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Good day to our valued subscriber Jennifer Isley of La Grande

Teachers, students react to in-person instruction expansion

By DICK MASON
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Plenty of La Grande School District educators and students are thrilled with the move back to in-person learning every day starting Monday, April 12.

“We are all elated. This has been a year in the making,” said La Grande High School Principal Brett Baxter.

The announcement on Thursday, April 1, means the La Grande School District soon will be a big step closer to operating as it did before the coronavirus pandemic struck in March 2020. Oregon shut down schools to in-person learning then to curtail the spread of the virus. Early in the 2020-21 school year, the LGSD began adding back in-person learning opportunities because of falling infection rates, changing state metrics and the state allowing more local control.

Elementary schools have offered in-person learning for all students five days a week since January, and students in grades 7-12 have received in-person instruction on alternate days for a little more than two months. High school and middle school students are in cohorts that attend classes on-site every other day and complete assessments at home on their off days.

Baxter said students will benefit greatly from again receiving in-person instruction five days a week.

“Students need more individual attention. It will help them so much more,” he said.

Middle school and high school students now are attending school from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on their in-person days, a schedule that will continue after April 12. La Grande High French and English teacher Kevin Cahill said maintaining this schedule will be a plus.

“I think it will help make the transition smoother,” Cahill said.

He noted there is a daily rhythm students have become accustomed to. Prior to the COVID-19, high school and La Grande Middle School students started classes at about 8 a.m. and were dismissed at about 3 p.m.

Senior Kierstin Lofton said she and many other students are glad the school district is keeping the 9 a.m. start time because most

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Potter Bob Jensen paints ponderosa pines on a freshly glazed ceramic pot Thursday, April 1, 2021. Jensen, along with other potters in the region, are donating handmade bowls to Shelter From the Storm's annual Soup Supper fundraiser.

Soup's on, safely

Shelter From the Storm's fundraiser will be different this year

By DICK MASON
The Observer

ISLAND CITY — The COVID-19 pandemic will not sideline Shelter From the Storm's popular and long-running Soup Supper fundraiser this spring.

Shelter From the Storm's Soup Supper has been conducted annually for about three decades, and this year's event will operate with a twist to allow for social distancing.

“We wanted to honor the tradition,” said Jamie Landa, executive director of Shelter From the Storm, a nonprofit that provides services for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.

In past years, Soup Supper participants picked up donated handmade bowls at the event, enjoyed a dinner there, and then took their bowls home. This year, the supper will not serve any soup because of social distancing restrictions. However, donors still will receive bowls and meals.

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Bowls and cups await glaze in Bob Jensen's La Grande pottery shop, The Potter's House, on Thursday, April 1, 2021. Jensen, along with other potters in the region, are donating their goods to Shelter From the Storm for the nonprofit's annual Soup Supper fundraiser.

TO ATTEND THE SOUP SUPPER

You can buy Soup Supper tickets online this month. Go to Shelter From the Storm's website, www.unioncountysfs.org, and click on a link to Eventbrite. Tickets for two fundraising quilt raffles also are available at the Eventbrite site. Shelter From the Storm will announce the quilt raffle winners May 1.

Academy Award nominee credits Eastern for success

By DICK MASON
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Award-winning documentary filmmaker Skye Fitzgerald, a 1993 graduate of Eastern Oregon University, is a risk taker. The premium Fitzgerald paid for kidnap insurance in 2020 is harrowing proof.

Fitzgerald purchased the insurance policy prior to filming “Hunger Ward,” a 40-minute work that documents the effects the war and famine in Yemen is having on children, families and health care workers. He shot the film over 30 days in January and February 2020 in northern

and southern Yemen, a west Asian nation devastated by war between Saudi-backed pro-government forces and the rebel Houthi movement.

Fitzgerald, a two-time Academy Award nominee, said he never forgot he was in peril throughout his time in Yemen.

“I was on guard at all times. The fear was real,” Fitzgerald said.

The EOU graduate and members of his party took numerous precautions. For example, they kept their cellphones and laptops in a bag made of material that blocked signals from the

devices, helping prevent potential abductors from detecting their location. Fitzgerald's party also avoided traveling at night and made sure someone outside Yemen knew their exact location at all times.

Fitzgerald, whose party was detained during its Yemen visit for a frightening seven hours before being released, emerged from the war-torn nation with footage that has caught the world's attention. “Hunger Ward” is one of nine films to receive a 2021 Academy Award

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Michael Seidler/Contributed Photo

Skye Fitzgerald, a 1993 graduate of Eastern Oregon University and a documentary filmmaker, has been nominated for a 2021 Academy Award.

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	34 Low		65/36
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CONTACT US

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
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THURSDAY PAVING PROJECT

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