

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Tuesday, May 25, the 145th day of 2021. There are 220 days left in the year.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT IN HISTORY:

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a Black man, died when a white Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee on Floyd's neck for about 9 1/2 minutes while Floyd was handcuffed and pleading that he couldn't breathe; Floyd's death, captured on video by a bystander, would lead to worldwide protests, some of which turned violent, and a reexamination of racism and policing in the U.S.

ON THIS DATE:

In 1787, the Constitutional Convention began at the Pennsylvania State House in Philadelphia after enough delegates had shown up for a quorum.

In 1935, Babe Ruth hit his last three career home runs — Nos. 712, 713 and 714 — for the Boston Braves in a game against the Pittsburgh Pirates.

In 1946, Transjordan (now Jordan) became a kingdom as it proclaimed its new monarch, Abdullah I.

In 1959, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *State Athletic Commission v. Dorsey*, struck down a Louisiana law prohibiting interracial boxing matches.

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy told Congress: "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth."

In 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the school board of Prince Edward County, Virginia, to reopen its public schools, which officials had closed in an attempt to circumvent the Supreme Court's desegregation ruling.

In 1965, Muhammad Ali knocked out Sonny Liston in the first round of their world heavyweight title rematch in Lewiston, Maine. (Ali's victory generated controversy over whether he'd truly connected when he sent Liston crashing to the canvas with a right to the head, or whether it was a "phantom punch," implying that the fight had been fixed.)

In 1979, 273 people died when an American Airlines DC-10 crashed just after takeoff from Chicago's O'Hare Airport. Six-year-old Etan Patz disappeared while on his way to a school bus stop in lower Manhattan. (In April 2017, Pedro Hernandez, convicted of killing Etan, was sentenced to at least 25 years in prison.)

In 1992, Jay Leno made his debut as host of NBC's "Tonight Show," succeeding Johnny Carson.

Work day helps create a 'Disneyland for mountain biking'

By DICK MASON
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — The threat of rain Saturday, May 22, did not douse the volunteer spirit burning within local mountain bikers.

The Blue Mountain Singletrack Trails Club's annual Mount Emily Recreation Area Work Day drew about 30 people.

"It was one of the biggest turnouts we've had," said Sean Chambers, Union County's parks director.

The National Weather Service forecast rain for the day, and some fell as the work started at 8:30 a.m. but it did not appear to cause anyone to leave.

"These are real die-hards," Chambers said late in the afternoon after a day in which rainfall at MERA was far less than what some expected.

The volunteers, many of whom were members of the trails club, focused much of their efforts on the Skills Development Center at MERA, which is adjacent to its Owsley parking lot. The skills center is where mountain bikers prepare themselves to take on



Volunteers at the Mount Emily Recreation Area's annual work day for nonmotorized trails prepare to install a "skinny" — a narrow pathway for mountain bikers to train on — from a split tree at the site's Skills Development Center Saturday, May 22, 2021. The skinnies help mountain bikers prepare to handle the 8- to 12-inch-wide trails at the recreation area.

Dick Mason/The Observer

the challenges of MERA's trails.

The work included adding about 60 feet to the skill center's network of "skinnies." A skinny is a narrow pathway mountain bikers ride on to improve bike handling skills and balance. Skinnies often are

made of lumber or a fallen tree.

The skinnies installed May 22, which are made from split trees, will help riders learn to handle the 8- to 12-inch-wide passages they will encounter at MERA, said Ed Mosiman, a member of the club who

helped run the work day.

The club also added a new drop site at the center using a plank that drops riders 1 to 2 feet. The drop sites simulate some of the drops riders have to make while riding trails at MERA.

The crew also prepared

Eagle Cap Excursion Train rolls again starting July 4

Train ride offers scenic views of Northeastern Oregon

Wallowa County Chieftain

ELGIN — Independence Day weekend will not only bring in the celebration of our nation's birth, but the official return of the Eagle Cap Excursion Train.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the train to a halt during 2020. The Friends of the Joseph Branch, which manages the train, announced in April it would be returning in 2021. That first date has been set for July 3, according to a press release.

The later start date gives the organization more time to prepare for the ever-changing measures from the state level and for more people to get shots against COVID-19.

"We usually launch the season with the Mother's Day Brunch, but in order to ensure we have all of



The Eagle Cap Excursion Train, run by the Friends of the Joseph Branch, makes its way back to the Elgin Depot in this undated photo. The train, which did not operate in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, returns to the rails Independence Day Weekend.

Wallowa County Chieftain, File

our new safety measures in place and more people are vaccinated against the virus, our first trip starts a little later than normal," Ed Spaulding, president of the Friends, said in the press release.

This year, there will be 18 train rides, starting on that first Saturday in July and running through Saturday, Oct. 23. Most of the trips are scheduled for

Saturdays, but a handful of midweek trips that run during the afternoon and evening are slated. Two train robberies are on tap, as the Gold Rush Bandits, riders on horseback who "rob" the train, will take part again.

There will be fewer passengers to allow for social distancing and a face-mask requirement for both volunteers and pas-

sengers, except for when people aboard are eating or drinking. A new ventilation system that filters the air as it circulates will also be installed.

"We believe these measures will provide passengers with the confidence they can safely enjoy the scenic train rides," Spaulding said in the release.

There is a bonus opportunity for riders this year, though it is limited to one passenger per trip. Riders have the opportunity to reserve a ride in the cab of the engine alongside the engineers during the return trip.

"Get the unique perspective from sitting high above the track, in the engine and talk with the engineers for the entire ride back to Elgin," the release states. "Your cab ride includes a special railroad cap, along with lunch and a seat in the passenger car during the first leg of the trip."

This option, for those 18 or older, is by reservation

only. Cost is the original price of the ticket for a regular ride, plus an additional \$200 for the ride in the cab.

Ten Depot Street in La Grande and Chuckwagon Sisters Catering in Enterprise are providing the lunches for the train rides.

According to its website, all but one of the Saturday trips are \$35 for youths age 3-16, \$70 for adults, and \$65 for those 60 and older. Kids under 3 ride free. A pair of longer trips on July 21 and Oct. 9 are \$40, \$75 and \$70. The train robberies take place on July 24 and Sept. 4.

The full schedule for the summer, and a description of the trips, is available online at www.eaglecap-trainrides.com. The website is also where riders can book a spot on a trip, or they can do so by calling the Elgin Depot at 541-437-3652. Those interested in volunteering can call Peggy Weishaar at 541-786-0094, or email weishaar73@gmail.com for more information.

CORRECTION

The Observer misidentified the man in two photos on page 1A of the April 1, 2021, edition of the newspaper. The man in the photos was Blue Chavez. The Observer regrets the error.

OK to forgo masks in La Grande schools in some situations

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Students, staff, volunteers and visitors no longer have to wear face coverings outdoors at La Grande School District events, according to an update the district sent Thursday, May 20.

That includes outdoor physical education classes, recess and other school activities, although physical distancing and other related requirements still apply.

And school district staff who are fully vaccinated also can ditch face coverings and physically distance inside school buildings when students are not present (such as before and after school or on weekends), but only when the school has checked their vaccination status.

The Oregon Department of Education and Oregon Health Authority made adjustments to the Ready School, Safe Learners guidance as well as risk guidelines based on the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the OHA making recent changes regarding masks and other COVID-19 safety practices, according to the update from the school district.

"In general, these updates do not substantially change Ready Schools, Safe Learners guidance," the press release stated. "However, these updates do impact students, families and staff before and after school as well as sports, activities and graduation ceremonies. In addition, these updates to RSSL and sports/events allowances are up to the discretion of local districts to choose to implement."

Fully vaccinated students, staff, volunteers and spectators are not required to wear face coverings at indoor sports events only when the schools check the vaccination status that meets OHA guidance. All previous physical distancing and capacity restrictions still apply.

That also applies to school board meetings if children are not present. Most children in Oregon are not yet vaccinated.

School board meetings are open to the public.

Those who are fully vaccinated also can take off masks at indoor sporting events as long as the schools check the vaccination status per OHA guidance. Again, all previous physical distancing and capacity restrictions still apply.

According to the press release, the Oregon Health Authority defines "fully vaccinated" as an individual who has received both doses of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine or one dose of a single-dose vaccine and at least 14 days have passed since the individual's final dose of the vaccine.

Per the OHA, "proof of vaccination status" means documentation provided by a tribal, federal, state or local government or a health care provider that includes an individual's name, date of birth, type of COVID-19 vaccination given, date or dates given, depending on whether it is a one-dose or two-dose vaccine, and the name/location of the health care provider or site where the vaccine was administered. Documentation may include, but is not limited to, COVID-19 vaccination record card, or a copy or digital picture of the vaccination record card.

The press release also emphasized the district will not tolerate shaming of students, parents or staff for continuing to wear masks in all locations and following all key safety practices. People who are vaccinated may continue to wear masks if they want to.

Lastly, families should be aware that an increase of active transmissions of COVID-19 in a school or in its local community may necessitate the reinstatement of the requirement for face coverings. La Grande School District will use its local teams, data and context to continue to monitor and adjust as the need arises.

For more information on the adjustments by ODE, go to <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/>



Spectators look on from Island Avenue in Island City during the Ag-Timber Parade Friday, May 21, 2021. The parade, which was canceled last year due to the pandemic, saw dozens of participants and hundreds of spectators.

Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Ag-Timber Parade rolls along

By ALEX WITTWER
The Observer

ISLAND CITY — The Ag-Timber Parade returned Friday, May 21, after taking a year off due to the pandemic, to again celebrate the agricultural and timber industries that make up a large chunk of the local economy.

Oregon Women in Timber sponsored the parade that rolled out starting at 6 p.m. Oregon Women in Timber is a statewide nonprofit organization committed to raising awareness about the importance of proper forest management and the products that come from Oregon's timberlands.

"The Ag-Timber Parade is our way to show our support for the big industries in

Union county," said Tiffany Sherman, an organizer with Oregon Women in Timber who helped facilitate the parade. "It's been around for years and years and we just like to honor those industries that honor our community."

The parade ran from D Street in Island City before making its way down Island Avenue. The Union County Sheriff's Office blocked the street for the hour-long parade, which showcased fire engines, log trucks, vintage cars and farm equipment. Participants in the parade threw out candy for children in the crowd.

"We didn't have the Ag-Timber in 2020 — but (before that) we've had it for probably 50 years at this point," Sherman said. "It's

been around for a really long time, and Women in Timber has been with it for 23 years."

The parade harkened a return to normalcy in Union County, which saw frequent shutdowns over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the state easing restrictions and relaxing outdoor gatherings due to increased vaccination rates, more parades and outdoor activities, such as the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show and Elgin Stampede, are on the horizon this summer.

"I was glad to see the participation. People seemed to enjoy it. They came out to watch," Sherman said. "I'm glad we had it. Kids are excited to get out and do something again."