



Panoramic
pedaling
In outdoors

RE-ELECT **BOYD RASMUSSEN**
for **SHERIFF**
Paid for by committee to Re-elect Boyd Rasmussen.



Verl Miller & Kathryn Lusk, Doug & Patty Hislop, Craig Nightingale

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

THE OBSERVER

Weekend Edition

SATURDAY-MONDAY • May 2, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Doug Hislop of La Grande

DOJ report: Rasmussen avoids charges

■ State says statute of limitations has expired

By Phil Wright
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Union County Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen defended himself Thursday against an Oregon Department of Justice accusation he pocketed more than \$7,000 for police services in violation of state law. “There was no ill intent,” Rasmussen said. “It was a simple transition with the city of Elgin. Did I knowingly go out there and violate the law? Hell no.” The justice department also



Rasmussen

ONLINE
To read the DOJ report, see this story at www.lagrandeobserver.com.

reported Rasmussen was beyond the reach of criminal charges because the statute of limitations had expired. The justice department’s Criminal Justice Division began investigating Rasmussen in 2019 for allegations he engaged in misconduct while in office from 2011-16, according to the eight-page report Kurt W. Miller, senior assistant attorney general, sent to

Union County District Attorney Kelsie McDaniel. The Observer obtained an unredacted version of the report via a public record’s request. McDaniel said she received the report Tuesday, and the justice department subsequently provided her digital copies of the entirety of its investigation. She said her office will review the mass of documents but it would be premature to comment without knowing the “ins and outs of what actually happened” with the investigation. She also stressed the review is not for the purposes of prosecution. The justice department’s report

states the investigation stemmed from complaints it received in 2019, and, “After a preliminary review of the information, we determined it was appropriate to open a formal investigation of the matter.” Special agents dug into six allegations: •The use of on-duty employees to perform personal services. •Improper use of a snowmobile grant fund. •Inappropriate management of a reserve deputy fund. •Using information from an inappropriate source to purchase

See, **Sheriff**/Page 5A

By the numbers*

Worldwide cases: 3,181,642
Worldwide deaths: 224,301
U.S. cases: 1,062,446
U.S. deaths: 62,406
Oregon cases: 2,579
Oregon deaths: 104
Union County cases: 4
Union County deaths: 0
Wallowa County cases: 1
Wallowa County deaths: 0
*As of 2 p.m. Friday, May 1. Sources: World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Oregon Health Authority

Union County leaders approve plan to reopen

■ Gov. Kate Brown said she hopes some rural counties can reopen as soon as May 15

By Dick Mason
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Union County Board of Commissioners took a step Friday toward getting Union County reopened in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

The commissioners voted during an emergency meeting to approve a reopening plan, which the county’s Incident Management Team prepared and now goes to the state. The board passed the plan, however, knowing the state will not grant approval. The plan does not conform to guidelines the state set earlier nor to new ones the state is formulating.

The county board will revise its plan next week after the state determines

See, **Plan**/Page 3A

A growing tradition

■ Middle school teachers make plant sale possible with innovation, dedication and hard work

By Dick Mason
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A deep-rooted La Grande Middle School tradition will go on despite the COVID-19 crisis. The annual LMS Plant Sale is set to roll later this month for at least the 25th straight year. The sale, a fundraiser for the middle school, will begin just before or after Mother’s Day, May 10, according to science teacher Kathy Nickerson, who is in charge of the event. The exact dates are still in flux due to COVID-19 issues.

The stock for this year’s sale includes close to 1,200 tomato plants, about a dozen varieties of pepper plants, hanging baskets with cascading perennials, and numerous other flowering plants grown in LMS’s greenhouse. All

See, **Plants**/Page 5A



Staff photo by Dick Mason

La Grande Middle School science teacher Kathy Nickerson waters plants Tuesday at the school’s greenhouse. The school is continuing its annual plant sale while following restrictions to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Senior reflections during a pandemic

■ Members of the class of 2020 share how the virus is affecting them

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

Life as we know it has changed during the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent government-ordered shutdowns.

This is particularly true for high school seniors, who won’t get to finish out their spring sports seasons, attend a traditional commencement ceremony or go to the senior prom.

The Observer wanted to share how the pandemic affects some local members of the class of 2020, their reaction to what is going on and what is next for them.

ONLINE
For a fuller version of this story, go to www.lagrandeobserver.com.

Alexyss Chamberlain, La Grande

Alexyss Chamberlain and the La Grande girls basketball team were gearing up for what already was going to be an odd 4A state basketball tournament — it wasn’t going to be played in front of fans.

Then, the morning of their quarterfinal game on March 12, they got the news.

“We went to state, we were going to go play, and then all of a sudden they said you can’t play,” Chamberlain said, “and we were driving home.”

Chamberlain said she and her



Submitted photo

teammates were devastated. “I was in shock,” she said.

“Right after I got that text I thought I was going to throw up.”

She said she skipped school the next day, which ended up being the last day of in-class studying.

“It was really weird being in a place where I’m not going to

“We’re driving down a road and getting a diploma. I think that’s pretty freaking cool.”

— Alexyss Chamberlain, La Grande

do senior track, finish basketball, and earn my graduation — sort of,” she said.

Recently, seniors learned they would graduate even if they didn’t finish their classes.

“I did about two weeks of

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
37 LOW
Thundershowers



Sunday
55/33
A little rain

CONTACT US

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La Grande, Oregon

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

TUESDAY

IMPACT OF LOST SPORTS SEASON

Online at lagrandeobserver.com

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