



Davis Carbaugh/The Observer

John Tristan Shields Maris steers his soap box car down Haefer Lane in Cove Saturday, May 29, 2021. Maris competed in the stock division bracket at the Oregon Soap Box Derby's Best of the West competition.



Davis Carbaugh/The Observer

Alexis Lowe crosses the finish line during a super stock division race at the soap box derby in Cove on Saturday, May 29, 2021. Lowe was a former runner-up at the 2019 All-American Soap Box Derby World Championship and competed in the same car at the competition in Cove.

# DERBY: 'Just to see all these local kids try it out is great'

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graduation taking place down the street at the same time, some locals meandered over to check out the races.

Nearly 20 racers took part in the event, split into two divisions. The stock division included competitors between the ages of 7 and 13 and less than 125 pounds, while the super stock division was made up of kids 9 to 18 and less than 150 pounds.

"I was really excited to see the number of kids and see the number of people in the community that came to watch," said Oregon Soap Box event coordinator Sam Delaney.

The contestants competed in a double-elimination tournament consisting of two races per matchup. After the first race, drivers switched lanes and wheels. The participant with the best combined time from both races advanced to the next round with the runner-up relegated to the consolation bracket.

Before the racing started, all contestants checked in and weighed their cars. The



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Cove hosted a soap box derby on Saturday, May 29, 2021, drawing competitors from across the state hoping to improve their point totals and a chance at competing in Akron, Ohio — home of the first and largest soap box derby.

overall weight of the driver combined with the car had to be exactly the same for every driver to ensure fair

racing conditions. To secure an even measurement, weights were added to the cars of the smaller drivers.

As part of the Super Kids program, local racer Sean Kuga teamed up with Mikayla Saddler in a two-

person soap box car. Super Kids allows physically and mentally disabled kids to compete in soap box derby

races. Sean's dad, Mark Kuga, remarked on the impact that soap box derby racing has had on Sean.

"He was afraid of a ball, just afraid to do stuff, and this totally took him out of his shell," Mark Kuga said.

Sean has competed in basketball, soccer and other sports through Special Olympics and integrated sports programs in Cove. Although he is too old to compete in the soap box derby now, Sean drove down the track a few times to raise interest in the Super Kids program and encourage other kids with special needs to get involved.

"The community is very supportive," Mark Kuga said.

The rest of the field consisted of a mostly even split between experienced drivers and first-time racers. The seeding for the tournament bracket was drawn randomly, but all the competitors took part in multiple races in the double-elimination format.

"Just to see all these local kids try it out is great," Youngers said. "It's a fun sport."

# BUDGETS: \$2M from American Rescue Plan is included in proposal

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department overall is losing staff, as two officers are retiring in the coming fiscal year.

The city plans to shell out funds in 2021-22 for some new vehicles. Topping that list is the fire department's \$195,000 capital outlay for a new ambulance.

According to city budget documents, the city has four ambulances and needs to replace its oldest, which is from 2006 and now has 201,000 miles.

Likewise, the police department plans to spend \$53,000 on a new vehicle for fleet rotation, the parks department has a \$28,000 expense for a 3/4-ton pickup, and the city also has budgeted \$340,000 for a street sweeper that could replace one of its pickups.

The city's budget proposal includes \$2 million in funding from the federal American Rescue Plan. The city has yet to receive the

LA GRANDE 2021-22 BUDGETS BREAKDOWN	
<b>Urban renewal budget</b>	
General fund:	\$1.8 million
Debt fund:	\$2.1 million
<b>City budget</b>	
General fund:	\$14.55 million
Police department:	\$3.69 million
Fire/EMS department:	\$2.95 million
Public works:	\$3.28 million
Street fund:	\$1.61 million
<b>Total city budget:</b>	<b>\$53.2 million</b>

### MORE INFORMATION

The public meetings to approve the budgets are virtual and begin at 6 p.m. The public can view the meetings on Charter Communications channel 180, the La Grande Alive website at [lagrandealive.tv](http://lagrandealive.tv) and on the Eastern Oregon Alive TV Facebook page.

funds. Strobe during the budget hearings explained the council can decide on how to use the money later, after the federal government sets regulations for the money.



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Homeowner Jenifer McCraw attempts to comfort her dog, Hunter, while firefighter Jerid Ployhar administers oxygen on Saturday, May 29, 2021. The dog was trapped inside the family's home when fire broke out and quickly filled the residence with smoke.



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

JD Little, of La Grande, embraces one of his family's dogs, Hunter, while La Grande firefighter Jerid Ployhar administers oxygen on Saturday, May 29, 2021.

# RESCUE: Cause of the fire yet to be determined

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"My youngest and I were taking food to our grandma and our oldest son," said Jenifer McCraw, "We came back, and we were two blocks away and I said, 'JD, there's firetrucks and our house is on fire.' I came

skidding on in."

Little ran into the house looking for Hunter, while firefighters raced to don breathing equipment and get the hoses ready. His efforts were to no avail.

However, firefighter Jerid Ployhar with the La Grande Fire Department, one of the first on scene

with Engine 46, emerged from the home holding the limp frame of the dog that had been trapped inside. Hunter was breathing, but seriously injured from smoke inhalation.

It took firefighters three full bottles of oxygen, but they were able to bring Hunter back to his feet.

The dog was released to the family, who took him to receive veterinary care.

The cause of the fire is still unknown. No one was inside the home at the time of the fire. Little received medical care from firefighters for smoke inhalation, but no person was injured in the blaze.

## 2021 EASTERN OREGON PHOTO CONTEST

**Official Rules:**  
 Photo Contest open now and closes at 11:59 pm Sunday, June 20, 2021.  
 Staff will choose the top 10. The public can vote online for People's Choice from 12:01 am Monday, June 21 through 11:59 pm Thursday, June 30.  
 Digital or scanned photos only, uploaded to the online platform. No physical copies.  
 Only photographers from Oregon may participate.  
 The contest subject matter is wide open but we're looking for images that capture life in Eastern Oregon.

Entrants may crop, tone, adjust saturation and make minor enhancements, but may not add or remove objects within the frame, or doctor images such that the final product doesn't represent what's actually before the camera.

The winners will appear in the July 8th edition of Go Magazine; the top 25 will appear online.

Gift cards to a restaurant of your choice will be awarded for first, second and third place.

Submit all photos online at: [lagrandeobserver.com/photocontest](http://lagrandeobserver.com/photocontest)

VISIT US ON THE WEB AT:  
[www.LaGrandeObserver.com](http://www.LaGrandeObserver.com)

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