

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Saturday, May 15, the 135th day of 2021. There are 230 days left in the year.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT IN HISTORY:

On May 15, 1970, just after midnight, Phillip Lafayette Gibbs and James Earl Green, two Black students at Jackson State College in Mississippi, were killed as police opened fire during student protests.

ON THIS DATE:

In 1602, English navigator Bartholomew Gosnold and his ship, the Concord, arrived at present-day Cape Cod, which he's credited with naming.

In 1918, U.S. airmail began service between Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and New York.

In 1954, the Fender Stratocaster guitar, created by Leo Fender, was officially released.

In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that juveniles accused of crimes were entitled to the same due process afforded adults.

In 1968, two days of tornado outbreaks began in 10 Midwestern and Southern states; twisters were blamed for 72 deaths, including 45 in Arkansas and 18 in Iowa.

In 1972, Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace was shot and left paralyzed while campaigning for president in Laurel, Maryland, by Arthur H. Bremer, who served 35 years for attempted murder.

In 1975, U.S. forces invaded the Cambodian island of Koh Tang and captured the American merchant ship Mayaguez, which had been seized by the Khmer Rouge. (All 39 crew members had already been released safely by Cambodia; some 40 U.S. servicemen were killed in connection with the operation.)

In 1988, the Soviet Union began the process of withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan, more than eight years after Soviet forces entered the country.

In 2000, the U.S. Supreme Court threw out a key provision of the 1994 Violence Against Women Act, saying that rape victims could not sue their attackers in federal court.

In 2015, a jury sentenced Dzhokhar Tsarnaev to death for the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing that killed three and left more than 250 wounded.

Ten years ago: Mobilized by calls on Facebook, thousands of Arab protesters marched on Israel's borders with Syria, Lebanon and Gaza in an unprecedented wave of demonstrations, sparking clashes that left at least 15 dead.

Activist's collection of books available to all

Bill Whitaker's books and journals now available at Cook Memorial Library

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — William "Bill" Whitaker spent the bulk of his career working toward social justice and campaigning for universal health care in Oregon and Idaho. He died in September 2020, and now the modest collection of his health care books and journals have a new home at La Grande's Cook Memorial Library.

Whitaker began advocating for health care as a fundamental right after people around him had their lives cut short due to a lack of access to health care, according to a Health Care for All Oregon newsletter from October 2020. He received a master's of social work from Atlanta University and a doctorate at the Brandeis University Florence Heller School for Advanced Social Welfare in Massachusetts.

Whitaker and his wife, Cheryl Simpson, came to La Grande after he retired from Boise State University in 2007. At Boise State, Whitaker taught as a professor of social work and served on the university's faculty senate.

Following his time at Boise State, Whitaker continued his research and social work with the goal of bringing universal health care to Oregon. Over the years, he accumulated a range of books and journals.

Simpson donated the works to the Union County chapter of HCAO. Whitaker and his wife guided the expansion of HCAO and served as board members for the last decade.

"We're strong believers in community education and opportunities for people to learn more about issues that impact their lives," Simpson said.

Chapter Chair Anna Maria Dill, along with the chapter's members, decided donating the collection to Cook Memorial Library would be an effective way to carry on Whitaker's legacy and impact the La Grande community in a positive way.

"Cheryl gave us this lovely collection and we wanted to share it with others and make it available to everyone who was interested," Dill said. "We thought that housing it at the library not only made that possible, but it would be something Bill would have wanted."

The assortment of books provide access to resources and databases related to health care. Kip Roberson, director of Cook Memorial Library, worked with Union County's Health Care for All Oregon chapter to make Whitaker's collection available to the public.

"I think it is the library's responsibility to provide books that cover all areas of health care systems and let the reader decide what is best for their situation in life," Roberson said. "(Whitaker's) collection can help move health care forward in this state."

This is not the first time Whitaker's books became volumes in a library. Back in 2007, Whitaker presented more than 500 books from his personal collection to Eastern



The Observer, File

Bill Whitaker and Cheryl Simpson in this August 2016 photo advocate for voting rights outside their La Grande home. Whitaker died in 2020, but his collection of health care books and professional journals now is available to the public at Cook Memorial Library, La Grande.



Dick Mason/The Observer, File

Bill Whitaker, a member of the Union County Progressives, participates in a rally in September 2019. Whitaker died in 2020.

Oregon University, La Grande.

Whitaker's contributions were also recognized at the annual Oregon Rural Action meeting on April 17, according to ORA Executive Director Kristin Ostrom. The organization launched the Bill Whitaker Arc of Social Justice Community Orga-

nizing Training Series at the meeting to honor his legacy. ORA strives to promote sustainable agriculture and economy as well as social justice efforts.

The organization plans to offer the training annually and recognizes Whitaker's commitment to inclusion and community building. Whitaker him-

self generated the funding for the training during his 80th birthday fundraiser last year. His dedication as a community organizer led to his namesake on the ORA's training series.

Whitaker's impact on the La Grande community goes beyond the publicly accessible collection of books now at Cook Memorial Library.

"I think the collection is a resource, (and) Bill lives on as he has inspired other people to take a stand for social justice," Simpson said.

The inside cover of his books are lined with a bookplate that identifies and honors the collection.

"I think Bill's legacy is giving people a voice and giving them the power to address problems," Dill said. "They can feel that their voice and energy can contribute to a larger conversation and ultimately create change in this country."

NEWS BRIEFS

Merkley to hold remote Union County town hall

UNION COUNTY — Sen. Jeff Merkley announced he will hold a remote town hall for Union County residents on Tuesday, May 18, according to a press release.

Merkley will provide updates on his work in Washington, D.C., and take questions and suggestions from participants who can chime into the town hall via computer, mobile device or telephone, the press release said.

"Hearing from Oregonians across the state is critical to doing my job. In these uncertain times, it's more important than ever to hear directly from folks, but it's also important to respect the health and safety of every member of our communities while there is still a very real risk of spreading COVID-19 through in-person gatherings," Merkley said. "The ideas and priorities I hear about in town halls inform the solutions that I fight to get into federal law."

The town hall will start at 4 p.m. Attendees can join a Zoom chat through computer, smartphone or tablet, according to the press release.

They also can call in to the meeting by dialing 669-254-5252. The meeting identification for the call is 160 459 6641#, the participant ID is # and the passcode is 41675231#, the press release said.

110 received vaccinations at recent EOU clinic

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon University on Thursday, May 13, reported 110 people received their COVID-19 vaccinations at the recent clinic on campus.

The university partnered with the Center for Human Development Inc., Union County's public health agency, to provide first and second doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine at the May 4 clinic at Quinn Coliseum. University staff and students ensured the practice gym provided a clean, functional space with several vaccination stations, as well as areas for health screenings, patient monitoring and scheduling follow-up appointments, according to a press release from EOU.

EOU has conducted testing for coronavirus since fall term and provided free vaccinations on-site for many students.

"The entire EOU community has been so dedicated to keeping campus



Eastern Oregon University/Contributed Photo

An Eastern Oregon University student receives the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine from COVID-19 Response Nurse Elizabeth Sieders at the on-campus vaccination clinic May 4, 2021. EOU confirmed 110 people received vaccinations at the clinic.

as safe as possible this past year and focused on moving toward the goal of a complete reopening," said EOU's COVID-19 Response Nurse Elizabeth Sieders in the press release. "Holding on-campus vaccination clinics was a natural next step toward achieving this goal and to ensure all students and staff had easy access to free vaccines."

Nearly 100 people are registered to receive their booster shots at a second on-campus clinic in June. The CHD again will offer first and second doses of the Moderna vaccine.

EOU is collecting feedback from students and employees before deciding whether to require vaccinations on campus for fall term.

Boardman man faces charges of disposing of body in Hermiston case

HERMISTON — A Boardman man is facing charges of disposing of the body of a Hermiston man who died of a gunshot wound outside the city in 2020, according to Umatilla County District Attorney Dan Primus.

Hermiston police on May 7 arrested Kevin Ricardo Melendez, 26, with Rachel Cruz, 26, after reports of trespassing. Both had warrants against them.

According to Primus, the charges against Melendez, which a Umatilla County Grand Jury handed up April 29, are related to the shooting death of Jordan Crandall, 28, who was found dead next to an irrigation ditch near Alpine Drive northeast of Hermiston in March 2020. Cruz was

wanted on a separate matter, court documents show.

Melendez is not suspected of killing Crandall, Primus said, "but the crimes that are alleged come as a result of the same incident that ultimately ended the life of Jordan Crandall."

The charges in the indictment include robbery, attempted unlawful use of a weapon, abuse of a corpse, felony conspiracy to unlawfully deliver a Schedule II controlled substance, misdemeanor menacing and theft. Melendez also faces charges for resisting arrest on May 7.

The abuse of a corpse charge is "in this circumstance the dumping of a body and disposing of a body," Primus said.

According to the indictment, Melendez on March 18, 2020 — the same day that Crandall's body was found — threatened Anthony Andrade with a gun while attempting to rob him. The charges also allege Melendez intended to use the gun against Stevie Martinez while delivering fentanyl.

Primus said local law enforcement and the district attorney's office are "familiar" with Melendez from previous cases, but declined to provide specifics. Court documents show Melendez has faced a variety of charges over the years, including first-degree manslaughter in 2011, though the charges in that case were dismissed. Primus said he doesn't expect Melendez to face more charges. He added his arrest is only a part of the ongoing investigation into Crandall's death.

— EO Media Group



The Observer, File

Grandview Cemetery in La Grande was awash in color at the 2019 annual Avenue of Flags ceremony during Memorial Day Weekend. American Legion Post 43 scaled back the event in 2020 due to the coronavirus crisis but this year is unfurling the event with at least 165 United States flags.

Avenue of Flags returns for Memorial Day

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A popular and long-running Memorial Day tradition in La Grande will be back in full force this year.

The 38th annual Avenue of Flags at Grandview Cemetery, one scaled back significantly in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, is set to return to its unabridged level during Memorial Day Weekend, May 28-31.

The full return will be possible because of falling infection rates, said John Craig, finance officer for American Legion Post 43, which puts on the Avenue of Flags.

This year's event, as in pre-pandemic years, will feature a ceremony starting at 11 a.m. on Memorial Day. Highlights will include Roger Cochran, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, delivering the keynote address, and La Grande High School's A Cappella Choir performing the National Anthem.

Everyone attending will have to follow social distancing rules and wear masks.

A display of at least 165 United States flags on poles along the road at Grandview Cemetery is another part of the event set to come back.

All are burial flags donated by families of American veterans. The flags will be put up the morning of May 29 and will remain up until May 31 at 3 p.m.

Craig, Dave Matott, commander of American Legion Post 43, and Bob Kennon, the second vice president of American Legion Post 43, are running the Avenue of Flags program this year.

At the abbreviated 2020 event there was no Memorial Day ceremony and flags were put up only at the Veterans Circle at Grandview Cemetery because much tighter social distancing rules were in effect.

Portable lights at night will illuminate the flags like in past years. A federal resolution, which the American Legion wrote and Congress adopted, requires illumination to identify American flags on display after dark, Craig said.