

## TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Tuesday, Feb. 16, the 47th day of 2021. There are 318 days left in the year.

### TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT IN HISTORY:

On Feb. 16, 1959, Fidel Castro became premier of Cuba a month and a-half after the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista.

### ON THIS DATE:

In 1945, American troops landed on the island of Corregidor in the Philippines during World War II.

In 1948, N-B-CTV began airing its first nightly newscast, "The Camel Newsreel Theatre," which consisted of Fox Movietone newsreels.

In 1961, the United States launched the Explorer 9 satellite.

In 1968, the nation's first 911 emergency telephone system was inaugurated in Haleyville, Alabama, as the speaker of the Alabama House, Rankin Fite, placed a call from the mayor's office in city hall to a red telephone at the police station (also in city hall) that was answered by U.S. Rep. Tom Beville.

In 1996, 11 people were killed in a fiery collision between an Amtrak passenger train and a Maryland commuter train in Silver Spring, Maryland.

In 1998, a China Airlines Airbus A300 trying to land in fog near Taipei, Taiwan, crashed, killing all 196 people on board, plus seven on the ground.

In 2001, the United States and Britain staged air strikes against radar stations and air defense command centers in Iraq.

In 2006, Russia's Evgeni Plushenko beat world champion Stéphane Lambiel of Switzerland by 27.12 points to win the gold medal in men's figure skating at the Winter Games in Turin, Italy.

In 2019, the Vatican announced that former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, who served as archbishop of Washington, D.C., had been found guilty by the Vatican of sex abuse and had been defrocked; McCarrick was the highest-ranking churchman and the first cardinal to face that punishment as the church dealt with clerical sex abuse.

Ten years ago: Bookstore chain Borders filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection and said it would close nearly a third of its stores. (Borders closed all of its remaining stores in Sept. 2011.) Huge crowds called for a political overhaul in Bahrain, and leaders appeared to shift tactics after attempts to crush the uprising stoked protesters' rage.

# More snow on the way as system moves in

By PHIL WRIGHT  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The National Weather Service in Pendleton is forecasting more snow through Tuesday, Feb. 16, as another winter storm moves through the region.

"So we're going on the third storm," said meteorologist Jim Smith, speaking Sunday from the agency's office in Pendleton.

The NWS issued a winter storm warning that is in effect until Tuesday at 4 p.m. Temperatures Monday look to crest in the upper 30s, Smith said, and Tuesday's highs are likely to be in the mid 30s.

While temperatures rise for the next couple of days, there also will be more snow.

"We're expecting snow to continue on through tonight, tomorrow and right on through Tuesday," he said.

Locals in the Grande Ronde Valley and Wallowa County can expect 5-10 inches of snowfall through



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Jesse Aldrich rests against his car, which is stuck in the snow, on Monday, Feb. 15, 2021, on Third Street and Main Avenue, La Grande. The National Weather Service has a winter storm warning in effect for the area through Tuesday at 4 p.m.

then, according to the storm warning.

However, Smith explained, that does not necessarily translate to accumulation totals on the ground. Melting and com-

pression can lead to lower measurements on surfaces, Smith said, and volunteer weather observers are trying to measure the snow when it's at a maximum depth.

"That's what we're trying

to catch," he said.

Sunday morning, snow was about 12 inches deep in Cove, 9 inches deep in Union and up to a foot in La Grande. Smith said the record snowfall for La

Grande for the month of February was 19.7 inches in 1966.

Rob Brooks, another meteorologist for the Weather Service in Pendleton, said on Saturday if residents should choose to travel, they should prepare their vehicles, bring warm clothing and remain cautious while driving.

The weather service has warnings and advisories along Highway 97 and throughout the foothills of the Blue and Cascade mountains, Brooks said.

Local roads proved treacherous at times during the weekend. The La Grande Police Department and Union County Sheriff's Office according to daily police reports responded to approximately 20 calls about disabled vehicles, cars causing a traffic hazard or stuck in snow and minor collisions due to the winter driving conditions.

— East Oregonian reporter Bryce Dole contributed to this report.

# Free snow removal service a weekend hit

By DICK MASON  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A six-man volunteer snow removal team made its mark in Union County during the weekend.

The team, using shovels and other manual equipment, cleared snow from the driveways of between 40 and 50 homes in the La Grande and Island City area plus two in Union.

Almost everyone they helped were seniors or people who are physically compromised, said Jaxson LaFeber of Austin, Texas.

LaFeber and the other members of the snow team are age 19-21 and with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in La Grande for a portion of their two-year mission work. As missionaries, they are volunteer representatives of the church who engage in church service, humanitarian aid and community service.

The snow busting team's members began working Friday, Feb. 12, after



Dick Mason/The Observer

Jaxson LaFeber, left, and Bridger Bodily shovel snow in La Grande on Feb. 15, 2021. They and four other missionaries with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints volunteered their snow-removal services and were busy as the snow fell.

offering free snow removal service via Facebook.

"We had a good response right away," LaFeber said.

The gratitude of the

locals they helped struck him.

"Some people wanted to pay us," he said.

But the group would not hear of it.

"We were happy to do something to help people for free," LaFeber said.

The Austin resident was joined in his snow removal efforts by Eli

Sampson of Arlington, Virginia; Bridger Bodily of Kingman, Arizona; Josiah Moulton of Gilbert, Arizona; Samuel Palmer of Deer Park, Washington; and Brian Wilkinson of Dallas, Texas.

The team worked through the early evening of Sunday, Feb. 14. The biggest challenge the young men encountered was clearing snow from a home with a four-car garage.

"It had a huge driveway," Bodily said.

Wilkinson said he wanted the people he was helping to see there are individuals eager to reach out to others.

Moulton said the sense of urgency he felt energized him, knowing how critical it was to keep the snow from hemming people in.

"There was an immediate need," he said.

The team will offer its snow removal services for at least another week.

To request their help, call 541-216-8393.

# One year later: Memories of digging out after flooding disaster

By KATHY ANEY  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Todd Taylor knows disaster.

Taylor, a North Carolinian who oversees U.S. teams from an international disaster relief organization called Samaritan's Purse, has experienced the aftermath of hurricanes, tornados, fire and floods. In 2020, his teams responded to deadly tornados in Tennessee, flooding in Michigan and Hurricane Laura in Louisiana. They spent three months in Southern Oregon after fire ripped through the cities of Talent and Phoenix, and burned more than 2,000 homes.

Even with one disaster after another, Taylor clearly remembers Pendleton.

Swollen rivers and creeks had jumped the banks on Feb. 7, 2020, and by the time Taylor's team reached the area a week later, it encountered devastation and numerous flooded-out residents who were still reeling.

"When we arrived in Pendleton, we saw hundreds of homes with severe flash flood damage from the very rapid snowmelt and heavy rains," Taylor said.

The team parked its semitrailer in the First Assembly of God parking lot to use as a headquarters and got to work. In the next three weeks, 209 volunteers (many of them local) worked a total of 4,424 hours to clear debris and prep homes for reconstruction.

This marked the first West Coast flood response for the relief organization, which is funded by private donations.

Some images remain lodged in Taylor's brain.

"One home just outside the town of Pendleton was a farmstead that was completely inundated with mud," he said. "It was such a trauma for that family, which had young kids. To see the damage to the farmland surrounding that homestead, just knowing they had a long road to recovery ahead of them."

Taylor also remembered the devastation experienced by residents living in Riverside Mobile Home Estates in Pendleton.

"I remember that trailer park and the utter devastation," he said. "It was so hard for those homeowners."

Taylor said his teams don't help residents rebuild, but rather to clear out muck and debris and prep their homes for reconstruction. Some of the residences, however, were beyond repair.

"In Pendleton, we saw homes that were washed completely off the foundation or sitting on the ground," he said. "Home owners have to deal with flood plain maps and city ordinances. There may be flood plain mitigation that has to be done. They can't simply get a building permit and replace their

home. The structure may have to be elevated. It may be damaged beyond a certain threshold that will allow simple repairs to be made. It's a detailed process to deal with a flooded home. We don't want them to jump into things and make hasty decisions that could hurt them in the long run."

Volunteers spent their days clearing away debris, tearing off sheetrock, ripping up flooring and pulling out nails. They treated the homes with Shockwave, a chemical that suppresses mold growth for 30 days and gives homes a chance to dry out.

Ray Thompson, a chaplain with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association's

Rapid Response Team, which often teams with Samaritan's Purse, also spent time in the Pendleton area with the crews. Thompson, a Southern Californian who had a career as a fire captain in the Los Angeles Fire Department, has comforted victims of floods, fires, earthquakes, explosions, mass shootings, tornados, hurricanes and snowstorms. The common thread they share is a paralyzing sense of loss. He said he finds the simple act of listening gets people into recovery mode.

"When we listen, people want to tell their story," Thompson said. "I really believe that starts them on the path of moving forward."

# DA: Murder, arson charges being dismissed in Grant County case

Judge rules confession was improperly obtained

By SEAN HART  
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Murder charges related to the missing couple whose house burned in Grant County are being dismissed because the confession was not properly obtained.

Charges of first-degree murder and arson against Isaac Connery, 23, and his mother, Gabrielle Connery, 47, will be dismissed without prejudice — meaning the state could file the charges again if further evidence is discovered —

according to a press release Friday, Feb. 12, from Grant County District Attorney Jim Carpenter.

The charges are in connection with the deaths of Terry and Sharon Smith, whose house on Nans Rock Road near Mount Vernon burned to the ground in the early morning hours of July 17-18, 2018.

"This is heartbreaking on many levels," Carpenter said. "Through Isaac Connery's confession, we know who did it and how it was done. The mystery is gone but the accountability is, at least for now, out of reach."

Judge Daina Vitolins ruled Feb. 10 the confession Grant County Undersheriff Zach Mobley obtained

from Isaac Connery could not be used at trial because state prosecutors could not prove the confession was knowing, intelligent and voluntary because of Miranda violations.

Vitolins said Mobley never asked whether Connery understood his Miranda rights — the right to remain silent and have an attorney present during questioning. She also said, after Connery invoked his right to defense counsel, Mobley continued talking to him in violation of the law.

"Once an individual invokes their right to counsel, law enforcement must scrupulously honor that request and stop questioning," she said.

Vitolins said Mobley's testimony at the Feb. 10 hearing was "not helpful" because he did not review the interview tapes before the hearing and often said on the witness stand he was unsure and would have to review the tapes. She also said a face mask blocked the camera in one of the recordings, and a bag of chips blocked the view in another.

Without the confession, Carpenter said in the release the state had only "limited circumstantial evidence that does not prove beyond a reasonable doubt" the Connerys murdered the Smiths.

"Rather than push forward and risk jeopardy

attaching, the State will dismiss the murder and arson cases without prejudice," Carpenter said. "Investigation of the case will continue and possibly other evidence will come to light that will allow the State to proceed."

Isaac Connery admitted in an interview that he took a handgun from Terry Smith and shot him during an altercation at the Smith residence and then shot Sharon Smith, according to Carpenter's release.

"He used gasoline to start the Smith residence on fire, then took the (Smiths') pickup and left," Carpenter said. "He drove to the Boise area where he parked the pickup, removed the plates

and rejoined his family on their travels."

Carpenter said Isaac Connery later disassembled the gun and put it in the trash.

The fire destroyed the home, but former Sheriff Glenn Palmer later discovered the remains of two people at the site, Carpenter said.

On the stand, Mobley said he is required to stop questioning a suspect if they request a lawyer but is not required to stop talking to them. Instead of stopping the interview, Mobley said he told Connery how he planned to proceed, by arresting two of his siblings and a family friend in connection to the murders.