

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Saturday, March 13, the 72nd day of 2021. There are 293 days left in the year.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT IN HISTORY:

On March 13, 1933, banks in the U.S. began to reopen after a "holiday" declared by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

ON THIS DATE:

In 1781, the seventh planet of the solar system, Uranus, was discovered by Sir William Herschel.

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed a measure prohibiting Union military officers from returning fugitive slaves to their owners.

In 1925, the Tennessee General Assembly approved a bill prohibiting the teaching of the theory of evolution.

In 1947, the Lerner and Loewe musical "Brigadoon," about a Scottish village that magically reappears once every hundred years, opened on Broadway.

In 1969, the Apollo 9 astronauts splashed down, ending a mission that included the successful testing of the Lunar Module.

In 2013, Jorge Bergoglio of Argentina was elected pope, choosing the name Francis.

Elgin High student recovering after crash

By DICK MASON

The Observer

ELGIN — The comeback of Rylee Sandland, an Elgin High School freshman seriously injured in a snowmobile crash in early February, is picking up speed.

Sandland, who was hospitalized at St. Alphonsus Medical Center in Boise, Idaho, for a month after the mishap, recently returned to her home in Elgin.

"She is just so happy to be back home," said Mandi Parsons, a teacher at Stella Mayfield School who is leading fundraising efforts for Sandland and her family.

Parsons said one of the best parts of being back for Sandland is having the chance to see her friends again. Parsons explained that at St. Alphonsus only her family could visit because of COVID-19 restrictions.

Sandland suffered a broken pelvis, a broken rib and a punctured lung in the crash, which occurred east of Union in the Catherine Creek area. An emer-



Mandi Parsons via Facebook

Elgin High School freshman Rylee Sandland sits with a calf in this undated Facebook photo. Sandland suffered serious injuries in early February 2021 in a snowmobile crash and now is on the path to recovery.

gency helicopter flew the teen from the crash site to St. Alphonsus. Parsons

said the helicopter made a big difference in getting Sandland rescued quickly.

If not for the air ambulance, Parsons said, the situation would have been a lot tougher.

She also said Sandland's recovery is ahead of schedule and doctors anticipate she will fully recover.

Sandland returned home two weeks ago and still faces significant challenges. The broken pelvis, for example, prevents her from walking. But Parsons said Sandland is not letting her health challenges get her down.

"Her spirits are very high," the educator said. "She always positive."

Sandland, who loves farm animals and horseback riding, has been an active member of Elgin High School's FFA chapter and made friends with chapter members soon after her family moved to Elgin from La Grande less than a year ago.

"The students welcomed her as if she had always been here," said Daniel Bolen, Elgin High School's agricultural sciences teacher and FFA chapter adviser.

Sandland's personable nature made it easier for her to make quick connections.

"She is super caring and sweet and thoughtful of others," Bolen said.

Parsons said Sandland, 15, has a special charisma that reflects her Christian faith.

"She has a wonderful soul. Her smile lights up a room," Parsons said.

About \$3,000 has been raised to help Rylee Sandland and her family with medical and other associated expenses caused by the snowmobile crash. A big part of it has come from the sale of sweatshirts Parsons designed. All have the outline of a heart and an illustration of a girl riding a horse on the left side and a snowmobile on the right. Above the heart are the words, "Rylee Rides Again."

The effort so far has sold about 50 of the sweatshirts, which are still available via Parsons' Facebook page. People also can donate to an account for Sandland at any branch of Community Bank.

LG School Board gives Mendoza high marks

By DICK MASON

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Superintendent George Mendoza again has received a strong endorsement from the La Grande School Board.

The board gave Mendoza an overall rating of 3.6 on a scale of 4 in Mendoza's annual

performance review. The evaluation was based on nine performance standards and three goals that are a part of the La Grande School District's strategic plan. The board found that Mendoza was "effective or accomplished" in regard to all nine performance standards.

"You continue to meet our expectations of a superintendent," said School Board Chair Robin Maille in a letter at a March 10 meeting of the La Grande School Board.

At the Wednesday meeting Maille said the board was impressed with how Mendoza has guided the school district in navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, which has limited how much in-person

learning all Oregon schools have been able to provide over portions of the past 12 months. The board said Mendoza's efforts helped get schools in this region reopened for in-person instruction.

"Your leadership in the district has been strong and focused and influenced decisions at both the regional and state level for better metrics and local control to reopen schools," Maille said in the letter.

Mendoza received praise for working diligently with his administrative staff to communicate with families and the public about the Ready Schools, Safe Learners changes and how they impact district operations and learning. Ready Schools, Safe Learners is a set of requirements the Oregon Department of Education created in partnership with the Oregon Health Authority for the operation of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Maille said the board believes Mendoza has done a good job of putting "the right leaders in the right roles" over the past year to help the school district

operate well during the pandemic.

The board also credited Mendoza for keeping the school district on strong financial footing in an uncertain economic environment and for how he has reached out to employees.

"District staff and administrators feel valued, appreciated and supported by you," Maille said.

Maille said the board unanimously decided to offer Mendoza a new three-year contract, which will be negotiated later.

Mendoza, who is completing his fourth year as La Grande's superintendent, described his job as tough but rewarding. He said everything the school district has accomplished is a credit to its school board and staff.

"I am thankful that I get to work with a lot of amazing people," Mendoza said.

Mendoza came to La Grande from the Morrow County School District, where he was an assistant superintendent.

He is a 1997 graduate of Eastern Oregon University and a member of its board of trustees.

\$1.3 million grant will establish homeless facility in Pendleton

By ANTONIO SIERRA

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Superficially, the future of The Whiskey Inn doesn't look promising.

The former motel's sign featuring a cowboy slumped against a post is turned inside out. Whatever visual evidence the empty parking lot offers is confirmed by a sign at the entrance that states the motel is "permanently closed."

But by the end of March, the 35-room motel, situated at 205 S.E. Dorion Ave., will be reborn as a facility that will serve the unhoused, a first of its kind in Eastern Oregon.

On Wednesday, March 10, the Oregon Community Foundation announced it was granting the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon a \$1.3 million grant to purchase the former motel and turn it into a facility that will offer temporary housing to local homeless residents.

CAPECO CEO Paula Hall said she was both excited and a little overwhelmed to receive the grant, which the foundation established as a part of its Operation Turnkey program.

"It's going to be quite the undertaking," she said.

In the short term, Hall said CAPECO plans to run the building mainly as a shelter for the unhoused, a safe place where lodgers could socially distance themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Once Umatilla County is able to get the pandemic



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

The former Whiskey Inn at 205 S.E. Dorion Ave., Pendleton, is getting another round of use. The Community Action Program of East Central Oregon has purchased the property with the help of a \$1.3 million grant from the Oregon Community Foundation to repurpose the site into transitional housing for the homeless.

under control, Hall said the building will retain some rooms as a night-to-night shelter while also dedicating other rooms to transitional housing, a place where the unhoused can live for up to two years while they search for permanent housing.

"This is not a forever home," she said.

Hall said CAPECO had initially identified another property for its project, but when another nonprofit notified CAPECO about The Whiskey Inn, officials saw plenty to like. Although it was slightly more expensive than their original target, the building was in better condition and its central location put it within easy walking distance of the Umatilla County Courthouse, Lifeways and other services.

Hall said CAPECO also likes that the motel is prominently featured in a high-traffic area, which officials expect will dis-

courage congregation and illicit activity.

Hall knows the motel's location in the heart of Pendleton will spark scrutiny from neighbors and other residents who fear the facility's presence will cause blight and illegal activity.

But Hall said CAPECO intends to continue to run the building like a motel, just with a shifting focus away from tourists and travelers and toward the unhoused. She added that the nonprofit will work diligently to make sure the building remains unblighted and will form a neighborhood committee to address concerns from nearby residents and businesses.

Hall said the new facility will be a good "first bite" at tackling the region's homelessness issue, but leaders in the community will need to continue to address one of the issue's main roots: a lack of affordable housing.

Three Northeastern Oregon hospitals make top 100 list

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Three Northeast Oregon hospitals received recognition as top critical access hospitals.

The Chartis Group, which provides comprehensive advisory services and analytics to the health care industry, recently released its annual list of Top 100 Critical Access Hospitals. Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, Saint Alphonsus Medical Center, Baker City, and Wallowa Memorial Hospital, Enterprise, made the list.

Oregon has 25 critical access hospitals, according to a press release from Grande Ronde Hospital, and the three Northeast Oregon hospitals are the only ones in the state on the list for 2021. All three hospitals also are regulars on the list.

Grande Ronde reported this is its fifth time making the top 100 list since its first time in 2011. Wallowa Memorial Hospital reported it has earned the designa-

tion eight out of the 11 years and five years consecutively. And Saint Alphonsus made the list for a fifth year in a row.

According to rural-healthinfo.org, there are 1,350 critical access hospitals nationwide in the nation. The Chartis Group listing, then, places the trio of regional hospitals in the top 7.4% of their peers.

Jeremy Davis, Grande Ronde's CEO and president, said in a press release it was an honor again to make the list.

"Our providers and staff have been tremendous advocates and it takes a lot of consistent hard work day in and day out to earn this distinction once again," Davis said. "I am honored to work with a dedicated team of 750 people who understand that a strong and independent health care system is crucial to sustaining the quality of life we all enjoy in our small community. An honor like this, when so many of our nation's small and rural hospitals are closing, underscores

the importance of our continued strength and support. This is something our entire community can celebrate."

Wallowa Memorial Hospital CEO Larry Davy in a press release credited the hospital's board, the Wallowa Valley Health Care Foundation and the community.

Priscilla Lynn, Saint Alphonsus president and chief nursing officer, expressed a similar sentiment in a press release.

"This is a direct result of the daily dedication by our colleagues, physicians and clinicians to provide quality, compassionate care in our community," she said.

The Chartis Center for Rural Health compiles the annual program to recognize performance among the nation's rural hospitals based on the results of the Hospital Strength INDEX, which relies only on public data and uses 36 indicators to assess rural hospitals across eight areas of performance, including market share, quality, outcomes and cost.

February colder than normal

The Observer

PENDLETON — With piles of snow still melting all around, it's no surprise to locals the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Weather Service in Pendleton reported temperatures at La Grande averaged colder than usual in February.

The National Weather Service in a press release stated the average February temperature here was slightly colder than normal. The average temperature was 32.9 degrees, which was 1.5 degrees below normal.

High temperatures averaged 40.5 degrees in February, 2.4 degrees below normal for La Grande. The warmest day was Feb. 1, which reached 52 degrees. The average low tempera-

ture was 25.3 degrees, 0.6 degrees below normal. The lowest recorded temperature was 10 degrees on Feb. 14.

Along with the late-winter snowstorms, there were 21 days in February with a low temperature below 32 degrees. There were three days when the high temperature stayed below 32 degrees, according to the release.

It also was a wetter month than usual. Precipitation was 1.31 inches above normal with a total of 2.45 inches. Measurable precipitation — at least .01 inch — was received on 17 days. The heaviest was 1.17 inches reported on Feb. 15.

The higher precipitation during February contributed to this year's tally so far of 3.60 inches,

which is 0.83 inches above normal. Since October, the water year precipitation at La Grande has been 8.18 inches, the release stated, which is 0.43 inches above normal. The 30-year normal precipitation is 1.46 inches.

Locals, however, might disagree with the greatest depth of snow reported by NOAA: 4 inches on Feb. 26.

The outlook for March from NOAA's Climate Prediction Center calls for below normal temperatures and near normal precipitation. The press release noted normal highs for La Grande rise from 47 degrees at the start of March to 55 degrees at the end of March. Normal lows rise from 28 degrees to 33 degrees.