

# THE OBSERVER

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## Paying tribute to friends lost to pandemic

Jim Arnott has seen three friends die from COVID-19 in the last 16 months

By **DICK MASON**  
The Observer

UNION — With pen in hand and heart on his sleeve, Jim Arnott is helping the state step up its campaign to convince more Oregonians to get vaccinated for COVID-19.

Arnott has lost three friends to COVID-19 over the past 16 months, a trauma he has written about in a piece now part of the Vaccine Voices series the Oregon Health Authority is carrying on its COVID-19 blog. The piece was written based on answers to a questionnaire Arnott completed for the Vaccine Voices series.



Arnott

All three of the friends Arnott writes about contracted COVID-19 before vaccinations were available.

“Losing friends is so painful,” Arnott said.

The Union resident focuses on the closest of the friends he lost in the blog, a Colorado man he knew for five decades whom he identifies as “KP.”

“I miss him so much,” Arnott said.

He wrote about KP to honor him and found the process heart-wrenching.

“I do not want to write any more obituaries,” he said.

Arnott said his friend was a self-employed engineer and was blessed with a mind that was as curious as it was innovative.

“One of the things he was trying to do was develop a helicopter which could run on autopilot,” Arnott said.

KP was also a woodworker who coveted the wood from the stump of a walnut tree Arnott had. Today Arnott still has this wood from the stump KP

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Workers remove dirt from Trice Community Field at Pioneer Park in La Grande on Thursday, Aug. 5, 2021.

## Project breaks ground

Installation of turf field, other renovations underway at Pioneer Park

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Construction workers have broken ground on a project in La Grande that will create one of the top baseball and softball facilities in the region.

Optimist Field and Trice Community Field at Pioneer Park will both be getting facelifts, with turf being installed on both fields and drainage problems being fixed at Trice Community Field. The city of La Grande, Eastern Oregon University, the La Grande School District and a number of volunteers have combined funds and efforts for the project.

“It’s going to make us the premier baseball and softball facility in Eastern Oregon,” La Grande Parks and Recreation Director Stu Spence said.

Both fields will have turf installed on the infields by Northwest Sports Turf Solutions, a turf company based in Philomath. Three turf companies made offers, but Northwest Turf Solutions was chosen at the La Grande City Council meeting on Wednesday, July 7, 2021.

Upon completion of the project, the fields will be used by La Grande High School baseball and softball teams, Eastern Oregon University baseball, Parks and Rec events and Little League competitions. Funding from the project is coming from \$150,000 from the school district, \$75,000 from Eastern Oregon University and \$25,000 plus labor and equipment from the city.



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Anna Gambill, with La Grande Parks and Recreation, on Thursday, Aug. 5, 2021, drives a pickup truck between ball fields under construction in Pioneer Park.

The city will also be handling future maintenance costs once the renovations are completed.

### Project timeline

Construction crews have begun digging up the outfield at Trice Community Field, which will be one of the larger tasks involved in the project. In addition to infield turf, drainage issues in the outfield will be improved.

The land where the softball field’s outfield is now located was a wetlands area. As of right now, stormwater does not fully drain properly, causing unplayable conditions at times. The Pioneer Park project will address and fix these



Spence



McKinley

drainage problems, in addition to installing fencing around the perimeter of Trice Community Field.

Prior to the turf installation, work crews will be digging up the current fields and then laying rock that will go underneath the turf. Sod or seed will then be installed in the outfield at Trice Community Field after the drainage maintenance is completed.

According to Spence, turf will arrive in the next four to six weeks. The goal of the project is to have all outfield renovations completed and all the rock laid by the time the turf arrives. At that point, the job will be mostly turned over

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## Judge rejects B2H challenge

Right-of-way across public land for project ruled in compliance

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Press

PORTLAND — A federal judge has rejected arguments by opponents of a 300-mile transmission line in Eastern Oregon who sought to stop the project for allegedly violating environmental laws.

U.S. District Judge Michael Simon has determined the U.S. Bureau of Land Management approved a right-of-way across public land for the project in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and Federal Lands Policy Management Act.

The Stop B2H Coalition and other plaintiffs filed a complaint in 2019 claiming the transmission line between Boardman and the Hemingway substation in Idaho should have been more closely scrutinized for impacts to the greater sage grouse and other factors.

The proposal has also stirred controversy for taking farmland out of production and disrupting agricultural practices, such as aerial pesticide spraying. Jim Kreider of La Grande, co-chair of the Stop B2H Coalition, said his group is meeting with attorneys to consider what its next step will be in its effort to prevent the transmission line project from moving forward.

“Of course we don’t agree with the judge’s decision and the coalition is evaluating the opinion and assessing our next steps regarding an appeal,” Kreider said.

The complaint filed by Stop B2H and other plaintiffs argued that BLM should have updated its environmental analysis of the project — known as a final environmental impact statement or FEIS — with new information about sage grouse populations, which have plummeted from historic levels.

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## Attendance figures strong for Union County Fair

By **DICK MASON**  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Union County Fair, revived after a year’s absence, ended on a promising note Saturday, Aug. 7.

The fair drew 6,434 people Saturday, its second highest attendance for a single day in the past five years.

“We finished with

a bang,” said first-year Union County Fair Manager Kathy Gover-Shaw.

The only day in the past five years the fair had higher attendance was on Aug. 2, 2019, when about 7,200 came, many to see nationally known rhythm and blues artist Curtis Salgado.

Gover-Shaw credits the fair’s strong finale to the popularity of its evening entertainment, the

Wasteland Kings band and a strong turnout for its annual FFA-4H auction. The popular sale had 138 sellers, up from 127 in 2020 when it was the only fair event conducted because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The four-day attendance for the fair was 13,893, which is close to what the fair has averaged

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

The Hog Wild Days piggy train visits the Union County Fair on Friday, Aug. 6, 2021.

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Full forecast on the back of B section		
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