



The Observer, File

**Eddie Cascio, shown in his La Grande home in 2015, owned a Las Vegas restaurant, Pizza Roma, frequented by Elvis Presley. He died on June 17, 2021, at 80 years old.**

## CASCIO

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The Cascio family moved to Long Island, New York, in 1956, where they ran a motel and restaurant. Although he did not graduate high school, Cascio learned English and earned his GED while working at the pizzeria. It was there that he developed a love for food and serving others, which he never stopped pursuing.

"He loved making food, cooking and catering to people, that was where he was the happiest," Colleen Cascio said. "It was always elegant, never sloppily put together. He had a lot of pride in the food that he put out, whether we were in Las Vegas or California or La Grande."

In New York, Cascio and his siblings worked at the family restaurant and enjoyed holiday vacations to Upstate New York and the surrounding area.

"He was a lot older than me, so he was almost like a parent to me. He would take me to the park and he helped me learn how to cook," Claudio Cascio, the youngest Cascio sibling, said. "Every summer, we would go on hunting trips and pick cherries and spend every Fourth of July on the Hudson River."

In 1972, the family moved to Las Vegas, where Eddie and his father owned a motel and restaurant. Within months, Cascio became a small celebrity with his popular guests and frequent appearances at the casinos around town.

"I would say that would be the best years of my life, as far as having a good time," Cascio said in a 2015 interview. "Because in Las Vegas, you know how it is, Elvis said if you see it once, you'll never be the same again."

### Las Vegas celebrity on screen and streets

In Las Vegas, Cascio filmed several commercials and would go out wearing his Elvis suit, greeting pedestrians and always saying yes to pictures. He also had minor roles in several films, but his love was always his restaurant.

Pizza Roma didn't just introduce Cascio to celebrities and their fans — he met his wife when she walked in looking for a job.

"I was a teenager and I went in there one day for lunch after school and I asked him if he had any job openings," Colleen Cascio recalls. "I started washing dishes and I worked my way up, and I got to know him very well."

Colleen Cascio looks back on the memories of her husband with a fondness for his "bigger-than-life" personality, which she believes was the reason he found friends wherever he went.

In 1983, the couple moved to a farmhouse in Elgin, and they owned the Cock & Bull restaurant

in La Grande. According to Colleen Cascio, Eddie Cascio was tired of the fast pace of Las Vegas and had wanted a simple place to retire, but he fell in love with the La Grande restaurant.

Although Cascio was raised Catholic, he was never particularly religious until he started studying with Jehovah's Witnesses around the time the couple moved to Elgin. After several years of being involved in the church, Cascio was baptized in 1991. From this point forward, religion was a big part of his life.

"I was very happy when I saw he had found his calling through religion," Claudio Cascio said. "We didn't always agree, but I think it was really good for him and made him a better person."

Eddie and Colleen moved back to Las Vegas for four years following Cascio's father's death, but they decided to return to La Grande, where they owned Palermo's, a restaurant in Island City, between 1997 and 2004.

### Enjoying a quiet life in Eastern Oregon

In 2004, the stress of the restaurant became overwhelming, and Cascio unofficially retired. For several years, he was able to enjoy a quiet life working on classic cars and attending services at the Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall. He also drove cars all over the Pacific Northwest for Legacy Ford and ran a painting business for several years in La Grande.

However, Cascio's separation from the restaurant industry was cut short when the couple bought the Sugar Shack in La Grande in 2019. Unfortunately, the business became too much of a hassle and closed after three months.

On Nov. 23, 2020, Cascio was driving along a highway when he collided with a log truck, which caused damage to his health for the next several months. Along with a physical disability, his mental health began to suffer, but he never let the accident affect his positive attitude.

"After his accident, things changed for him. He became closer to God, and he grew much deeper in his faith," Colleen Cascio said.

Cascio died on June 17, from complications from a gallbladder disease. He is remembered as the larger-than-life personality who was willing to help anyone with any problem, no matter the size.

"If anyone ever needed help, he would find a way to help, no matter what," Claudio Cascio said. "A lot of people loved him, and his legacy is the guy who put his most into everything, no matter who he was with or what he was doing."

A service will be held at a later date. Arrangements are by Daniels-Knopp Funeral & Cremation Center in La Grande.

## BUSINESS

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required' sign up and are making masks available, but we haven't been enforcing it so much," Sean Lerner, a barista at La Grande's Liberty Theatre Cafe, said. "Employees here are still going to be wearing masks, maybe until the vaccine rates go up more."

The cafe opened in February and does not have indoor seating options, partially because the tables have not been built. Lerner has noticed a wide variety of reactions from customers regarding their lack of indoor dining options.

"We've had some angry people, some have been mad about it, but most people have been pretty understanding," Lerner said.

Some residents think the restrictions should have been lifted months ago.

"The restrictions should have been taken back six months ago," Shari Webb,

of Summerville, said. "I believe in herd immunity. I'm old, I have medical issues, but if I get it, I get it. If you're old, and you get it, who says you're going to die?"

Experts seem to disagree.

A 2020 study from the Glenn Center for Biology of Aging Research at Harvard found that adults older than 65 represent 80% of COVID-19 hospitalizations and have a 23 times higher chance of death than those younger than 65.

However, with Union County now averaging only two new cases per day, many residents are eager to leave their houses with less fear, and business owners are ready to welcome them back.

Another change with the new state laws is that bars can stay open until 2:30 a.m. Since the onset of the pandemic, Oregon bars have not been open past midnight.

"We can stay open later, now until 2:30, and it makes

a huge difference because a lot of the time, younger people are coming out at 11 or so, so they're able to spend more time in here," Patsy Davidson, a manager at Longbranch Bar and Eats in La Grande, said.

Longbranch has been operating at half capacity for most of the pandemic, which can be inconvenient for business.

"It's nice to be able to have full capacity because people by themselves aren't going to be taking up a whole table or part of the bar," Davidson said.

Archie Hook, pastor at First Christian Church in La Grande, says he is looking forward to having services at full capacity.

"It'll give us a sense of well-being, and we won't have to be so afraid," Hook said. "I think if this pandemic has done anything, it's taken away our fellowship, and we're looking forward to getting that back."

A local church was connected to one of the biggest COVID-19 outbreaks over

the past year. Last spring, more than 240 COVID-19 cases were linked to the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church in Island City.

The First Christian Church has required masks since it reopened in the summer of 2020, but has now lifted that rule.

"We've had social distancing, masks and limited capacity, but it feels relieving to not require masks anymore," Hook said.

Armando Robles, owner of La Fiesta Mexican Restaurant & Lounge, La Grande, agrees that the updated rules create a better experience for customers. For several months the inside dining room was closed, but it has now opened back to its normal capacity.

"It's great having customers back in here," Robles said. "Without our customers, we are nothing. We are only here because of them. So it's great being able to see people's faces again."

## WEATHER

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Carman described it as a "train wreck." Still, he spoke like he felt more fortunate than rattled.

"I can replace all this, but I can not replace a son," Tom Carman said.

Shortly after the windstorm hit something else remarkable happened — four men with chain saws offered to help cut up the fallen tree and other wooden debris in the yard. The men waited patiently for two hours until Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative representatives indicated that it was safe to proceed. The volunteers then worked feverishly for close to two hours to clear the Carmans' front yard of its debris.

"Even people I didn't know were helping. They just jumped on it," Tom Carman said. "It is amazing how people come together."

The thunderstorm's strong winds also hit the portion of V Avenue that runs directly across the south side of Greenwood Elementary School hard. One falling tree seriously damaged the rear portion of a Toyota owned by Cindy Willcoxon, a V Avenue resident.

Willcoxon was terrified when she saw clouds from the thunderstorm coming in because they had a funnel type look and she said they behaved like those of a tornado. She instantly tried to get her son into one of the safest places one can be during a tornado.

"I told my son to get into the bathtub," Willcoxon said.

Willcoxon understands tornadoes well because her father grew up in Nebraska, where tornadoes are common, and told her a lot about their behavior.

Willcoxon said she



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

**Bev Carman walks out of her La Grande home on Thursday, July 1, 2021, after a severe windstorm and thunderstorm uprooted a massive spruce tree next to her home the night before, damaging her car and collapsing the porch awning and roof. The tree, according to insurance inspectors, showed no signs of rot and was otherwise healthy.**

remained rattled after the storm.

"I was so scared I could not sleep," she said.

Wind readings at La Grande/Union County Airport indicate that there were gusts of up to 42 miles per hour on Wednesday, according to the National Weather Service office in Pendleton. The wind which hit north La Grande was likely much higher.

"The wind must have been blowing at least 50 to 60 miles per hour to create as much damage as it did," said Roger Cloutier, a forecaster for the National Weather Service in Pendleton.

### Power outages

The high winds damaged a number of electrical lines, leaving many homes without power. A total of 1,700 Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative members lost electrical power in La Grande and 1,000 members lost their electricity in the Elgin-Imbler area, according to Joe Hathaway of OTEC. Power in the Elgin-Imbler area

was restored before or just after midnight and most homes and businesses in La Grande had their electricity back on by 2 a.m. on Thursday, July 1. All OTEC members in Union County had their power restored by 10 a.m. Thursday.

Union County OTEC crews, assisted by linemen called in from Baker County, worked for 13 to 14 straight hours to get power lines running again.

"It was an all-hands-on-deck situation," Hathaway said.

Two power poles blown down by the high winds had to be replaced.

### Wildfires ignited

The thunderstorm coincided with the outbreak of about 27 small wildfires in Northeastern Oregon and Southeastern Washington. Lightning strikes from the storm ignited six of the fires and the causes of 10 are unknown, according to the Blue Mountain Interagency Dispatch Center's website. All of the wildfires were one-tenth of an acre or less except for the three-acre

Clear Fire 19 miles west of North Powder, whose cause is unknown. The Clear Fire today is contained and all of the others are controlled, according to Renae Crippen, manager of the Blue Mountain Dispatch Center.

### High heat

The June 30 thunderstorm struck after another day of extreme heat. The high temperature for La Grande on June 30 was 104 degrees according to a reading at the Union County airport. At another La Grande area site the high temperature was 108 degrees according to an observer for the National Weather Service. Both readings topped La Grande's previous June 30 record of 99 degrees.

The 108-degree mark ties La Grande's all time record, first set July 18, 1960, according to data from the National Weather Service cited in The Observer at the time. The record was tied four decades later on July 13, 2002.



**We're here for you when you need us.**

If you're still deciding whether or not to get vaccinated for COVID-19, we encourage you to talk it over with your trusted health care provider.

**It's your choice to make.**

You and your provider know your health and your body best. Trust your provider to understand, listen to and respect your questions and concerns. Talk about it.

**Then, make up your mind.**

There is a lot of information, *and misinformation*, surrounding the COVID vaccines.

**BEFORE YOU SAY NO,  
TALK TO YOUR PROVIDER.**