



THE OBSERVER

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Weekend Edition

SATURDAY-MONDAY • March 14, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Donna Esser of La Grande

Sheriff's race

Sheriff's group now backs deputy

Observer staff

LA GRANDE — The Union County Law Enforcement Association changed who it is endorsing for sheriff in the primary election.

The local union in early November 2019 endorsed Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen, who is running reelection. But Thursday the association changed its tune and reported it now backed deputy Cody Bowen.

Bowen was the president of the association when it unanimously supported Rasmussen, stating in the endorsement letter that during his 15 years as sheriff he lead with "Honesty, Excellence, Respect, Integrity, Firmness, and Fairness with Compassion and Courage."

Bowen at the end of January entered the race for sheriff and stepped down as president of the local. Thursday, sheriff's detective Jason Mckaig, the new association president, announced the group "reconsidered and re-voted for an endorsement of a candidate for the 2020 Union County Sheriff's Election."

According to the statement, the association "agreed that it would be best to re-vote once Deputy Cody Bowen made the decision to run for Sheriff of Union County. Cody Bowen was not in the candidacy at the original time of our vote."

Rasmussen, Bowen, and the other two challengers in the race, Bill Miller of Elgin and Shane Rollins of Cove addressed the union, according to Mckaig, and the association was "proud to announce we officially endorse Cody Bowen for Union County Sheriff."

"It feels good to have that support," Bowen said. "I didn't ask for it, so it is very humbling."

While the endorsement for Rasmussen noted the vote was unanimous, the

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Coronavirus

THE VIRAL EFFECT

From schools to movies, community is feeling the effect of coronavirus

By Phil Wright
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Alexia Briggs' cell phone lit up again and again Friday morning.

"I've been getting tons of text messages from parents asking if I'm going to be open," she said.

Briggs operates the state-licensed Sweet Pea Daycare with her mother in La Grande. She cares for about 16 children from as young as a few months to 13 years. The messages came in the wake of Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's order late Thursday to shut down K-12 schools statewide for two weeks beginning Monday, the latest fallout in the new coronavirus crisis.

Anxious parents were eager to find out if Sweet Pea would be running. Briggs said she would be open, but she's usually full. She said she has heard of local parents taking the week off work to care for their children and offering to care for others. That



Staff photo by Ronald Bond

Patrons gather ahead of an afternoon movie showing Friday at the Granada Theatre in La Grande. The movie house is just one of several local businesses that could be impacted by the coronavirus.

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For a list of local cancellations, see Page 5A.

could be problematic.

Oregon law, she explained, allows an adult to care for three children who are not their own. But add a fourth, she said, and

the adult needs a day care license. Given the situation with the virus, she said she hoped the state would be a lenient with parents in those situations. She also said she had not been expecting the announcement about the school closures.

"This is similar to summer," she said, "but it's something that's being

thrown on you — for summer you can prepare."

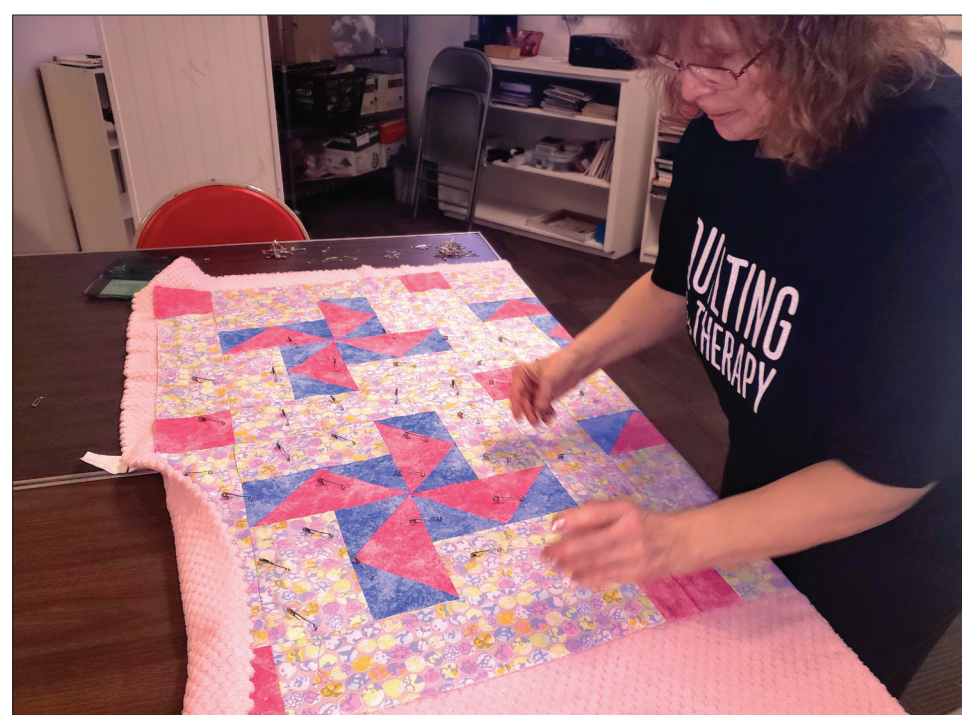
Organizations of all stripes nixed outings, gatherings and fundraisers. (For the latest list, see the accompanying sidebar.) Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, announced students will take final exams, which begin Monday, via remote access and not in person. The university also

suspended all non-essential travel and activities until further notice.

The effects of dealing with the virus and trying to curtail the outbreak also touched on the Granada Theatre.

La Grande's lone movie house shows first-run flicks, but studios are

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Staff photo by Sabrina Thompson

Quilt Quester Kathy Parish works on a baby blanket Thursday morning. Quilts from the local group are on display at Cook Memorial Library, La Grande, until May 19.

Fabric art on display

Local Quilt Questers club builds community with stitches

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

UNION — Every week, a group of women come together in the basement of the Union Methodist Church with fabric and thread to make quilts. The Cook Memorial Library, La Grande, has some of these works on display in an annual exhibit showcasing the

creativity of the Quilt Questers, a group focused on building community.

The Quilt Questers began in the 1980s as a way to help with outreach for the church.

The group has gone from eight or 10 people to more than 100 quilters and now has around 40 members.

Earlene Lamb, former Quilt Questers president, said having a strong organizational system has helped the group maintain a steady membership.

"It is amazing what an email list and Facebook page will do," she said.

Lamb and other members described the group as a place of support and conversation. For those who join with little knowledge of quilting, Lamb said there is always someone ready to assist. She explained the group has a culture of helping one another whenever needed.

"The quilters are like family," Lamb said. "Especially for those who might not have family in the area. We look out for each other."

The organization also

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Boost coming to fine arts in local schools

\$90,000 to help purchase musical equipment, including baby grand piano

By Dick Mason
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The La Grande School District's fine arts program will get a big boost in 2020-21.

The program is set to receive an additional \$90,000 from the school district for the purchase of new music and art equipment and curriculum materials. Scott Carpenter, the school district's educational director, made the announcement Wednesday at a meeting of the La Grande School Board.

The district's elementary school music program will be among the biggest beneficiaries of the additional funding. The funding will allow for the purchase of 35 violins, four cellos and two basses for the school district's strings program. This is an after-school program, known as the Fiddle Club, which Central Elementary School music teacher Carla Arnold runs for 65 students in grades three through eight.

In addition, the dis-

trict's three elementary schools offer supervised instrument practice time to students for one hour a week.

Arnold said the new instruments will give the Fiddle Club a tremendous lift because the instruments it now has are aging. She also said it gives her hope the school district may someday reinstate its orchestra program, which it cut in the 1980s.

"It (the additional funding) helps in many ways, emotionally and vision wise," Arnold said.

The funding also will cover the cost of new music curriculum, percussion instruments and a full set of risers for all of the elementary schools for choir concerts.

An addition, the new funding helps cover the cost of a grand piano for high school auditorium. The district will purchase the piano for \$20,000 from Ontario. The Tiger Booster Club will pay half of this cost.

"I'm extremely grateful to the Tiger Booster Club," said Kevin Durfee, the choir teacher at the middle school and high school.

The grand piano will be a big step up from the one now in the high school auditorium.

"It is a professional

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
23 LOW
Snow showers



Sunday
40/20
Snow, up to 1"

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541-963-3161

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com. More contact info on Page 4A.



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