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Public safety

Police in Eastern Oregon partner up for K-9 training

By ALEX WITTWER
The Observer

PENDLETON — Under blue skies amid brisk wind, a cadre of K-9 handlers and trainers met Saturday, March 20, in Pendleton. The purpose — train the working dogs that serve Eastern Oregon’s police and sheriff’s offices.

Police resources for training in rural Oregon are limited, so inter-departmental training is a crucial way to pool assets and provide opportunities that resemble real-life situations the K-9 units could run into while working calls.

“There’s good knowledge sharing that occurs with different departments, and how things they have seen in the past add to the experience,” said Noah Robbins, master trainer and owner of Howling Creek in Hockinson, Washington. “It’s a good opportunity to learn from others.”

The training compound, just north of the Pendleton Police Department, hosts a small warehouse, a derelict bus and a firing range. Here, the dogs can train in several tactical situations, such as tracking, apprehension, evidence finding and with real gunfire.

“We have a lot of room here,” Robbins said. “From the dog’s perspective, the more weird (expletive) you can do with them, the better.”

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Oregon eases school safety guidelines

Schools now can cut social distance between students from 6 feet to 3 feet

By TERESA CARSON
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon relaxes school safety guidelines — again

In yet another about-face, the state announced Monday, March 22, it would drastically reduce the amount of spacing required for students going back to school, to align with new

See, **Guidelines**/Page 5A

The show goes on

Pandemic not stopping Elgin Opera House production

By DICK MASON
The Observer

ELGIN — Putting on a musical during the COVID-19 pandemic is a tricky and painstaking process.

Terry Hale, executive artistic director for the Elgin Opera House, knows this firsthand. Hale is directing a film version of Disney’s popular “High School Musical Jr.” with a 70-member cast, the vast majority of whom are high school students.

“It is one of the most challenging things I have ever done,” Hale said.

It is also something he believes he had to do because of how youths have had to stay home so much during the pandemic.

“We wanted to get them out from behind their screens,” said Hale of the production, which Friends of the Opera House is putting on.

People will be able to purchase tickets to watch “High School Musical Jr.” online. The film will be designed to replicate the experience of watching a theater production at the Elgin Opera House.

One of the trickiest parts of the filming process involves conforming to social distancing rules. Six groups of actors are having their scenes recorded at the Elgin Opera House over about a two-month period. The video recordings will then be spliced together, so in many instances cast members will appear to be performing on stage together even though they were never in the same place at the same time.

“It really is a puzzle,” Hale said.

“High School Musical Jr.” — the movie version came out in 2006 — is an upbeat and witty look at students dealing with issues of love, friends and family at fictitious East High School.

“I wanted to have something fun and light after the rough year we have had because of COVID-19 and the political turmoil,” Hale said

The cast for the production consists of

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Director Terry Hale looks back through the empty audience seats Friday, March 19, 2021, while cast members warm up on stage for a rehearsal of the Elgin Opera House’s upcoming production of “High School Musical Jr.” The opera house is filming the performance in segments, as opposed to performing live, due to the pandemic.



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Hunter Adams performs the role of Troy Bolton, the main character of “High School Musical Jr.,” on Friday, March 19, 2021. The performance at the Elgin Opera House was recorded through two cameras while Terry Hale directed.

New fire station fulfills big needs

\$1 million project provides ample space for large equipment, training

By PHIL WRIGHT
The Observer

NORTH POWDER — The North Powder Rural Fire Protection District welcomed the first day of spring, Saturday, March 20, with an open house of its new fire station. Dozens of people attended the event — which included free hamburgers, sodas and deserts — and liked what they saw.

“This is nice” became a common refrain.

The new two-story building stands on 2 acres at 710 E St., North Powder, about 600 yards from the previous station’s site. Among the most eye-catching elements inside are barnwood wainscoting that adds a rustic touch to the decor and the large sliding door between the big apparatus bay and the conference room. There also is a second-floor overlooking the bay that provides recreation space.



Phil Wright/The Observer

Locals socialize Saturday, March 20, 2021, at the open house of the North Powder Rural Fire Protection District’s new station. The former facility could not house the district’s big equipment. That is no longer a problem.

“We literally did not have room in the old structure.”

— Casey Martin, North Powder assistant fire chief

Fire Chief Colby Thompson and Assistant Chief Casey Martin were stoked about the new digs. The project to build this fire station began in 2017,

they said, out of sheer necessity.

“We literally did not have room in the old structure,” Martin said.

Holding meetings and train-

ings was a challenge, Martin said, because the quarters were so cramped. And as The Observer reported in January 2018, the vehicles inside the old building left little room for firefighters to hustle and get into protective gear.

The former building also was too small to house the department’s big equipment, including its bulldozer and 5,000-gallon tank water truck. That and other equipment remained outside. The crew had to drain the tank each winter, Martin said, to protect hoses and pumps, and having the heavy equipment outside meant they could have been targets for vandalism.

While that never materialized, he said, it was a constant concern.

But the new building provides 11,500 square feet of space, Thompson said, about four times as much as the former, and has wide bay doors to accommodate the big equipment. The dozer and water truck both were on display inside the new station.

“That tank truck right now is full,” Martin pointed out. “So

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
25 LOW
Cold



Wednesday
49/33
Afternoon rain

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