28, 2017.**

A University of Georgia graduate, Darch said he developed a lifelong love of animals while growing up on a dairy farm. Darch is a veterinarian

at Kittrell Animal Hospital in Kittrell, North Carolina, where he is winding up his practice this week.

Kittrell, which has a popu-

lation of about 500 is in Vance County, has a much higher population density than Union County does. Darch has said he enjoys the "atmosphere of small communities."

Grande Ronde Animal Hospital will be the third veterinarian clinic Darch has built. His other two, including Kittrell Animal Hospital, which he earlier sold, were in North Carolina. Clinics he earlier worked at include North Wake Animal Hospital in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

The veterinarian's new animal hospital will provide medical, dental, surgical and diagnostic services in its brick building. The veterinarian said the two clinics he built in North Carolina drew between 45 and 120 patients a day, and that is what he expects to treat

See CLINIC / Page B2

# Grande Ronde River businesses gear up for spring visitors

By Bill Bradshaw  
EO Media Group

ENTERPRISE — With spring fast approaching, two businesses along the Grande Ronde River are gearing up for anglers and other visitors.

"It means that it goes from being dead as all get-out to people start showing up," said Doug Witherrite, who runs the Wenaha Bar and Grill in Troy.

He has leased the business for two and a half years from Shilo Inn across the road, where there also is lodging and recreational vehicle hookups. The Wenaha has been open since the early 1900s, though not always in the current building, Witherrite said.

While he's eager for anglers, they're not his only clientele.

"It's just people showing up," he said. "People from Lewiston or wherever drive down here and have breakfast."

Lewiston, Idaho, is about 57 miles away to the northeast.

Witherrite enjoys the off-the-grid way of life in Troy. The restaurant decor includes deer-antler handles on the front door, elk heads adorning the walls and even a stuffed beaver. His establishment takes only cash or checks — no credit or debit cards.

"The old sign in town used to say, 'Keep Troy green — bring cash,'" he said, laughing. "The other day someone called me from Google and wanted to put



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

**Doug Witherrite, proprietor of the Wenaha Bar and Grill in Troy, rings up a sale for a customer Feb. 29. Witherrite likes the cash-only policy of his business, recalling an old sign in town that said, "Keep Troy green — bring cash."**

me on it. I said I don't need Google. Word of mouth seems to work pretty good. So I got Google off my back."

Witherrite said work and life in Troy suits him.

"It's been a nice place to meet a lot of good people," he said. "The way I know is, I got to trust a lot of people without credit cards. I send them home with how much they owe me written on the back of (his business card) and they send it in the mail."

But do they always pay? "Pretty near all of it," he said.

The Wenaha can be contacted by calling 541-828-7773.

Farther downriver, but more on the beaten path, Boggan's Oasis sits along the Lewiston Highway at the bottom of Rattlesnake Grade where Rattlesnake Creek spills into the Grande Ronde.

Bill and Farrel Vail have owned it since 1984.

"We bought this as an out-of-town place," Farrel Vail said.

The business has known its share of ups and downs. In November 2017, the building burned, but the Vails rebuilt it the following year, Vail said.

The river and its fish govern their business. At present, steelhead are running, and the Oasis is sponsoring a steelhead fishing derby that ends March 28. It brings a lot of people to their door.

Now 87, Farrel Vail and her husband are content to let employees do most of the work. They have between three and six employees depending on business.

"When we built it, we didn't even hire anybody for 20 years," she said.

Boggan's can be contacted by calling 509-256-3372.

# Kenya now accepting Northwest wheat

Observer staff

WASHINGTON D.C. — Kenya has lifted its ban on exports from Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

The U.S. Wheat Association announced the end to the trade barrier in a recent news release. The Oregon Wheat Growers League reacted with enthusiasm.

"The acceptance of export phytosanitary inspection and certification provides access to a market restricted to Oregon growers for more than a decade," Amanda Hoey, Oregon Wheat CEO, stated in a news release. "Kenya imports much of its annual wheat supply, since its domestic production only supports around 10% of annual consumption needs. This change has a significant impact for Oregon Wheat market potential in Kenya, but also for U.S. wheat going into Uganda as they are using Kenya's port facilities and thus have been restricted to those same import requirements."

As part of the technical agreement, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service will work with U.S. stakeholders to enhance general surveillance for flag smut of wheat (*Urocystis agropyri*) in Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Kenya

See WHEAT / Page B8