

TODAY IN HISTORY

TODAY

Today is Saturday, Jan. 23, the 23rd day of 2021. There are 342 days left in the year.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT IN HISTORY:

On Jan. 23, 2020, Chinese state media said the city of Wuhan would be shutting down outbound flights and trains, trying to halt the spread of a new virus that had sickened hundreds of people and killed at least 17. The World Health Organization said the viral illness in China was not yet a global health emergency, though the head of the U.N. health agency added that "it may yet become one."

ON THIS DATE:

In 1845, Congress decided all national elections would be held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

In 1962, Jackie Robinson was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility.

In 1968, North Korea seized the U.S. Navy intelligence ship USS Pueblo, commanded by Lloyd "Pete" Bucher, charging its crew with being on a spying mission; one sailor was killed and 82 were taken prisoner. (Cmdr. Bucher and his crew were released the following December after enduring 11 months of brutal captivity at the hands of the North Koreans.)

In 1973, President Richard Nixon announced an accord had been reached to end the Vietnam War, and would be formally signed four days later in Paris.

In 1977, the TV mini-series "Roots," based on the Alex Haley novel, began airing on ABC.

In 1998, a judge in Fairfax, Virginia, sentenced Aimal Khan Kasi to death for an assault rifle attack outside CIA headquarters in 1993 that killed two men and wounded three other people. (Kasi was executed in November 2002.)

In 2002, John Walker Lindh, a U.S.-born Taliban fighter, was returned to the United States to face criminal charges that he'd conspired to kill fellow Americans. (Lindh was sentenced to 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to providing support for the Taliban; he was released in May, 2019, after serving more than 17 years.)

Interest high in new filmmaker residency program

By **DICK MASON**

The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Eastern Oregon Film Festival's new filmmaker residency program debuts this spring with the aim to do more than help boost promising filmmakers. The program also may give Northeast Oregon a financial lift.



Jennings

This is the hope of Chris Jennings, director of the Eastern Oregon Film Festival, a La Grande-

based nonprofit. Jennings explained this economic goal is why writers and directors participating in the program, all of whom will be creating screenplays, have to give their works an Oregon connection.

"This needs to be integrated into the story they are creating," Jennings said. "We want them to incorporate Oregon's culture and geography."

Jennings said this could mean those receiving EOFF residencies may return later to make their films in Northeast Oregon, boosting its economy.

"Filmmaking could have a very positive impact on



Sabrina Thompson/The Observer, File

Local filmmakers J.J. Hill and Liberty O'Dell share their idea for their feature-length film "Out of Character" in October 2019 at the Eastern Oregon Film Festival, La Grande. EOFF debuts its filmmaker residency program in the spring of 2021.

the economic status of the region," Jennings said.

He said he thinks this region, where few movies have been made, is an untapped gem for filmmakers.

"Cinematically it is not explored," Jennings said.

Between six and 10 people will receive residencies through the new program, and they will be shown the virtues Northeast Oregon has to offer,

including microclimates, the natural beauty and communities with people eager to provide support services.

"We will show them how their story can come alive in this region," Jennings said.

The residency program will run from April 30 through May 27. It will be for writers and filmmakers who are working on screenplays. Some may be nearing completion of their screen-

play while others may be in the more formative stages. All will be anything but filmmaking first timers. "They will be past the novice stage. They will know how to create a script and produce a film," Jennings said.

He said early interest in the residency program is strong. Jennings noted 30 people from all around the United States took part in a Zoom video conference on

Wolf depredation grants awarded to ranchers

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Two ranching operations in Union County received more than \$17,000 total for nonlethal means to protect their livestock from wolves.

The county board of commissioners voted Thursday, Jan. 21, to award \$9,584.04 to Krebs Livestock and \$7,745.96 to Eric Harlow, according to a Union County Board of Commissioners staff report.

Krebs Livestock, a company in Morrow County that uses Union County to raise some of

its sheep, will use the money to pay for secure night pens, four fox lights, bluetooth speakers, spotlights, additional herders and the removal of dead livestock. Harlow, a Union County rancher, will use the funding to pay for two additional herders.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture provides the funding for the grants.

The board of commissioners voted to award the grants at the recommendation of the Union County Wolf Depredation Compensation Committee.

Traffic stop nets weapons, drugs

The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Oregon State Police reported a traffic stop in Union County led to arrests on drugs and weapons charges.

OSP Lt. Daniel Conner on Wednesday, Jan. 20, at about 1:10 p.m. pulled a vehicle over on Interstate 84 for multiple traffic infractions. When the lieutenant contacted the driver and passenger, he observed "reasonable suspicion of criminal activity."

State police dog Ore alerted to the vehicle, and a search revealed a "commercial quantity of methamphetamine, scales,



OSP/Contributed Photo

Oregon State Police dog Ore alerted to a vehicle during a traffic stop on I-84 in Union County, leading to two arrests.

packaging material, paraphernalia, U.S. currency,

prohibited weapons for a felon and a stolen 9-mm pistol," according to state police. "As a result, the driver and passenger were arrested."

The inmate roster for the Union County Correctional Facility and state court records show state police booked Joshua Barritt, 33, of Caldwell, Idaho, into the jail at 4:31 p.m. on charges of delivery and possession of meth, theft, felon in possession of a firearm and felon in possession of a restricted weapon. According to court documents, the state alleges Barritt stole a 9-mm pistol.

Readying the recreation center



John Hilllock/Contributed Photo

Volunteers gathered Saturday, Jan. 16, 2021, to continue work on the indoor city recreation center near the baseball fields in Enterprise. The center is expected to be ready for use by March 1.

Halfway to get new fire station

By **SAMANTHA O'CONNOR**

Baker City Herald

HALFWAY — The city of Halfway is using a \$1.5 million federal block grant to build a new station for the Pine Valley Rural Fire Protection District.

Halfway received the Community Development Block Grant in 2019 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In an email to the Baker City Herald, Lisa Dawson, executive director of the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District, wrote the city has contracted with the district to prepare the environmental review for the construction project.

The new 7,800-square-foot station, which will

replace a structure built in the 1960s, will be in the northwest portion of a two-acre property the fire district owns in Halfway, adjacent to the Pine Valley Fairgrounds and near Pine Haven Cemetery.

Dawson wrote that construction is slated to start this summer, and the project should take about a year to finish.

She said the Pine Valley station, which will include five equipment bays with room for the department's vehicles and equipment, will be similar in size to one built recently in Richland for the Eagle Valley Fire Protection District.

The current fire station can't accommodate all the equipment, and it also is inefficient to heat, Dawson

wrote. The new station also will have restrooms, office space and a training room.

There will be a paved parking area and potentially a helicopter landing pad for emergency medical flights.

"The Pine Valley Rural Fire Protection District is an all-volunteer organization that provides fire-fighting services for the city of Halfway as well as the surrounding community," Dawson wrote in her email. "The nearest fire station is in Richland. Because of the remote, rural location, PVRFD volunteers are often the first responders to fires on public lands (BLM, USFS) within a 20-mile radius. The PVRFD acquired the vacant land for the proposed fire station in 2015."

Records chronicle events leading to melee at Ontario prison

By **LILIANA FRANKEL**

Malheur Enterprise via AP StoryShare

ONTARIO — A fight between two inmates in December 2020 at Snake River Correctional Institution, Ontario, escalated into one of the largest disturbances in recent times at the prison, according to records the Malheur Enterprise obtained.

The Oregon Department of Corrections recently released more than 100 pages of documents about the disturbance as a result of a public records request.

They provide new details about an episode that put the prison in lockdown, required corrections officers to deploy pepper spray and sent two inmates to the hospital.

The Dec. 9 night-time fight in Complex C of the

prison eventually involved 37 inmates and required 37 corrections officers to quell.

The fight was contained in Unit C, a housing unit for 80 inmates. The arrival of a new inmate led corrections officer Brandon Kropp to report "an intangible sense of an increase in tension" among the inmates and a "change of tone on the unit," according to an incident brief by Capt. Robert Campbell.

Kropp moved to conduct a standard inmate count the evening of Dec. 9 when at 9:16 p.m. he radioed other prison workers a fight had broken out.

"The incident began in the dayroom, when adult in custody (AIC) Torren Cooksey was verbally disrespectful to AIC Alec Imel," according to Jennifer Black, communications

manager with the corrections department. "The two men decided to resolve their issue with a one-on-one fight inside a cell. After they fought, other AICs on the unit did not agree that there was resolution to the fight and the larger fight ensued."

Cooksey said in a recent letter to the Enterprise that it was a "bum beef" — prison slang for a false charge — and the fight "could've been hours or even days before this spoken of disturbance."

Cooksey said the disturbance really was a gang fight between the White-Boys and the Paisas, two ethnic factions in the prison. Black confirmed members of ethnic gangs participated in the fight.

Kropp estimated 25 inmates were "actively

fighting and not complying with staff directives to stop fighting and other AICs were joining in the fight," an incident report recounted.

Kropp gated the housing unit, and his backup, Sgt. James Kenyon, arrived with two teams of corrections officers. Within three minutes, the entire prison was put on lockdown.

Almost immediately after the fighting began, the response teams began pepper spraying the inmates in short bursts. Five officers in total deployed their spray. At first, according to chemical agent deployment forms, the pepper spray had "little to no effect."

Lt. Mike Real reported he then responded with what he described as "special munitions" and warned the fighting inmates they

would be deployed.

Prison spokesperson Amber Campbell clarified "special munitions" refers to weaponry designed to "incapacitate, distract, and control a subject with less likelihood of life-threatening injury" — likely rubber or foam bullets.

The reports show that by 9:50 p.m., the officers had successfully quelled the fighting between inmates.

"Several AICs were celebrating with each other, walking around and shaking hands with each other," the incident report said.

"Many inmates already were laying on the ground bleeding profusely," Cooksey wrote. "When everyone was on the ground, guards rushed in and started cuffing people up and taking them either to

(disciplinary segregation) or the hospital."

Inmates who hadn't suffered visible facial injuries were filmed and their hands inspected for signs they had been involved in the fight, such as red or swollen knuckles. All of the inmates who had been exposed to the pepper spray were offered the chance to rinse their faces, change their clothes and take a shower.

One inmate was taken to the hospital and Cooksey soon followed after corrections officers found him with a badly injured face, according to the incident reports.

While inspecting cells, SRCI staff found Cooksey's blood in a cell where he did not live, leading them to formulate their hypothesis about the origin of the fight.