

THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

Weekend Edition

SATURDAY - MONDAY • February 13, 2021 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Dale Young of La Grande

Murder defendant Lee still unable to help in own defense

By PHIL WRIGHT
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Murder defendant Ronald Dwight Lee of La Grande could be in for a long stay at the Oregon State Hospital in Salem.

Union County Circuit Judge Thomas Powers during a hearing Jan. 19 to review Lee's fitness to proceed again found he is not able to aid and assist in his own defense.

Lee, 73, has pleaded not guilty to charges of murder and conspiracy to commit murder. He has been undergoing treatment and evaluation at the Oregon State Hospital, Salem. According to the ruling, Powers concurred with the Jan. 6 forensic evaluation of Dr. Michael Saul Farris that Lee "continues to lack the fitness to proceed" under Oregon law and is unsuitable for community release.

Union County District Attorney Kelsie McDaniel explained determinations for whether a defendant can aid and assist in their own defense is not the same as finding a defendant is guilty except for insanity. Powers' ruling applies to Lee's situation at

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State: Extension of jobless benefits easiest to manage

Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden seeks \$600 supplemental unemployment benefit

By PETER WONG
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — As Congress starts work on President Joe Biden's proposals to extend pandemic unemployment benefits, the acting director of the Oregon Employment Department said straight-forward extensions that are on the table will be easier to manage.

But David Gerstenfeld also said he and counterpart agencies in other states would like as much lead time as possible to prepare for any changes and avoid

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Oregon State Police Honor Guardsman Daryll Sheets of Florence renders a salute before assuming guard over the casket of former Oregon State Police Superintendent Reginald B. Madsen on Thursday, Feb. 11, 2021, at Loveland Funeral Chapel, La Grande.

Saluting an honored leader

By DICK MASON
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Former Oregon State Police Superintendent Reginald Bernard Madsen dedicated his life reaching out to others.

Thursday, Feb. 11, it was the OSP's turn to reach out to Madsen and his family.

The OSP Honor Guard conducted an honor watch for Madsen, 80, who died Jan. 29 at his Island City residence.

The 90-minute honor watch was a solemn and ceremonial tribute to a man who gave more than two decades of service to the OSP.

Nine members of the OSP's honor guard took turns in pairs, standing at attention on both ends of Madsen's casket draped with an American flag. The troopers stood at attention in 10-minute shifts until the changing of the guard ceremonies. The watch ran 1-3 p.m., then Pauline Madsen, Reg Madsen's wife of 59 years, received the flag that covered his casket.

The honor watch saluted a man who was with the Oregon State Police from 1968 through 1993. Madsen was OSP superintendent from 1990-93. Those who worked under Madsen included LeRon Howland of Summerville, who was his deputy superintendent for three years before succeeding him.

"I had a lot of admiration and respect for him. He was a great friend and a great leader," Howland said.

Howland said Madsen took great pride in representing the OSP.

"He wanted to set an example for the department. Pride, loyalty and dedication were a big thing for him," Howland said.

He credited Madsen with never losing



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Oregon State Police Honor Guardsman Jim King of Burns reads a memorial for former Oregon State Police Superintendent Reginald Madsen on Thursday, Feb. 11, 2021, at Loveland Funeral Chapel, La Grande. Madsen served as OSP's Superintendent 1990-93. He died at the age of 80 on Jan. 29 at his Island City residence.

sight of the agency's mission to serve the people of Oregon.

Howland, who met Madsen when he was working in the state police crime lab in Pendleton in the 1960s, said he was an easy person to like.

"He had a good sense of humor and was personable," said Howland, who served as state police superintendent for six and a half years after succeeding Madsen.

Howland said Madsen's office door

always was open and he welcomed any opportunity to help others.

He noted Madsen had a keen eye for spotting men and women who could direct others and tried to help them advance their careers.

"He had an ability to recognize people with leadership potential," Howland said.

"He wanted to help people move up who

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Online learning skews school enrollment numbers

Enrollment is down, but student numbers show in virtual classes

By KALEB LAY
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Enrollment at the La Grande School District is down from fall 2019, according to a recent report from the Oregon Department of Education. But the enrollment numbers in the report also paint a somewhat inaccurate picture of how many students are learning in Union County school districts. According to the ODE report,

VIRTUAL LEARNING ACADEMY NUMBERS

- The InterMountain Educational Service District reported the number of local students taking its Virtual Learning Academy in fall 2019.
- Cove — 46
- Elgin — 4
- Imbler — 15
- La Grande — 217
- North Power School District — 15
- Union — 46

1,979 students were enrolled at the La Grande School District as of Oct. 1, 2020, a stark drop compared to 2,348 at the same point in 2019. However, that figure — which would represent a drop of 15.7% — does not include students taking online-

only learning through the district's partnership with the InterMountain Educational Service District.

The InterMountain ESD provides its Virtual Learning Academy to schools in Union, Umatilla and Morrow counties

and to Burnt River School District in Baker County. According to the ESD, 217 students in the La Grande School District were enrolled in the Virtual Learning Academy.

"LGSD very much considers (those) students as our students," said La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza.

As does the InterMountain ESD.

Erin Lair, director of teaching and learning for the IMESD, explained the service district offers a fee-based opportunity

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight 16 LOW Flurries; cold
Sunday 35/28 Not as cold

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



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TUESDAY FOOD DRIVE

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