

TRAINING

Continued from Page 1A

Pendleton police officer Cass Clark and K-9 Bali, as well as Union County sheriff's deputy Dane Jensen and K-9 Molly, were in attendance. Other adjacent counties — Morrow and Baker — join the training sessions when time permits.

The departments enlist the aid of two nonprofit organizations that specialize in training working dogs — Howling Creek and Working Dogs Oregon.

The latter was started in 2014 to train service dogs for veterans and psychiatric patients.

"Our original goal was to educate businesses on what they can and can't do (regarding service dogs)," Campbell said. "And then K-9 Mick in Portland was killed, and that got us thinking about the law enforcement side."

Mick, a German-born shepherd, was only a month into his career when he was shot and killed while attempting to apprehend a



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

burglary suspect on April 16, 2017. His handler, officer Jeffrey Dorn of Portland Police, also was shot but suffered non-life threatening injuries.

In Pendleton last week, as the dogs were unleashed from the patrol vehicles — one at a time to keep chaos

to a minimum — they made their way around greeting handlers, trainers and volunteers who had come in order to serve as bite or tracking targets. Bali, the K-9 with Pendleton police, jumped up to greet his former trainer Robbins just moments after his release

from officer Clark's police vehicle.

Robbins had set up an interview station for the handlers and their dogs inside the warehouse — a way to bolster social media presence with quick one-on-one interviews that give insight into the life of K-9



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Pendleton police officer Cass Clark with police dog Bali train to find a suspect Saturday, March 20, 2021, at the training compound in Pendleton. Pendleton police received Bali as part of a scholarship through the nonprofit Working Dogs Oregon.

units. Afterward, it was time to train.

Darin Campbell, owner of Working Dogs Oregon, was the first to don the bite suit before heading out to hide in the compound. The dense padding made him waddle like an 1980s arcade bad guy through the gravel.

The comically large suits serve to protect the volunteers and trainers from serious injury. Other implements, such as fake limbs, provide a more real-life

experience for the dogs, but the suit works well for quickly rotating volunteers through the training.

Molly was the first up, taking direction from Jensen before darting off toward where Campbell hid. The two officers approached with finger-guns drawn. Campbell's acting was convincing, playing a scared fugitive while Molly barked at the same man she had warmly greeted moments prior.

GUIDELINES

Continued from Page 1A

guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Oregon schools are now allowed, on a voluntary basis, to provide 3 feet of physical distancing between students "under certain conditions."

Just a week ago, on Monday, March 15, the state announced the safety rules for reopening would be relaxed, but left the 6-foot-spacing requirement unchanged.

School districts have been struggling with planning for returning students to schools amid rapidly changing mandates and guidelines from the state. Some have struck deals with staff unions based on earlier guidelines and would have to reopen union negotiations if the district wants to reduce the spacing requirement.

The 6 feet of distance and 35 square feet per person that had been required meant that only about half of a student body could fit in a school at once when they reopened.

Schools announced arrangements for students to be in buildings in shifts in a model called hybrid education. Students would continue remote learning when they were not in school buildings. But the Oregon Department of Education said the new distancing guidelines announced Monday, March 22, are voluntary.

"This new physical distancing allowance is a local decision. Schools may maintain 6 feet and, under certain conditions, must maintain 6 feet — such as when students are passing in hallways between periods, or when students are eating," the announcement reads.

Other pandemic safety precautions such as wearing masks were not changed.

The state's largest district, Portland Public Schools, will maintain 6 feet of distancing as they reopen after spring break, said district spokeswoman Karen Werstein. The district struck a deal with the teacher's union based on that figure and reducing it would require another round of negotiations.

The ODE announcement reads, "These changes may take place over the next several weeks in some of our schools as every school district will need time to plan and adjust to these new requirements."

Indirectly acknowledging the fast pace of changes districts have been facing, state Education Department Director Colt Gill said "This shift will take time to digest, partner with staff, and integrate in many schools and districts. I know our educators have spent countless hours over the last year stretching to implement different learning models and safety protocols."

Nonetheless, Gill said some districts may want to rejigger their hybrid plans or even consider going back to completely on-site instruction. Under the new plans, elementary schools must maintain the 3 feet of distancing and staff and students must be at least 6 feet apart "to the maximum extent possible."

Middle and high schools have to keep the 3 feet of distance unless COVID-19 case rates reach certain levels in the county. Gov. Kate Brown said in the announcement, "With the new recommendations for physical distancing from the CDC, I know I join students, parents and educators across Oregon in welcoming the news that months of scientific research clearly demonstrates the risk of COVID-19 transmission is low in schools."

"This new physical distancing allowance is a local decision."

— Oregon Department of Education in an announcement Monday, March 22

MUSICAL

Continued from Page 1A

actors from Union, Wallowa, Baker and Umatilla counties, plus Walla Walla County in Washington. Many of the actors, almost all age 18 and younger, have not been together at filming sessions because of social distancing rules.

"The cast will never be together at one time for the production," Hale said. "It is the first time I have directed a production in which the full cast can't come together."

Cast members are meeting in small groups for rehearsals before coming to the Elgin Opera House for filming sessions.

"They are all doing such a tremendous job. I am so proud of them," Hale said.

Hale also said he is receiving a big boost from his directing staff — assistant director Caitlin Marshall, choreographer Abigail Hale, music and sound director Becky Chelson, costumer Maureen O'Brien, stage manager Shelby Kealiker, cheer coach Jessica Dearing, scene artists Beth Wasley and Tess Cahill, and Brent Clapp, who is managing the filming and editing process.

"Our staff is incredible," Hale said.

This is the first time almost all of the cast and many of the staff have been involved in a film production.

Actors moving from stage productions to film must learn that they have to be more subtle because they no longer must speak loud enough for everyone in the



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Director Terry Hale, along with members of the video, sound and lighting crew, discuss operations before rehearsal in the Elgin Opera House on Friday, March 19, 2021.

theater to hear them, Hale said. He noted everyone has a microphone on during the filming process, so speaking too loudly can cause recording issues.

Hale said the need for perfection is greater in film productions.

"Mistakes that are not obvious in theater come through on film," the director said.

Cast member Ian Califf said he is enjoying learning about cinematic style, but he will miss performing for a live audience.

"I get a spark from the audience," Califf said.

Fellow actor Hunter Adams shares this sentiment.

"Now I have to create my own energy," Adams said.

Cast member Joseph Hale noted even though the full cast is never gathering at once, he still feels a con-

nection to all the members.

Blake Rasmussen, one of the cast's adult actors, said he is enjoying the chance to learn about film acting.

"It is super fun with a different vibe," said Rasmussen, who plays the role of a coach.

Rasmussen said he found that in film acting it is more important to be on an even kilter and there is less opportunity for spontaneity. Rasmussen said when performing on stage he sometimes adds impromptu lines and gestures in response to the audiences.

Misty Hines, who has played many on-stage roles in the past, said the "High School Musical Jr." film experience will help cast members in the future when they return to stage acting.

"It will give us so many new experiences to draw upon," said Hines, who plays the role of a detention

room teacher in the musical.

Hines said she is delighted to have the opportunity to be acting again after the pandemic shut down local productions.

"I so missed my theater family," she said.

Filming of "High School Musical Jr." will continue for about another month, after which production work will be completed. The Elgin Opera House production will be shown online from April 24 to May 2. All showings will be at 7:30 p.m. except for May 2, which will start at 4:30 p.m. Information on purchasing tickets is available at elginoperahouse.com/box-office.

Hale said those watching should not be late because viewers will not be able to rewind or pause the show.

"It will start and run just like a live show at the Opera House," he said.

STATION

Continued from Page 1A

there's 5,000 gallons of water ready to go."

The all-volunteer department consists of 20 locals, serves an area of 172 square miles and receives funding for operations from its taxing district.

The project for the new building cost a little more than \$1 million.

The department paid a good chunk of that with its own building fund, Thompson said, which it had been adding to for a number of years. Grants from local and regional organizations also helped cover the tab, as did donations from numerous busi-



Phil Wright/The Observer

The North Powder Rural Fire Protection District's new fire station at 710 E St., North Powder, is ready for service Saturday, March 20, 2021.

nesses and residents. Martin stressed this was key to the money end of the project.

"That was a big part of the process with trying not to increase the tax rate for

the district," he said.

A general contractor oversaw the construction of the building, and the department's own members shouldered their share of work, including

installing interior walls. Martin said the children of firefighters chipped in, often with the cleanup.

"They've really been a big part of this also," he said, adding that getting youth involved has the benefit of piquing interest in the next generation of firefighters for the North Powder Rural Fire Protection District.

Bob Middleton came over from Haines to check out the building.

"It's a beautiful facility," he said.

Middleton said he retired a year ago from the Haines Rural Fire Protection District, and as he surveyed the scene from the second floor, he quipped that just maybe his former station could use an upgrade like this one.

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