

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Saturday, Feb. 6, the 37th day of 2021. There are 328 days left in the year.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT IN HISTORY:

On Feb. 6, 1778, during the American Revolutionary War, the United States won official recognition and military support from France with the signing of a Treaty of Alliance in Paris.

ON THIS DATE:

In 1815, the state of New Jersey issued the first American railroad charter to John Stevens, who proposed a rail link between Trenton and New Brunswick. (The line, however, was never built.)

In 1911, Ronald Wilson Reagan, the 40th president of the United States, was born in Tampico, Illinois.

In 1952, Britain's King George VI, 56, died at Sandringham House in Norfolk, England; he was succeeded as monarch by his 25-year-old elder daughter, who became Queen Elizabeth II.

In 1991, comedian and television performer Danny Thomas died in Los Angeles at age 79.

In 1993, tennis Hall of Famer and human rights advocate Arthur Ashe died in New York at age 49.

In 1998, President Bill Clinton signed a bill changing the name of Washington National Airport to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.

In 2003, edging closer to war, President George W. Bush declared "the game is over" for Saddam Hussein and urged skeptical allies to join in disarming Iraq.

In 2008, the Bush White House defended the use of the interrogation technique known as waterboarding, saying it was legal — not torture as critics argued — and had saved American lives.

Ten years ago: Egypt's vice president met with the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition groups and offered sweeping concessions, including granting press freedom and rolling back police powers in the government's latest attempt to end two weeks of upheaval. The Green Bay Packers won Super Bowl XLV (45), defeating the Pittsburgh Steelers 31-25. New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady became the first unanimous choice for The Associated Press NFL Most Valuable Player Award.

La Grande city trees earn bragging rights

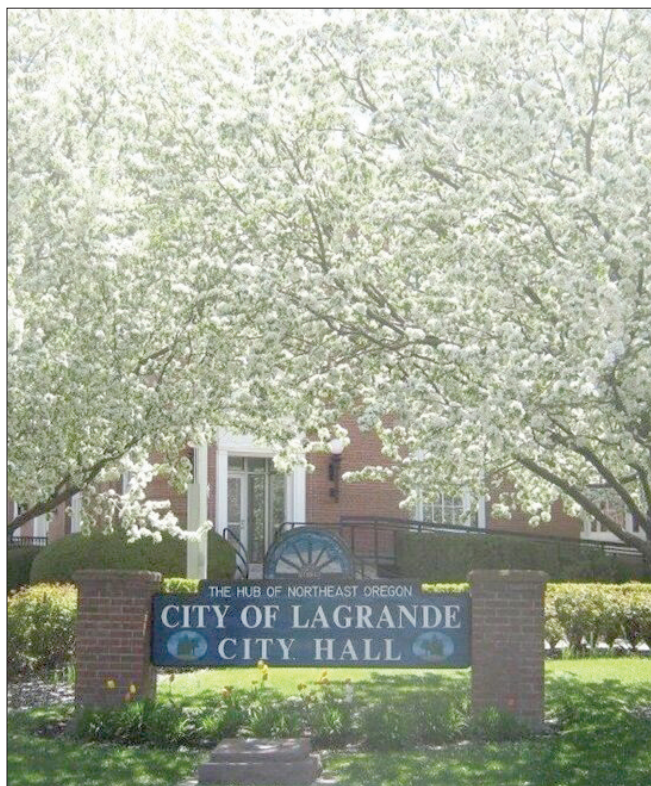
By **KALEB LAY**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The city of La Grande's urban forestry program has garnered special attention as part of the Tree City USA program, earning a "Growth Award" for the 29th consecutive year in 2020.

No other city in the Pacific Northwest can compete with that winning streak, according to Teresa Gustafson, the city's urban forester, and heading into 2020, La Grande was tied for second best in the nation among some 3,600 other cities across the United States in that regard.

The Tree City USA Growth Award recognizes cities with urban forestry programs that go above and beyond program requirements, cultivating flourishing arboreal communities. Other Oregon cities recognized included Portland, Salem, Hood River and Oregon City.

"What's cool about the Growth Award program is that it encourages cities to expand and improve their community forestry program," Gustafson said. "That's important because



Teresa Gustafson/Contributed Photo

Trees in bloom shade out the sign at city hall in downtown La Grande. The town in 2020 earned a "Growth Award" from Tree City USA for a 29th consecutive year.

of all the benefits that our trees and urban forests provide, and that's everything from clean air, clean water, shade, energy (use) reduction, beautification, wildlife habitat, the list goes on and on and on."

Gustafson noted La Grande's urban forestry approach goes far beyond maintaining the city's existing tree life. Her job also includes Arbor Day education programs in schools, coordinating with



Teresa Gustafson/Contributed Photo

Foliage droops from oak trees near Community Bank in downtown La Grande, which was recently awarded a Tree City USA Growth Award for its outstanding urban forestry program.

the community to plant new trees as older ones age out and planning for the future.

"There's always projects on the horizon for expanding where we plant trees," Gustafson said. "We've got a couple lined up this year that we're excited about."

Among the requirements for a city to participate in the Tree City USA program is a stipulation that \$2 per

resident be spent on urban forestry. La Grande far outpaces that benchmark, spending \$18 per capita in 2020 — a price tag that notably includes the cost of volunteered labor.

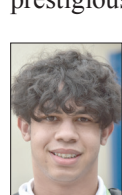
Gustafson said she hoped people recognize that trees are "growing, living things that need care and support" and mark their importance as a vital part of La Grande.

LGHS student receives noteworthy scholarship

Julian Harris among 106 students in U.S. to earn Horatio Alger college scholarship

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A La Grande High School student whose life story is one of inspiration has received a prestigious scholarship.



Harris

Julian Harris, 17, has been awarded a \$25,000 Horatio Alger college scholarship by the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans.

Harris, one of more than 10,000 young people to

apply for the annual scholarship, is one of only 106 in the United States to receive it.

This scholarship recognizes students who have remained committed to continuing their education and giving back to their communities while overcoming great personal adversities and navigating the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, said Claire Salazar, a spokesperson for the Horatio Alger Foundation, in a press release.

Harris learned he

received the scholarship the morning of Thursday, Feb. 4, when a LHS staff member told him in class.

It was an emotional moment for Harris, who said the mask he wore to protect himself from COVID-19 concealed the degree of excitement he felt. He also said the news made him think of his mother and two older brothers, who died in a car wreck about a decade ago.

"I know they are watching me to see how far I have come," Harris said.

Harris moved to La Grande from Boise, Idaho, during his freshman year and lives with his younger brother, Weston,

and his aunt and uncle.

"I love it here, I love the teachers, they have made me feel so welcome," Harris said.

Although a junior, Harris is set to graduate this spring after taking many additional classes. He said he found himself with extra time during the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced the state to close schools and offer only online instruction.

Harris said he decided to put the time to good use and began taking extra classes to graduate early.

Harris said he wants to attend a college in this region after high school so he can remain close to his

family. He has not decided what career he wants to pursue, but law is one field he is interested in.

All of the 106 winners of the 2021 Horatio Alger Scholarship are set to later receive a trip to Washington, D.C., to meet fellow scholars and those who fund the scholarship. The trip will be made only after COVID-19 conditions allow for it.

The Horatio Alger scholarship program is conducted in recognition of Horatio Alger Jr., a prolific writer in the 19th and early 20th centuries whose books inspired its readers to work hard and persevere through adversity.

Union School District readies to restore steps

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

UNION — The past is set to become the present at Union High School.

UHS's decorative east entrance, closed to the public for decades because a portion of its steps are deteriorating, is scheduled to reopen this fall after repair work in the summer with money from a \$4 million bond voters approved in 2019, said Carter Wells, superintendent of the Union School District.

Wells said he welcomes the opportunity to revitalize a piece of the school district's past.

"We want to honor our history," the superintendent said.

The east entrance, which features four solid columns, is planned to be the only one students can access to enter the school. Wells said that is a security boost, making it easier for school district staff to mon-



Dick Mason/The Observer

Students climb the crumbling steps Thursday, Feb. 4, 2021, at Union High School's east entrance. Work this summer will restore the steps.

itor who is coming inside the building, constructed in 1912.

The east entry rule will only be in place only if the steps are restored and the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided to the point social distancing rules are relaxed.

Funding for the repairs

could include grant money. Should the school district receive grant funding, Wells said more bond money will be available for additional restoration work on campus.

Ninth and 10th graders each school day are now using the old east entry, its

first regular use in decades. Staff watch to make sure freshmen and sophomores walk only on the portion of the stairs that are in good condition. Other students at the school use a different entry and exit to meet social distancing standards.

The bond also will fund other projects, including building a new main entry at Union Elementary School's S.E. Miller building, about 50 yards north of the school, to make dropping off and picking up students easier. The school's gym also will undergo a major renovation to improve access for people with mobility issues. Boosting accessibility is something the school district is focusing on in the course of the bond work.

"That is our theme," Wells said. "We want people to be able to get to all parts of the school district with dignity."

Monica West to lead Central Elementary School

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — La Grande School District officials did not have to look far to find Central Elementary's next principal.

The school district has named Monica West, central's assistant principal, to lead the school starting July 1.

"I am very excited about getting to work with Central's parents and staff," she said.

West will succeed Suzy Mayes, who will retire at the end of June after

serving as the school's principal since the fall of 2014. West is completing her second year at Central as assistant principal.

West joined the LGSD after working for the Olympia School District in Washington for 25 years. She served as a teacher, instructional coach, middle school assistant principal and elementary school principal during her tenure in Olympia.

West was the principal of McLane Elementary School in Olympia for seven years. She received a number of awards during her tenure as principal. They include the

2018 Center for Education Effectiveness' "School of Distinction Award," which recognizes continuous growth in English language arts and math over a five-year period. West also won the Olympia School District's 2017 "Unsung Hero" award.

She speaks humbly of the awards, crediting them to the excellent work of her teaching staff.

West has a bachelor of science degree from College of Idaho and a master's in educational leadership from Portland State University.

She received her administrative creden-

tials from Seattle Pacific University.

West earlier taught high school math and science for five years and middle school math and science for 11 years in the Olympia School District.

LGSD Superintendent George Mendoza praised West in a press release.

"Every child deserves to have a principal that will set high expectations and provide a loving and motivating environment where staff members are supported to educate the whole child as well as meet or exceed state standards. I am pleased that we have found that in Monica West."

NEWS BRIEFS

One shot in home invasion, man in custody

LA GRANDE — The Union County Sheriff's Office reported a La Grande-area resident shot a home invader at 4:26 a.m. Friday, Feb. 5, who then disarmed the resident and assaulted him with the gun before the victim's son took control of the moment.

According to a press release from the sheriff's office, Jose Jesus Diaz, 27, of Plains, Montana, broke into a garage at a residence on the 60000 block of Bushnell Road in southern La Grande and then broke into a vehicle in the garage, alerting the residents of the home.

One resident armed with a rifle confronted Diaz. A violent struggle ensued, the sheriff's office reported, the rifle went off and Diaz was shot in the arm. According to the release, Diaz then disarmed the victim and began to assault them with the rifle.

At that point, the victim's son engaged Diaz, disarming him and holding him at gunpoint until police arrived.

Diaz was arrested taken to the Union County Correctional Facility on charges of attempted murder, assault, attempted assault, robbery, menacing, pointing a firearm at another, unlawful use of a weapon, burglary, trespass and unauthorized entry into a motor vehicle.

Diaz, the victim and the victim's son were all taken to Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, for treatment of non-life threatening injuries.

The Union County Sheriff's Office is investigating the incident.

One dead after sledding accident at Spout Springs

ELGIN — One person is dead following a sledding accident Wednesday, Feb. 3, at Spout Springs between Elgin and Weston, according to a press release from the Union County Sheriff's Office.

Emergency personnel from Elgin Rural Fire Department, La Grande Fire Department and the sheriff's office responded to a 911 call at Spout Springs Ski Resort regarding a sledding accident. Spout Springs is closed, according to the release.

Rosa Itzel Farias, 27, from Pasco, Washington, died at the scene.

After investigation, the sheriff's office confirmed eyewitness reports claiming Farias was traveling as fast as 20 mph on an inflatable sled when she struck a light pole, causing fatal injuries.

La Grande police report burglary, car prowls crime wave

LA GRANDE — The La Grande Police Department on Friday, Feb. 5, reported La Grande and the surrounding area have experienced an increase in thefts in the past month.

La Grande police in a press release reported more than 45 reports of car prowls and burglaries resulting in a substantial loss of property. The vast majority of the burglaries are occurring at storage units and unlocked buildings. The car prowls are generally occurring in vehicles that are unlocked and parked in dark neighborhoods.

— The Observer