

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Thursday, Feb. 18, the 49th day of 2021. There are 316 days left in the year.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT IN HISTORY:

On Feb. 18, 1970, the "Chicago Seven" defendants were found not guilty of conspiring to incite riots at the 1968 Democratic national convention; five were convicted of violating the Anti-Riot Act of 1968 (those convictions were later reversed).

ON THIS DATE:

In 1564, artist Michelangelo died in Rome.

In 1930, photographic evidence of Pluto (now designated a "dwarf planet") was discovered by Clyde W. Tombaugh at Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona.

In 1943, Madame Chiang Kai-shek, wife of the Chinese leader, addressed members of the Senate and then the House, becoming the first Chinese national to address both houses of the U.S. Congress.

In 1960, the eighth Winter Olympic Games were formally opened in Squaw Valley, California, by Vice President Richard M. Nixon.

In 1972, the California Supreme Court struck down the state's death penalty.

In 1983, 13 people were shot to death at a gambling club in Seattle's Chinatown in what became known as the Wah Mee Massacre.

Two men were convicted of the killings and are serving life sentences; a third was found guilty of robbery and assault.

In 1988, Anthony M. Kennedy was sworn in as an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 2001, auto racing star Dale Earnhardt Sr. died in a crash at the Daytona 500; he was 49.

In 2003, an arson attack involving two South Korean subway trains in the city of Daegu claimed 198 lives.

Five years ago: In what was seen as a criticism of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, Pope Francis said that a person who advocated building walls was "not Christian"; Trump quickly retorted it was "disgraceful" to question a person's faith.

Food bank looks to move to PGG building

By **DICK MASON**

The Observer

ISLAND CITY — A major bank is set to open in Island City later this year.

The Northeast Oregon Regional Food Bank plans to move this summer into the former Pendleton Grain Growers building in Island City. The change will give the food bank eight times the storage space it now has at the Union County Senior Center. The food bank now has 1,092 square feet of space but will have 8,800 square feet at the old PGG building.

"This is very, very exciting," said Audrey Smith, manager of the regional food bank.

The additional space will allow the food bank to maintain a stronger reserve for the pantries it serves in Union, Wallowa, Baker and Grant counties, and will put the food bank in a position to better address emergen-



Dick Mason/The Observer

Snow covers the ground Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021, outside the former Pendleton Grain Growers building, 10209 N. McAlister Road, Island City. The Northeast Oregon Regional Food Bank plans to renovate the building and move into it this year.

cies such as those caused by natural disasters.

Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, which operates the North-

east Oregon Regional Food Bank, bought the PGG building at 10209 N. McAlister Road. The structure and site need renovation

work before it can reopen as a food bank. The project will begin after the fundraising drive for it is complete.

The remodeling work

will cost \$300,000-\$400,000, a portion of which a grant might pay.

The goal is to complete the renovation by July, Smith said. The food bank must be out of its storage building at the Union County Senior Center by July 31 due to an order by the Federal Transit Administration.

The FTA issued its order because the food bank's present site was originally built to serve as a site for the operation of a public transportation operation, Smith said. The Northeast Oregon Public Transit, which Community Connection also operates, could later use the site.

The food bank's move to Island City will have no impact on the services it offers to the public at the Union County Senior Center. All services there now will continue at its present site.

IC council endorses new law enforcement contract

By **DICK MASON**

The Observer

ISLAND CITY — The Island City City Council gave a thumbs-up Monday, Feb. 15, to a new contract with the Union County Sheriff's Office.

The contract is similar to the one now in place. Before the pact can take effect July 1, the Union County Board of Commissioners must give its approval.

The contract calls for Island City to continue receiving 80 hours a month of law enforcement service from the Union County Sheriff's Office. The contract, like the present one, would automatically increase 1.5% each year on July 1 to allow for cost-of-living pay increases and



Bowen



Comfort

will remain in place indefinitely unless one party pulls out or a change is negotiated.

The big difference between the new contract and the current one is the city or the sheriff's office must give a 120-day

notice for any changes to the deal. The current contract requires a one-year notice before parties can negotiate changes or either side can pull out of the contract.

Island City Mayor David Comfort said the 120-day notice would give both parties greater flexibility.

The proposal also calls for the same individual from the Union County Sheriff's Office to provide reports about the past month's law enforcement activities, at the city council regular monthly council meetings, in six-month rotations.

"This would help continuity," Comfort said.

This is the first contract Island City and the sheriff's office are negotiating with Cody Bowen as sheriff. Voters elected him in November 2020, and he participated in the negotiations. Comfort said he was impressed with Bowen's input during bargaining sessions.

"He brought a lot of energy to the negotiations," Comfort said.

Baker City woman charged with theft from senior

By **CHRIS COLLINS**

Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Police arrested a Baker City woman on charges that she stole more than \$60,000 from a 98-year-old woman who is a memory care patient at Settler's Park.

Baker City police Lt. Ty Duby said officers on Thursday, Feb. 11, arrested Dalene Davis, 61, on a secret indictment charging her with six counts each of first-degree aggravated theft and first-degree criminal mistreatment involving Lydia Chancy. Police took Davis

to the Baker County Jail, which processed and released her because of COVID-19 restrictions, Duby stated in a press release.

He said the investigation of the crimes began in June 2019. The state has accused Davis of taking money from Chancy after befriending her and gaining access to her financial accounts.

The Oregon Department of Justice Elder Abuse Division and the Baker Branch of Adult Protective Services assisted with the investigation.

Enterprise offers police chief job to deputy

By **BILL BRADSHAW**

Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — The Enterprise City Council during a special meeting Monday, Feb. 15, offered Wallowa County sheriff's deputy Kevin McQuead the position of Enterprise police chief, according to a press release.



McQuead

He is the husband of the city's administrator, Lacey McQuead, who is not a member of the police committee that led the hiring process. Kevin McQuead will replace Joel Fish, who resigned in January after winning election as Wallowa County sheriff.

According to the press release, the police committee reviewed city policies pertaining to the employment of relatives and any reporting of misconduct.

"As a result of the policy review, the city council does not feel any nepotism or conflict of interest has occurred with this hiring process or will occur as the city of Enter-

prise policies are followed," the release stated.

Anyone hired as police chief will report directly to the council.

The committee interviewed two candidates and decided to make a conditional offer of employment to McQuead. The deputy has served with the Wallowa County Sheriff's Office since February 2008, when he resigned as an Enterprise police officer to take the position, according to Wallowa County Chieftain files.

In other matters at Monday's special meeting, the council:

- Approved an event permit for the Circle 100 Club "Drive-By" fundraiser March 18 for the Wallowa Valley Health Care Foundation.

- Increased the amount for the new sports complex by the baseball fields to \$124,050 to reflect the cost.

- Approved moving money from the city's contingency fund to help cover the cost of the engineer to prepare new improvement standards for the city.

OTEC resumes normal collection activity March 17

The Observer

BAKER CITY — Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative will resume normal collection activity, including disconnections and late fees for unpaid utilities, on Wednesday, March 17.

The Eastern Oregon power provider temporarily suspended disconnections and late fees on March 17, 2020, due to financial hardships placed on members due to COVID-19.

"We feel that it's time to begin normal collection activities in order to be good stewards of our members' financial resources and keep the cooperative operationally and financially resilient," said Eric Wirfs, OTEC's director of member services. "It was a difficult decision for us, but we continue to see the number of unpaid accounts climb. The amount owed from these accounts would be enough to possibly necessitate a rate increase if we do not shift measures to help members bring



The Observer, File

An Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative lineman secures ropes and pulleys during a rescue training session in July 2016. The utility announced plans to resume normal collection action on delinquent accounts March 17, 2021.

their accounts up to date."

Wirfs added OTEC owes responsibility to the entire membership because it is member owned.

"That is why we are resuming normal collection activities," he stated, "to avoid any potential negative

monetary impact on all our members."

Over the last year, OTEC's member service representatives have continued to contact members to help them stay current with their bills by offering guidance for financial assis-

tance, local resources, and flexible payment options. In the lead-up to the resumption of normal collection activity, OTEC has contacted or has attempted to contact every member with a delinquent account.

If you have not been in contact with a member service representative, contact OTEC as soon as possible. There is time to make arrangements, set up a payment plan or seek financial assistance to help with your account. OTEC also is helping members find other assistance resources, such as food, housing or clothing.

"We know many our members are still impacted by the pandemic," Wirfs said. "We urge those who are struggling to pay their bills to call us and we will work with you on many different payment plan options to avoid disconnecting power."

OTEC Member Services is available at 541-523-3616 or visit www.otec.coop for more information.

USDA honors Enterprise native for innovation in finding aid for farmers

By **BILL BRADSHAW**

Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — A long-time Enterprise-area resident who moved on to do good has done just that, earning his second Secretary's Award for his work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture by helping farmers get federal assistance because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Marc McFetridge, son of Larry and Davise McFetridge who farm east of Enterprise, has been working for the USDA for 15 years. He now works for the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service in Washington, D.C.

McFetridge said this year's award, presented Jan.



McFetridge

12, was for his work helping secure about \$23.6 billion in payments to farmers nationwide.

He won the award in 2018 for streamlining the USDA's ability to purchase surplus foods for food banks. He said that effort also earned him the Presidential Honors Award — a distinction about eight people received out of roughly 330 Secretary's Award winners from all departments of the federal government.

McFetridge said this year's award, presented Jan. 12, was for his work helping secure about \$23.6 billion in

payments to farmers nationwide through two payment periods. The awards are not just handed out in a random fashion, he said.

"About six to seven awards (based on the strategic goals for each administrator) are given out at the administrator's level; there are 18 different administrators within the USDA, meaning roughly 126 administrator awards are given out each year," he said. "From there, those winners are moved up to the undersecretary level, based on the same criteria of the undersecretary's strategic goals, about six to seven awards given out at the undersecretary level and there are seven under-

secretaries in the USDA, meaning out of the 126 administrator awards, 49 are awarded the Undersecretary's Award. From there, the secretary picks seven projects based on the winners from the undersecretary level to win the Secretary Award."

McFetridge's award was presented in the name of former Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue.

McFetridge was born and raised on his parents' fourth-generation cattle and hay ranch near Enterprise. His sister and her husband, Larissa and Ed Barnhart, are partners in the ranch today.

After graduating from Enterprise High School in 1996, McFetridge took

a somewhat circuitous route to working for the government.

"My path to the USDA is a bit crazy," he said Feb. 2 in a telephone interview from Washington.

He first got a bachelor's degree from Oregon State University in agriculture business management in 2001, and then worked at the Food Innovation Center in Portland for a year. The center is an OSU experiment station. He obtained his master's degree in agricultural and resource economics in 2004 and the next year accepted a job for AC Nielsen in Paramus, New Jersey, working on pricing analysis for Nabisco products. He stayed

there for a year and then accepted a job with the USDA as a marketing specialist for the Marketing Orders and Agreement Division. In July 2006, he moved to the Washington, D.C., area. He stayed with the division for three years before accepting a job as an economist for the Promotion and Economics Division, where he's been for 12 years.

In his position, he handles millions of federal dollars for various programs. "One of my main duties is to assist the USDA procurement division providing pricing analysis for fresh fruits and vegetables that go into the National School Lunch program," he said.