

DAILY
PLANNER

TODAY

Today is Thursday, Oct. 15, the 289th day of 2020. There are 77 days left in the year.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT IN HISTORY:

On Oct. 15, 1976, in the first debate of its kind between vice-presidential nominees, Democrat Walter F. Mondale and Republican Bob Dole faced off in Houston.

ON THIS DATE:

In 1815, Napoleon Bonaparte, the deposed Emperor of the French, arrived on the British-ruled South Atlantic island of St. Helena, where he spent the last 5½ years of his life in exile.

In 1917, Dutch exotic dancer Mata Hari (Margaretha ZelleGeertruida MacLeod), 41, convicted by a French military court of spying for the Germans, was executed by a firing squad outside Paris. (Maintaining her innocence to the end, Mata Hari refused a blindfold and blew a kiss to her executioners.)

In 1940, Charles Chaplin's first all-talking comedy, "The Great Dictator," a lampoon of Adolf Hitler, opened in New York.

In 1945, the former premier of Vichy France, Pierre Laval, was executed for treason.

In 1946, Nazi war criminal Hermann Goering fatally poisoned himself hours before he was to have been executed.

In 1954, Hurricane Hazel made landfall on the Carolina coast as a Category 4 storm; Hazel was blamed for some 1,000 deaths in the Caribbean, 95 in the U.S. and 81 in Canada.

In 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed a bill creating the U.S. Department of Transportation. The revolutionary Black Panther Party was founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, California.

In 1969, peace demonstrators staged activities across the country as part of a "moratorium" against the Vietnam War.

In 1991, despite sexual harassment allegations by Anita Hill, the Senate narrowly confirmed the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court, 52-48.

In 2003, 11 people were killed when a Staten Island ferry slammed into a maintenance pier.

In 2017, actress and activist Alyssa Milano tweeted that women who had been sexually harassed or assaulted should write "Me too" as a status; within hours, tens of thousands had taken up the #MeToo hashtag (using a phrase that had been introduced 10 years earlier by social activist Tarana Burke.)

LOTTERY

Megabucks: \$3 million

5-6-22-34-39-47

Mega Millions: \$69 million

11-44-45-46-70 — 25 x2

Powerball: \$62 million

5-18-23-40-50 — PB-18 x3

Win for Life: Oct. 12

16-20-37-52

Pick 4: Oct. 13

• **1 p.m.:** 2-1-1-1; • **4 p.m.:** 2-6-5-2

• **7 p.m.:** 6-7-0-9; • **10 p.m.:** 7-3-1-4

Pick 4: Oct. 12

• **1 p.m.:** 5-4-5-0; • **4 p.m.:** 4-5-5-3

• **7 p.m.:** 2-5-2-4; • **10 p.m.:** 5-9-1-7

DELIVERY ISSUES?

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LG school district refinances bonds

Effort expected to save taxpayers \$2.3 million

The Observer

LA GRANDE — The La Grande School District's improved credit rating is helping property taxpayers save millions.

The La Grande School District recently refinanced its general obligation bonds, originally sold in 2015, for a significantly lower interest rate, which will save taxpayers almost \$2.3 million over the approximately 15-year remaining life of the bonds.

Voters in 2014 passed a \$31.85 million bond measure. The district used the funds from the bond to build the new Central Elementary School and a new Career and Technical Education building at La Grande High School, remodel the high school gymnasium and auditorium, and add classroom spaces at Greenwood and Island City elementary schools. The money also provided security upgrades and facility improvements throughout the district.

The bonds' refinanced rate is 1.69%, significantly lower than the original interest rate of 4.75%. One of the reasons for the lower rate is a substantial improvement in the school district's credit rating from A2 to A1, according to a La Grande School District news release.

"This improved credit rating created a better investment viewpoint for bond buyers," said the district's business director Chris Panike.

The \$31.85 million in bonds were sold at a \$4.1 million premium in 2015, which provided the district a total



Dick Mason/The Observer, File

The La Grande School District opened the new Central Elementary School at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year, part of the result of a \$31.85 million bond voters passed in 2014. A better credit rating now is helping the district save \$2.3 million over the 15-year remaining life of the bonds.

of \$36 million to invest in its facilities, Panike said. And starting in 2015, the school district's population began to grow by 2-3% a year. This boosted the school district's budget because it receives at least \$7,000 a year per student from the state. The money from enrollment growth helped make it possible for the school district to install a new track and tennis courts and make other improvements, while boosting its financial reserves.

The result of the additional funding, Panike said, was a better rating from Moody's Corporation, an American business and financial services company. When interest rates dropped to all-time lows, it allowed the school district to refinance the bonds and save taxpayers more than \$2 million in debt service requirements.

La Grande School District superintendent George Mendoza called it

"good news for taxpayers and our community." School board chair Robin Maille said given the economic uncertainty due to COVID-19, the school board "felt the bond refinance was a fiscally prudent decision that would take care of our school district and taxpayers in the long term."

With the successful conclusion of the refinancing, the district will complete a grant-funded facilities study that will involve a facilities committee, community input and long-range plan. Then, the district will submit a proposal to receive a \$4 million bond matching grant by July 2021. If the application is successful, voters will have to pass a matching bond in May 2022 for the district to receive the money.

The goal is to have \$8 million in funds for facility improvement without increasing tax rates to service the debt on both

bonds. Taxpayers will continue to pay around \$1.91 per \$1,000 of assessed value to service the debt on both bonds.

According to Mendoza, the district has stayed below the rate of \$1.99 per \$1,000 that was estimated when taxpayers approved the bond measure in 2014 and will continue to stay below that rate long term. This puts the district in a strong position when considering future bond measures because a \$4 million bond request would keep the district near or below the current \$1.91 per \$1,000.

The La Grande School District still has facilities that need significant improvements and upgrades, according to the news release, including the 100-year-old annex building at the middle school and the 80-year-old Willow building, which houses the district office, preschool classrooms and a gym.

Oregon state trooper turns llama wrangler

The Observer

BAKER CITY — Oregon State Police troopers train for plenty of circumstances, but llama wrangling may be a first.

Trooper Levi Macy was monitoring traffic Sunday, Oct. 11, on Interstate 84 near Baker City when around 7:20 a.m. he received a call from OSP dispatch for a llama in the road at exit 304.

"I got there and sure enough a displeased mama llama was lying on the onramp," Macy stated via a post on the Oregon State Police Facebook account.

Macy said the llama's owner was transporting three of the animals from Washington to Utah in the back of a short-bed pickup. A homemade livestock rack was not able to hold the llamas when the pickup



Trooper Levi Macy/Oregon State Police

Oregon State Police trooper Levi Macy snapped this photo Sunday, Oct. 11, 2020, of a "displeased" llama in the road on Interstate 84 near Baker City. Macy kept watch over the animal until its owner was able to get it back onto the pickup from which it escaped.

took an uphill corner, and one of the animals ended up on the highway.

"Fortunately enough for the llama and myself, the speeds were slow, and traffic was minimal,"

according to Macy.

The driver noticed the missing llama about a mile later, and when he stopped, Macy stated, the other two animals "bailed out, running free on the interstate."

Somebody has to do it



Sabrina Thompson/The Observer

La Grande Public Works Department employees Dallas Stone (left) and Jared Huff clean the city's main sewer line Tuesday afternoon, Oct. 13, 2020, in front of The Observer at 911 Jefferson Ave.

Elgin city administrator quits after 6 years on job

Sabrina Thompson

The Observer

ELGIN — Brock Eckstein is leaving his role as city administrator of Elgin.

Eckstein announced the decision Tuesday, Oct. 13, during a meeting of the Elgin city council. Though he will stay on until the start of 2021, Eckstein said he felt it was time to step back and let someone with fresh eyes take care of the city.

"Everyone was pretty understanding," Eckstein said. "It is a stressful position, and it had been wearing on me for while."

Eckstein was hired as city administrator in November 2014. Born and raised in Elgin, Eckstein said he felt frustrated with the way the city handled council meetings and wanted to help make a difference.

"My mother gave me

some advice, which I took to heart," Eckstein said. "She said, 'If you are not part of the solution, then you are part of the problem,' and that stuck with me."

In his six years as city administrator, Eckstein has overseen several changes to the city. He noted several stand out, including resurrecting the municipal court, securing a Union County Sheriff's Office contract for law enforcement services and bringing in more than \$12 million in grants for various city projects.

"I also think we built one of the best city staffs in the county," Eckstein said. "I think I am leaving it in a really good place for the next person."

He noted that the role of city administrator, while great for making a difference in the city, can be challenging.

NEWS BRIEFS

Woodgrain Lumber employee dies in work accident

LA GRANDE — The La Grande Police Department reported an employee of Woodgrain Lumber died Tuesday night, Oct. 13, in a workplace accident.

Police at 7:57 p.m. received an emergency call from Woodgrain Lumber, 1917 Jackson Ave., for a worker pinned inside a golf cart and not breathing. Officers and a La Grande Fire Department ambulance crew arrived moments later, the police department reported in a press release.

The first responders found Shaun Hoyt, 56, of Elgin, dead at the scene.

The preliminary investigation revealed Hoyt missed his 7 p.m. lunch break, according to police, and coworkers shut down the mill and went looking for Hoyt. They found him sitting in the golf cart pinned against a steel beam and not breathing. A worker then called 911.

The investigation determined Hoyt was operating the golf cart, which mill employees use to travel around the mill yard, prior to colliding with the beam.

The Union County District Attorney's Office, the Union County Medical Examiner's Office, Oregon State Police and the Union County Sheriff's Office assisted with the investigation. La Grande Police Department also reported it will work closely with the the Oregon Occupational Health and Safety Administration.

Union County Sheriff's Office arrests two for drug possession

UNION COUNTY — The Union County Sheriff's Office reported a traffic stop led to two arrests on warrants and for drugs.

Shawn Presock, 37, of La Grande, was driving when deputies stopped his vehicle Monday, Oct. 12, at 6:17 p.m. at Riddle Road and May Lane, La Grande. The sheriff's office in a press release reported deputies made the stop because Presock had a warrant for his arrest. Angela Farrell Thamert, 43, of La Grande, was a passenger and also had a warrant.

Deputies began an investigation and called in Oregon State Police to provide its drug detection dog. That led to law enforcement finding methamphetamine, heroin and one narcotic prescription pill.

Deputies booked Presock into the county jail, La Grande, on charges of felony possession and delivery of heroin as well as on out-of-county warrants, and booked Thamert into the jail on charges of felony possession of methamphetamine, heroin and Oxycodone and on a parole violation.

Enterprise gets \$58K in COVID funds

ENTERPRISE — The city of Enterprise received \$58,350 from the federal Treasury's Coronavirus Relief Fund to address unforeseen financial needs and risks created by the COVID-19 pandemic, it was announced at the Monday, Oct. 12, city council meeting.

Councilors Chris Pritchard and Brandon Miller volunteered to serve on a committee to decide how to disperse the funds.

City Administrator Lacey McQuead recommended up to \$15,000 for computer system updates to allow for employees who are working remotely is needed, up to \$15,000 for community partners to assist families with COVID-19 relief, and up to \$25,000 for small business grant funding.

The council approved the request.

— EO Media Group