

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Saturday, Feb. 13, the 44th day of 2021. There are 321 days left in the year.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT IN HISTORY:

On Feb. 13, 2016, Justice Antonin Scalia, the influential conservative and most provocative member of the U.S. Supreme Court, was found dead at a private residence in the Big Bend area of West Texas; he was 79. During a Republican presidential debate that evening in South Carolina, the candidates, with the exception of Jeb Bush, insisted that President Barack Obama should let his successor nominate Scalia's replacement.

ON THIS DATE:

In 1633, Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei arrived in Rome for trial before the Inquisition, accused of defending Copernican theory that the Earth revolved around the sun instead of the other way around. In 1861, Abraham Lincoln was officially declared winner of the 1860 presidential election as electors cast their ballots.

In 1965, during the Vietnam War, President Lyndon B. Johnson authorized an extended bombing campaign against the North Vietnamese.

In 2000, Charles Schulz's final "Peanuts" strip ran in Sunday newspapers, the day after the cartoonist died in his sleep at his California home at age 77.

Spreading the love on Valentine's Day

Local businesses deliver spirit of Valentine's Day in spite of pandemic

By **ALEX WITTWER**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A wholly unique Valentine's day celebration is on the horizon for La Grande as businesses and restaurants remain closed to in-person dining. So no speed dating or murder mystery dinners at Le Bebe Cakes Bakery Coffee House — a venue with a reputation for its intriguing and colorful events during the holidays.

"We've been hit really hard this year, no events," said Spring Roberts, the owner of the bakery. "Usually we would do a dinner concert — other times of the year a murder mystery. We've had decorating classes. This year, we're offering free delivery."

On this pandemic Valentine's Day, the bakery cafe is offering drink specials and deliveries of their confectionaries to residents of La Grande for free — including to the newly reopened schools wishing to celebrate the holiday.

"Most of the schools are



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Chef Merlyn Baker prepares takeout dinners Thursday, Feb. 11, 2021, at The Landing Hotel and Dining in La Grande. The establishment is offering a stay-date-style take-home dinner for Valentine's Day.

not allowing at-home stuff, and kids aren't bringing cards to each other. They don't want them spreading germs," Roberts said. "So some of them are getting us to deliver on their behalf to the schools."

"Normally we're a bit busier around Valentine's Day ... doing (events) like speed dating," said Ashton Gilbert, an employee who has been with Le Bebe Cakes for four years. "Usually we'd be offering

dinners, catered for two people and they can sit down and they can have a nice little dinner and we do everything for them. We're just doing the boxes this year — we're doing good with those, so we can't really complain, but I feel like if we were able to do seating it would be a bit easier."

The Landing Hotel and Dining is hosting a stay-date-style take-home dinner prepared by chef Merlyn

Baker, which includes stuffed oven-roasted halibut or filet mignon, along with options to include salad and dessert, with a rose vase from La Grande florist Fitzgerald Flowers. Dinners also are available a la carte style, sans rose.

"Because it's a stay-at-home event," Baker said, "people are exploring a lot of options."

Side A Brewing in downtown La Grande is offering a chocolate cake

with house-made raspberry sauce as well as a can of its raspberry mousse pastry and two 10-ounce glasses. Hines Meat Co. in La Grande has come up with meat bouquets and steak and lobster dinners for patrons wishing to support local businesses during the pandemic.

Available to everyone, the Tayde McAndie Band is playing a free livestream concert Sunday, Feb. 14, at 6:30 p.m. The Landing Hotel and Dining, Lush Boutique Salon and other local businesses are sponsoring the concert, which will be streamed live via EO Alive, the Tayde McAndie Band YouTube Channel and the Brent Clapp YouTube Channel.

Restaurants and businesses looking to resume in-person dining will have to wait until Union County downgrades from "extreme risk" to "high risk." Portland's metropolitan area resumed regular dining operations Friday, Feb. 12. Union County, along with 14 other counties, remains in the extreme risk category until its COVID-19 infection rates stay below 200 cases per 100,000 residents.

"As soon as we get the green light," Gilbert said, "we'll be ready for it."



The Observer, File

The Blue Springs Crossing Apartments in Island City in October 2017 received the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials' Award of Excellence. The developers are building a similar complex in east La Grande, which would be completed in 2022. The city of La Grande is hosting a virtual public meeting Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021, to discuss ways to address a lack of housing in the community.

Public input sought on La Grande's housing strategy

The Observer

LA GRANDE — The La Grande Planning Division is hosting a virtual public meeting Wednesday, Feb. 17, at 6 p.m. to gather input on how the city should best respond to the community's housing needs.

The city in 2019 completed a housing study, the "Housing Needs Analysis," that forecasted La Grande's housing needs over the next 20 years for low-, middle- and upper-income housing for rental and home ownership.

According to a press release from Michael J. Boquist, La Grande's

community development director, the purpose of this public meeting is to invite residents to engage in discussions and share ideas on the possible actions the city could take to create opportunities for more housing development in the community.

This is a state-funded effort and the city has hired a consultant to facilitate the public meeting. The consultants and city staff will begin the meeting with a presentation and initial recommendations, which the city will ask the public to comment on.

Some of the ideas to

create housing opportunities may include changing the zoning of some areas, creating financial incentives to encourage new construction, and establishing public-private partnerships with housing developers, the release stated.

The meeting will be online via Zoom. More information and a link to the Zoom meeting is available on the La Grande Planning Division website, planning.cityoflagrande.org.

The meeting also will be available for viewing on Facebook Live at www.facebook.com/LaGrandeCityManager.

Union School District seeks seismic grants for upgrades

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

UNION — The possibility is as daunting as it is undeniable.

The Oregon Office of Emergency Management reports on its website there is a 37% chance a major earthquake of at least a 7.1 magnitude will strike the state in the next 50 years, the impact of which would be felt throughout the Pacific Northwest.

In the event of such an earthquake, the Union School District wants to be prepared.

It has applied for a total of \$4.4 million in grants from the state for seismic upgrades. One grant would be for \$2.5 million for work at Union High School's gym, and another would be for \$1.9 million for upgrades at Union Elementary School's S.E. Miller building, which children in kindergarten through third grade attend.

Should the school district receive the grant for the gym, upgrade efforts would start in the fall of 2021 and likely be completed by early winter of 2022, said Cassie Hibbert, project manager for the Wenaha Group, a construction management and consulting firm that helped the Union School District apply for the seismic grants. Hibbert said a timetable for possible seismic grant-funded work at the S.E. Miller building will be developed later.

The Wenaha Group is



The Observer, File

The Union High School gym will receive major seismic upgrades if the Union School District is successful with a \$2.5 million grant application to the state. The district also seeks a \$1.9 million grant for seismic upgrades to its S.E. Miller building. The improvements could allow the public to seek shelter at both buildings in the event of a major earthquake.

the construction management provider for the school district's bond-funded renovation project, which includes major improvements to the Union High School gym. Hibbert said if the district receives the seismic grant for the gym, it would have no impact on the schedule for the bond-funded work, which is being funded by \$4 million from a 2019 bond and a \$4 million state matching grant.

Union School District Superintendent Carter Wells said the seismic work at the UHS gym and the S.E. Miller building would include major reinforcement of walls so they would be better able to withstand the force of an earthquake.

This would mean the two buildings would be available to provide shelter and emergency services to the community.

The grants, which the Union School District applied for in December, are available from the Seismic Rehabilitation Grant Program through Business Oregon, the state's business department. The program provides seismic grants to public schools, community colleges, education service districts and emergency service facilities.

The La Grande, Imbler and North Powder school districts are among those that have received and used seismic grants from the state in the past five years.

Grande Ronde hospital offers medication disposal with kiosk

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Grande Ronde Hospital announced it has made disposal of expired or unwanted medicine more convenient.

As of Feb. 1, anyone may dispose of their prescription or over-the-counter medications by depositing them in the bright blue, secured MED-Project medication drop-off kiosk near the first-floor elevator in the lobby of Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, according to a press release from the hospital. All medications collected are disposed of securely and responsibly.

Using the kiosk is as simple as using a post office drop box — use the handle to open the door of the kiosk, drop your medication inside the box and close the lever.

The MED-Project kiosk allows for proper disposal of unwanted or expired medications in a way that is secure, confidential and con-



venient. Proper disposal removes unnecessary medications from the home, decreasing the risk of misuse or abuse and prevents dangerous disposal practices. It also provides an alternative so that people don't flush medications down the toilet, which causes contaminants to infiltrate groundwater.

Wendy Roberts, community benefit officer, and Brian Harris, pharmacy manager, played integral roles in establishing the kiosk at Grande Ronde Hospital.

"We've been working toward this day for the past year and a half," Harris said in the press release. "We approached several other agencies early on, all of which required annual fees to provide this service to the community. About six months ago, MED-Project approached us with a convenient, zero-cost solution. It was a no-brainer."

"This kiosk fills a need in the

community as identified under the Behavior Health Well-Being goal in our FY2020-FY2022 Community Benefit Plan," Roberts said. "We are so pleased to offer a MED-Project kiosk, and hope to see a positive impact from the added availability of proper medication disposal in a way that is safe, secure, confidential, convenient and free-of-cost."

Anyone interested in disposing of unwanted or expired prescription or over-the-counter medications should follow these disposal instructions as provided by MED-Project:

- Check the medicine's packaging. If there are specific disposal instructions on the label, package or insert, please follow those instructions.
- Remove all personally identifiable information on medication labels or packaging.
- Keep medicines in their original container or a sealed bag when dropping them off in the kiosk.

With the exception of those in the following list, medications in any dosage form still in their original container or sealed bag may be disposed of in the MED-Project kiosk. Items that are not accepted are herbal remedies, vitamins, supplements, cosmetics and other personal care products, batteries, mercury-containing thermometers, medical devices, sharps and illicit drugs.

When bringing medications to the hospital for disposal, be aware that any person entering the building must complete the COVID-19 screening process per hospital policy.

An additional MED-Project kiosk also was installed Feb. 1 at Red Cross Drug Store in downtown La Grande. For more information about the MED-Project, visit med-project.org.