



Oregon Legislature

State proposal to address homeless youth crisis

Concept had backing of Republican Sen. Bill Hansell

By KALEB LAY
The Observer

SALEM — The Oregon Legislature is set to deliberate on a new bill aimed at addressing the state’s homeless youth crisis.

The draft bill, Legislative Concept 2625, would allocate \$4.4 million in taxpayer funds to the Department of Human Services, which would be charged with using the money to expand youth shelter facilities and fund “host homes” across the state.

The bill has the support of at least one Eastern Oregon GOP legislator — Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena.

“I think that one of the things that government is to do is to

See, Youth/Page 5A

EOU’s Insko sees windfall as enrollment drops in pandemic

By KALEB LAY
The Observer

LA GRANDE — As 2020 closed on a year of declining enrollment and tuition revenue for many of Oregon’s public universities, Eastern Oregon University in La Grande opted to increase President Tom Insko’s salary and to award him \$22,500 in year-end bonuses.



Insko

The EOU Board of Trustees on Nov. 12, 2020, approved two bonuses for Insko: a \$7,500 “goal attainment award” and a \$15,000 “meritorious achievement award.” The trustees also awarded Insko a 2.6% increase to his quarter-million dollar salary.

The move came even as year-over-year enrollment declined at EOU in 2020 — a trend universities across the state and the country have experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to fact sheets from the university’s website, on-campus enrollment from fall

See, Insko/Page 5A

Extending a hand

Firefighters build a ramp for retired chief

By DICK MASON
The Observer

ISLAND CITY — Ray Hamann responded to countless emergency calls during his 48-year career with the La Grande Rural Fire Department.

Recently, this man known so well for giving was a recipient.

Members of the La Grande Rural Fire Department teamed up to fund and build a much-needed wooden ramp leading to the front of Hamann’s Island City home. The ramp, which cost \$900 in materials, was paid for with funds from the La Grande Rural Fire Department’s Volunteer Association. La Grande Rural Fire Chief Craig Kretschmer and Lt. J.B. Brock constructed the ramp over a two-day period.

“He has given a lot to so many people,” Kretschmer said, noting it was only right to extend a hand to the former chief.

The ramp covers a sidewalk that was becoming dangerous to walk over because of its deteriorating condition.

“We are very touched by what they did,” said Patty Hamann, Ray’s wife.

Jill Hoskins, one of the Hamanns’ two daughters, echoed this praise, noting the quality of the ramp makes the process of walking to and from her parents’ home as smooth as possible.

“Their generous act of kindness means the world to us, and has given our dad a bit more freedom and a lot more reassurance and confidence,” Hoskins said. “It is a gift for our dad.”

Hamann was with the La Grande Rural Fire Department from 1962 through 2010. He was the department’s chief the last two decades.

“What he did was remarkable,” said Capt. Anthony Swales of the La Grande Rural Fire Department.

Swales noted Hamann was paid only during the last decade of his tenure. Hamann was chief of the fire department when Swales joined it about 15 years ago. Swales credited Hamann with doing an excellent job of making sure all members of the La Grande Rural Fire Department received their state-mandated training. He said at the time a number of small fire departments did not make such an effort to get firefighters the

See, Ramp/Page 5A



Dick Mason/The Observer

Ray Hamann, left, retired chief of the La Grande Rural Fire Department, talks with firefighters Nick Vora, center, and Anthony Swales on Sunday, Jan. 10, 2021, while on his home’s new ramp. Members of the La Grande Rural Fire Department built the ramp for Hamann.

“Their generous act of kindness means the world to us, and has given our dad a bit more freedom and a lot more reassurance and confidence. It is a gift for our dad.”

— Jill Hoskins, daughter of Ray Hamann, retired fire chief of the Grande Rural Fire Department, on the new ramp department members built for her father.

Economic forecast grim if Elgin mill closes

Analysis finds that Elgin plywood plant’s closure would lead to \$21 million less in labor income across region

By KALEB LAY
The Observer

ELGIN — If the Boise Cascade plywood plant in Elgin closes this year, it could cost Eastern Oregon 446 jobs, nearly \$21 million in labor income and more than \$78 million in economic output within a year.

That’s according to an economic impact analysis conducted by the Eastern Oregon Center for Economic Information, a division of the Eastern Oregon University College of Business.

“The reason I wanted to do something on this is really just to bring people to the table so that they can figure something out, because it would be catastrophic for our region,” said Scott McConnell, an economics professor at EOU who led the



Dick Mason/The Observer, File

Vapor trails through the air the morning of Oct. 22, 2020, at Boise Cascade’s plywood plant in Elgin. The wood products company has announced it could reduce workers’ hours or even close the plant, at least temporarily, in 2021. A new economic analysis predicts major losses in Union County and Eastern Oregon if the mill shuts down.

forecasting project.

Boise Cascade announced it may close or reduce hours at the plywood plant in Elgin — which employs 230 people — after a permitting dispute with the Oregon Department of Environ-

mental Quality over dioxin-contaminated wastewater broke out in late October 2020.

The EOCEI found the closure of the Elgin facility would have far-reaching effects across Eastern Oregon, but Union

County would bear the brunt of the blow.

“Not only will the economic effects affect the lumber and plywood industry, but local area restaurants, schools and grocery stores will feel the economic impacts of this closure as well,” the report stated.

In the fallout of the mill’s closure, according to the analysis, 76% of the job and economic output losses would fall on Union County, particularly in Elgin. That comes to 339 jobs, almost \$16 million in lost labor income, more than \$59.6 million in lost economic output and about \$79,600 in lost tax revenue at the county level.

But the effects of the Elgin plant’s closure would extend across the region. The analysis found that total losses in Union, Baker, Wallowa, Malheur, Umatilla, Grant and Harney counties would be 446 jobs, just shy of \$21 million in labor income and almost \$78.4 million in economic output.

See, Elgin/Page 5A

INDEX

Classified..... 2B Home..... 1B Obituaries..... 3A
Comics..... 5B Horoscope.... 3B Opinion..... 4A
Crossword.... 2B Letters..... 4A State..... 6A
Dear Abby.... 6B Lottery..... 3A Sudoku..... 5B

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
39 LOW
Rain, snow



Wednesday
46/25
A touch of rain

CONTACT US

541-963-3161

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



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