

# THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

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Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

The crystal-blue waters of Wallowa Lake are easily visible on a clear day from the Wallowa Lake Tramway, which was the case Saturday, June 5, 2021.

## Theater group returns for repeat

Elgin-based group looks to defend its title at national competition

By CARLOS FUENTES  
The Observer

ELGIN — Students representing the Opera House Youth Actors in Elgin will perform musical theater on June 25-27 at the 2021 Junior Theater Festival in Sugar Land, Texas, their first festival in over a year.

The Elgin-based group, which draws in members from Wallowa, Union and Umatilla counties, took the top group award at the festival in 2019 and 2020, along with a handful of individual awards. This year, they are looking for a repeat.

“I am excited, this is the most nerve-wracking thing I do at the opera house,” OHYA director Terry Hale said. “I’m nervous for the kids, and we really root for them because we know how hard they worked.”

Every year, Junior Theater Festivals occur at multiple locations throughout the United States to celebrate musical theater. In 2019, nearly 15,000 people attended at least one of the three festivals. This year, there will be 50 groups in attendance, plus an additional seven joining virtually. Every group will perform a 15-minute act, competing for individual and group awards.

The Opera House group will present a 15-minute performance of selected acts from *The Little Mermaid Jr.*, which they have been rehearsing three days a week since April.

“We would like to win the outstanding performance award again, we’ve won it two years in a row and we’re going for the hat trick,” Hale said. “Our competition is pretty fierce. These kids work hard, they deserve it because of the efforts that they put in.”

This is the first festival that the group will attend since JTF West in February of 2020. This year, a festival was held online in January, and the second, JTF West in Sacramento, was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. Sugar Land is a first-time host, and will be the last festival

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## The next 50 years Wallowa Lake Tramway has eye on the future

By BILL BRADSHAW  
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA LAKE — More of the same exciting rides and new features can be expected during the next half-century of life in the Wallowa Lake Tramway, co-owner Mike Lockhart said.

Like many businesses, last year — when the tram marked its 50th anniversary — was taken up with just getting through the coronavirus pandemic. He said nothing special was done to mark the first half-century of county’s top tourist attraction.

“I didn’t think about that until this morning,” he said.

Originally constructed in 1970, the tram was first owned by a stock corporation known as High Wallowas, which was later forced to sell, Lockhart said.

“It started with a bunch of dedicated people who wanted to build an attraction that would be special, which this is, in my



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Tourists eat outside the Summit Grill at the top of Mount Howard, while others embark on a hike around the summit after riding the Wallowa Lake Tramway up Saturday, June 5, 2021.

opinion,” he said.

He and three others bought the attraction. In 1984, he said, he and Bill Whittemore bought out the other two partners and became co-owners.

“We’ve been operating it ever since,” he said.

### Focus on maintenance

Perhaps the primary goal Lockhart and Whittemore

**TRAM FACTS**

**Elevation:** Base 4,450 feet; Summit 8,150 feet.

**Distances:** Vertical 3,700 feet; Horizontal 1.83 miles; Trails 2½ miles.

**Time:** One way 15 minutes.

**Header:** 150 hp electric motor with a 55 hp auxiliary

**Towers:** highest is 74 feet; average tower height is 30 feet.

**Top terminal counterweight:** 28 tons

**Gondolas:** Swiss-made four-passenger cabins with a detachable grip. One car leaves the terminal every 90 seconds.

**Land:** One-third is privately owned; two-thirds is owned by U.S. Forest Service Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

**From the top,** you can see four states: Oregon, Idaho — including Seven Devils — Washington and on a clear day, the Bitterroot Mountain Range of Montana.

have for the tram is to continue to maintain and upgrade it. The attraction operates from late May to early October and

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## Elgin firefighters fill empty stomachs

Community breakfast is a highlight during the return of Riverfest

By DAVIS CARBAUGH  
The Observer

ELGIN — Firefighters in Elgin extinguished empty stomachs, not fires, at this year’s Riverfest.

Community members came out Saturday, June 19, to take part in the Firemen’s Breakfast at the Elgin Fire Hall on the corner of 10th and

Baltimore Street. The firefighters and support staff served pancakes, eggs, sausage and drinks to approximately 500 individuals in attendance throughout the morning.

“It’s good for the community and it’s an event we really enjoy,” Elgin Fire Chief Kevin Silvernail said. “This is one of our biggest fundraisers of the year.”

Riverfest returned to Elgin in 2021 after being canceled last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Locals from Elgin as well as

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Davis Carbaugh/The Observer

Firefighter Jake Smith cooks eggs for hungry locals at the Elgin Fire Hall at Riverfest on Saturday, June 19, 2021.

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### WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight **61** Low Partly cloudy

Wednesday **92/60** Mostly sunny

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Email story ideas to [news@lagrandeobserver.com](mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com).  
More contact info on Page 4A.



THURSDAY

HQ HOSTING INDOOR SHOWS AS COVID-19 NUMBERS DECLINE

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