

# 104-year-old barn fills new role

In Business & Ag Life, 1B



# THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896



Follow us on the web

THURSDAY • October 15, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Loyd Barker of Elgin



## La Grande councilor faces challenger

Candidates touch on local Republican involvement in nonpartisan races

By Dick Mason  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — La Grande City Councilor Mary Ann Miesner wants to help the town's businesses bounce back and regain the momentum they had before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. But for her to continue her work on that goal,

she will have to prevail in the November election.

Challenger Kristine Alf Rippee also wants to help businesses and take on other issues in place of Miesner.

Miesner said her experience would help her achieve her goals if voters grant her for another term. She has served on the council a total of 16 years in two stints, from 2000 to early 2015 and from early 2016 to the present.

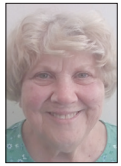
"I want to do everything I can to help," said Miesner, a computer instructor for the Training and Employment Consortium who also served 19 years on the La Grande School Board.

The councilor also aims to help the city tackle its housing issues. She is particularly concerned, in this regard, about addressing the needs of the homeless in La Grande.

"I want to explore all policies as we look at what we can do to the best of our abilities to help them as a community," Miesner said.

The councilor said the city council now is reviewing a recently completed city housing study. She said she believes the council should take action to address the

See, Council/Page 5A



Miesner



Alf Rippee



Sabrina Thompson/The Observer

Willow Elementary School in La Grande also serves as the offices for the La Grande School District. The district is the largest in Union County and has an 80% completion rate for students, the same as the state average.

## Local schools solid

2019-20 report cards give high marks for completion, staff retention

By Sabrina Thompson  
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Most schools in Union County scored high grades for students walking away with diplomas, according to the Oregon Department of Education's latest school report cards. The department's most recent At-A-Glance reports also highlight the pitfalls small districts face.

The reports provide a quick overview for evaluating and measuring a school's and a school district's impact on its students, according to the Oregon Department of Education website. The department's profiles look at the number of students enrolled and their demographics, including race and economic status. The profiles also report the number of faculty and teachers at schools, the

demographics of the staff and contain graduation and completion rates.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the 2019-2020 report does not include statewide assessments data, class size data, ninth grade on-track and attendance data.

### Completion data

Imbler and North Powder school districts each have a 95% graduation rate, while Elgin is furthest behind in the county with a 75% completion rate. La Grande's rate is 80%, the same as the state average.

The smaller the district, the more only a few students can affect outcomes.

"We had two students fall off the grid after we were shut down for COVID, and we

See, Schools/Page 5A

EXPERIENCED TO LEAD

Write Me In!

For a Safer Future

VOTE FOR ONE

MILLER

FOR SHERIFF

Bill Miller  
Write-in

Paid for by committee to elect Bill Miller for Sheriff.

### State race

## Bylenga, Levy vie for House District 58

By Alex Castle  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Echo farmer Bobby Levy is the strong favorite in the Republican stronghold of Oregon's House District 58 this November, but she still has to beat out Pendleton resident and Democratic challenger Nolan Bylenga.

Bylenga, 22, won the district's Democratic primary with 53% of the vote, while Levy ran unopposed for the Republican nomination after Rep. Greg Barreto, R-Cove, opted not to run for reelection.

House District 58 hasn't been represented by a Democrat since Bob Jenson first ran as one in 1996.

Levy, 67, resides and works on a farm in Echo in addition to serving as president of the Eastern Oregon Women's Coalition, a non-profit she helped form that represents regional issues and works to "bridge the urban-rural divide." Her public track record also includes serving on the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission.

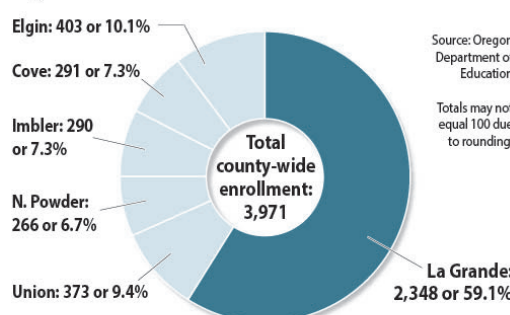
"I've already been advocating for the things that are really important to District 58 since 2006," she said. "This is just a continuation of what I've always been doing."

Levy had built a strong friendship with Bob Jenson, the late and longtime representative of House District 58, before Barreto succeeded him in 2015. Jenson was revered as a dynamic representative who identified as a Democratic, Independent and Republican and didn't always capitulate to the party line.

Through that relationship and conversations she's had with sitting legislators, such as Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, and Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, both among the many elected officials in the region who have endorsed her, Levy said

See, District 58/Page 5A

### Union County student enrollment by school district, 2019-20



### Student ethnicity per school district by percent

Ethnicity	La Grande	Union	N. Powder	Imbler	Cove	Elgin
Hispanic/Latino	8%	4	14	3	5	5
American Indian/Alaska Native	1	1	1	3	-	1
Asian	1	-	-	-	1	1
Black	1	1	1	-	<1	-
Multi-racial	6	2	-	3	5	2
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	-	-	-	-	-
White	81	91	84	90	89	91

Alan Kenega/Contributed Graphic  
Union County's largest district is the La Grande School District. La Grande is also the most racially diverse district in the county.

## Wallowa-Whitman might boost some camping fees

Proposal would apply to several forest trailheads

By Jayson Jacoby  
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest is proposing to increase fees at 28 campgrounds and to charge fees at 24 other recreation sites, most of them also campgrounds, that are free now. The changes could start next summer.

The forest is also proposing to eliminate fees at two campgrounds and one trailhead.

Dispersed camping on the forest — outside of designated campgrounds — will remain free.

The Wallowa-Whitman is soliciting comments from the public about the proposal through Nov. 15. The forest hasn't changed its recreation fee

**ONLINE**  
Go to [lagrandeobserver.com](http://lagrandeobserver.com) to see a detailed list of the proposed fees for area campgrounds.

schedule since 2005.

The John Day-Snake River Resource Advisory Committee, a group of 15 residents of the region that makes recommendations about public land management to the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service, will then review the proposed fee changes, which could take effect in the summer of 2021.

"Over the past 15 years, most of the fees have stayed the same across the national forest, and the majority of our recreation sites still do not require a fee," Tom Montoya, Wallowa-Whitman supervisor, said in a press release. "However, we need to keep in



Lisa Britton/For EO Media Group

Two Color campground along Eagle Creek in the southern Wallowa Mountains is among 24 campgrounds or trailheads on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest that could begin charging fees in 2021 under a proposal.

check with inflation and maintain what we have for the benefit of the public. Fees are needed to continue the services we deliver at developed sites. The fees will also be comparable with other

similar sites that are adjacent to the national forest."

The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act allows

See, Camping/Page 5A

### INDEX

Business..... 1B Dear Abby .... 6B Nation..... 8A  
Classified..... 2B Horoscope..... 3B Obituaries..... 3A  
Comics..... 5B Letters..... 4A Opinion..... 4A  
Crossword..... 3B Lottery..... 2A State..... 7A

### WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight 32 Low  
Mainly clear  
 Friday 69/47  
Sunny and warmer

### CONTACT US

541-963-3161  
Issue 123  
3 sections, 22 pages  
La Grande, Oregon  
Email story ideas to [news@lagrandeobserver.com](mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com).  
More contact info on Page 4A.



SATURDAY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

Online at [lagrandeobserver.com](http://lagrandeobserver.com)