

ELGIN

Continued from Page 1A

visitors from around Union County and beyond took part in the event.

The breakfast kicked off a full slate of activities across the community. Vintage car owners parked their vehicles throughout the field next to the Elgin Community Center, local artists displayed their exhibits at the opera house, quilters showed their work at Elgin High School and local food vendors lined Baltimore Street to serve those in attendance.

For the Elgin Fire Department, the breakfast serves as a means to reach out to members of the city as well as raise crucial funds.

“This becomes a community focal point,” Elgin firefighter Mike Pearson said. “It’s for a dang good cause.”



Davis Carbaugh/The Observer

Community members gather in the Elgin Fire Hall for the annual Firemen’s Breakfast during Riverfest on Saturday, June 19, 2021. The event was canceled last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but locals came out in large quantities during the 2021 rendition.

The funds raised at the breakfast contribute toward Operation Santa Claus, a program run by

the Elgin Fire Department to bring gifts to local children on Christmas Eve. The chance to interact

with locals in an informal, family-friendly environment was not taken for granted by the firefighters

and support staff serving breakfast.

“We get to see a lot of people that we usually only see when it’s a really bad situation, when their house has burned down or we’re picking them up on a lift assist,” Pearson said.

According to Silvernail, the Elgin Fire Department has been hosting the Fireman’s Breakfast for nearly 40 years. Silvernail has served the department for 25 years and participates in the breakfast every year.

“It’s good for the people to see us, see inside the fire department and see who all the firefighters are,” he said. “They can see that their tax money is well spent and well used.”

The Elgin Corner Market, owned by Brad and Kelly McLaughlin, donated the breakfast supplies for the Firemen’s Breakfast. Local musicians played folk music outside

the fire hall throughout the duration of the event.

“It’s been a wonderful way to get the community together,” said Steve Oliver, of the Elgin Lions Club. “With the Firemen’s Breakfast as well as the car show, the quilt show, the art show and all of this put together, it’s a great community effort.”

Oliver and his wife, Kathy, president of the Elgin Lions Club, host the annual event and help coordinate the activities across the city. Following the conclusion of the Firemen’s Breakfast, the focal point of Riverfest is the congregation of vintage automobiles at the car show.

“It feels wonderful to get back out here and meet people,” Steve Oliver said. “People are just hungry to be out and visit each other after a year contained inside.”

TRAM

Continued from Page 1A

some people would like to see that expanded. But that’s unlikely, since the “shoulder seasons” of late fall and early spring are necessary for their maintenance work.

Lockhart estimated the tram would cost about \$10 million to replace.

However, he said, “It isn’t worth \$10 million and that’s why we’re doing everything we can to restore it to keep the place operating safely. There’s very little here that dates back to 1970.”

He said they are continually on the lookout for parts they can use on the tram — or have made new.

“A lot of the parts we have right now we have to have made ourselves” at a local machine shop, he said, but “there are still parts around” that can be purchased.

Safety is key

Their efforts to keep the tram operating safely have proven successful.

“Back in the day, almost the very first year, a bullwheel bearing went out and we had to evacuate three cabins,” Lockhart said.

A bullwheel is the big wheel that drives the cable, easily visible at each terminal.

The scheave wheels that support each cabin alone cost about \$1,000 each. Lockhart didn’t know the cost of the bullwheels.

“We have to keep track of our rates to keep up on this,” he said, adding that replacing the entire tramway is unlikely. “That’s probably not feasible because of the cash flow. So it’s important that we do this maintenance. We are the No. 1 attraction in Wallowa County and there’s a lot of people who factor that into when they come to Wallowa County. We’re finding that out, as will any accommodation person will tell you. It’s a common question they get asked when making reservations (for lodging). Or, the chamber could tell you that.”

Once, they had to evacuate the top because of high winds.

“It’s all about safety, from every operation we have from the lift to food service to everything else,” he said.

Evacuation is no easy task. Under the seats of each car is a cord that is used to let a rope down to the ground and passengers get into a harness to be lowered to ground. Then they either walk to the terminal or, “if necessary, we bring a helicopter in,” Lockhart said.

He said the tram works with local first-responders when necessary. But such calls are rare.

“We haven’t had one in 20 years,” he said.

The only mishaps on the tram have been minor injuries suffered, such as a rider slipping upon getting into or out of one of the cabins. He said no loss/claim injuries have been filed in his time as a tram owner.

One thing that tram riders often wonder is how supplies reach the summit, particularly the Summit Grill. Outside are two large propane tanks that would hardly fit in a cabin. Lockhart said there is a



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

A “boxcar” used primarily to bring supplies to the Summit Grill prepares to make its run down to the base terminal of the Wallowa Lake Tramway on Wednesday, June 9, 2021.

roadway up the back side of Mount Howard that comes up near Ferguson Ridge. Large items can be brought up that way. Most supplies, however, are brought up on the tram via a “boxcar” — an open, yellow car.

A road accessible only by all-terrain vehicle provides access to each of the towers that carry the cable.

Improvements made

Most of the improvements made by the current owners have been about maintenance, Lockhart said.

“Over the past three years, we’ve done some extensive remodeling,” he said, replacing parts where needed.

“We started a very aggressive maintenance program. We’ve taken every assembly off,” Lockhart said, and had a machine shop in Enterprise refurbish parts during the off-season.

“In addition to that, we’re replacing all the wheels,” he said. “Over two-thirds of those will be done this year.”

They also have made some additions to the attraction. When they bought it, there was only the terminal at the summit. Riders would go up, hike around, enjoy the view and ride back down. But the current owners poured a concrete slab, added a patio and the Summit Grill.

The grill, Lockhart said, has “Kind of a bistro menu. We don’t want people to feel they have to go someplace else to eat, so we’re pretty competitive.”

Improvements considered

The owners also are considering additions they can create. Already the tram does some catering to skiers.

“We take people up in the spring and they hike over to East Peak and do a mountaineering-type of skiing,” Lockhart said.

In the 1990s, they considered adding ski runs down the back of Mount Howard that would end near Ferguson Ridge Ski Area. However, when they did a master plan for the area — that would’ve included the ski runs — they got some local

resistance. That, and the fact that an environmental impact statement for the project would cost \$4 million — with no guarantee it would pay off — shelved the idea.

Lockhart hopes to be able to add interpretive tours of the mountaintop, including the history of the moraines, if they can find the right person to do the interpreting.

“That could be happening soon,” he said. “But that’s a special person we’d have to find.”

There also has been discussion of campsites in the area, but those would depend on the markets, the economy and what the U.S. Forest Service says of the ideas, since two-thirds of the tram is on USFS land.

Local support

While the tram largely survives on tourist dollars, the owners don’t neglect the locals who support it. A planned “Business After Hours” event for Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce members is planned soon, as is a Father’s Day event for first-responders. Lockhart said they also want to honor educators and others who worked hard during the coronavirus pandemic.

“They worked extra hard here in Wallowa County, as compared with what was going on nationally,” he said of the educators. “They worked hard for our children — we put them first. There may be a few other groups, but there’s a limit as far as what we can do. We can’t ignore our businesspeople who were at risk, but at least they got some reward for their endeavors. We just feel we want to do something to say thank you.”

The future?

Lockhart has hopes for the future of the tram.

“There’s things we would like to see happen,” he said. “There’s a possibility someone besides me could think (more) about winter sports.”

But for now, they just want to keep improving what’s there.

“We’ve been going 50 years and we’d like to add a few more things,” he said. “We don’t know what the life of the lift is, so we’ll have to see.”



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Tavi Jacobson and Maddie Nordtvedt, playing as Erik and Ariel respectively, rehearse “The Little Mermaid Jr.” behind the Elgin Opera House on Tuesday, June 15, 2021.

THEATER

Continued from Page 1A

of 2021.

“The Junior Theater Festival’s core objective has always been to celebrate and support young people and their teachers, who make the world a better place one musical at a time,” Junior Theater Festival CEO Timothy McDonald said in a press release. “This past year has taken a tremendous toll on students and educators, and our team is drawing on all our creativity and problem-solving to give young people the chance to come together with people who love this art form just as much as they do.”

According to Hunter Adams, who has been with OHYA since its inception in 2017, the best part of the festival is the sense of community that he has experienced every year.

“There is nothing but support and love from everybody competing, it’s not really as much of a competition as it is a celebration of the arts,” he said.

Adams, who plays Sebastian in the performance, recently graduated from La Grande High School with hopes of one day performing on Broadway. In 2019, he won the Outstanding Performance by a male. Now in his last year, Adams says he has been inspired by some of the younger members of the group.

“It’s been amazing to get to see them,” Adams said of the younger members. “We have a lot of new kids, and I’ve just seen them put their heart and soul into the performance, and it’s really inspiring.”

Besides performing



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Hunter Adams, playing as Sebastian, rehearses with the Opera House Youth Actors outside the Elgin Opera House on Tuesday, June 15, 2021. Adams, a recent high school graduate and long-time member of the theater, will be heading to Sugar Land, Texas, along with the rest of the cast for a theater festival on June 25-27.

PUTTING ON A SHOW

Opera House Youth Actors will be performing a show for the public at the Elgin Opera House at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, June 22.

and watching the 49 other groups that will be in attendance, participants will attend workshops and professional performances. According to Hale, this festival is a great opportunity for students to develop their skills and learn from their peers.

“It’s really exciting, there’s a great energy to this festival. The kids get to go and be with other musical theater kids all over the world,” Hale said. “It’s been amazing getting to see these kids grow as a group and individuals. We want them to be successful and just leave the festival being proud of what they’ve done.”

Prepare for unexpected power outages with a Generac home standby generator

SCHEDULE YOUR FREE IN-HOME ASSESSMENT TODAY!
877-557-1912

FREE 7-Year Extended Warranty*
A \$695 Value!

Offer valid March 16, 2020 - June 30, 2020

Special Financing Available
Subject to Credit Approval

*Terms & Conditions Apply

A Smarter Way to Power Your Home.

REQUEST A FREE QUOTE!

ACT NOW TO RECEIVE A \$300 SPECIAL OFFER!*
1 (844) 989-2328

*Offer value when purchased at retail. Solar panels sold separately.

LeafFilter GUTTER PROTECTION

NO MORE GUTTER CLEANING, OR YOUR MONEY BACK GUARANTEED!

CALL US TODAY FOR A FREE ESTIMATE 1-855-536-8838

15% OFF YOUR ENTIRE PURCHASE*

AND!

10% OFF SENIOR & MILITARY DISCOUNTS

+

5% OFF TO THE FIRST 50 CALLERS!*

Promo Number: 285 Mon-Thurs: 8am-11pm, Fri-Sat: 8am-5pm, Sun: 2pm-8pm EST

*For those who qualify. One coupon per household. No obligation estimate valid for 1 year. ** Offer valid at estimate only. CSLB# 1025795 DGPL# 10783658-5501 License# 7056 License# 50145 License# 41354 License# 99538 License# 120344 License# 218204 License# 603 233 977 License# 2102012066 License# 2106121046 License# 2705132153A License# LEAFFW62ZJ License# WWS6912 License# WC-29988-H17 Nassau HC License# H01067000 Registration# 176447 Registration# HC564905 Registration# C127229 Registration# C127230 Registration# 366520918 Registration# PC6475 Registration# R731804 Registration# 139V0995900 Registration# PAB69383 Suffolk HC License# 522294