

THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

October 21, 2021

THURSDAY EDITION

\$1.50



Nearing the finish line?

Recent grants show end in sight for Liberty Theatre project

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Things are looking up at the Liberty Theatre in downtown La Grande. The Liberty Theatre Foundation, the organization renovating the historic theater, recently announced it received a \$250,000 grant from the MJ Murdock Charitable Trust in Vancouver, Washington. The most recent funds, along with \$10,000 in grant money from the Wildhorse Foundation in late June, bring the project within reach of completion.

“We’re approximately three-quarters completed with the overall project and we were recently awarded \$250,000 from the Murdock Charitable Trust, which really takes us over the final hump,” Vice Chair of the Liberty Theatre Foundation Jeff Clark said at the most recent La Grande Urban Renewal Agency meeting.

The project was originally put into place in 2009, when the nonprofit organization was created by La Grande locals. After years of renovations, the end is getting closer for the historic venue.

The MJ Murdock Charitable Trust will close the gap in needed funds to complete the project, according to Liberty Theatre Foundation Chair Ashely O’Toole in a press release.

“When an organization of their stature has such a high belief in our project and confidence in our abilities, it gives us all the more motivation and confidence that we can get it done — despite the challenges we’ve been facing during the pandemic,” O’Toole said.

See, *Liberty*/Page A5

INSIDE DROUGHT’S IMPACT ON THE NORTHEAST



Supply chain casualties

Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

A young boy walks out of the Riveria Activity Center’s kitchen after receiving a free lunch on Thursday, June 10, 2021. Programs such as the Summer Seamless Option, Summer Food Service Program and other school lunch programs are slated to continue despite supply chain problems.

School lunches in disarray amid nation’s supply chain troubles

By **ALEX WITTWER**
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Supply chain issues gripping the nation have found a new, unexpected victim — local schools. Those issues prompted state leaders with the Oregon Department of Education to issue temporary waivers for schools for nutritional requirements.

That meant that long-time staples of the cafeteria such as pizza or spaghetti were absent. Officials grappled with brokering deals with new suppliers to get food to the students.

With supplies short on hand, local school lunch cooks had to improvise to get food out to hungry students.

“There are products we’re only supposed to serve for child nutrition, and all of the pizza was zeroed out — it was nothing — so basically I did pizza that I put my own toppings on,” said Tanya



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Kristi Ritchie, head cook with La Grande High School, hands out lunches on Tuesday, Oct. 19, 2021. A shortage of five-compartment lunch trays led to students receiving plastic bag lunches. Ritchie, who has been an employee with La Grande High School for 21 years, laments the ordering hiccups and menu changes due to the pandemic and supply chain issues.

Corta, a kitchen supervisor with Imbler School District. “We’re running on a tight ship here.”

Tight ship or not, the supply chain woes leave little certainty about the menus — typically planned a month

in advance — and whether or not the ingredients will even be available. That puts extra strain on kitchen workers and supervisors.

See, *Lunch*/Page A5

State vaccination mandate goes into effect



Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

Demonstrators outside of La Grande City Hall protest against vaccine mandates on Saturday, Sept. 18, 2021.

Organizations in Union County affected by mandates feel minimal impact

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH** and **DICK MASON**
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Union County residents can breathe a sigh of relief.

The state vaccination mandate that took effect earlier this week has not resulted in a mass exodus of employees that would hobble its public schools, health care services and state government agencies.

Under Executive Order 21-29 all public school staff for students in kindergarten through 12th grade, health care workers and employees of state government agencies must have been vaccinated for COVID-19 by Oct. 18 or have been granted an exception on religious or medical grounds. It appears that this order has resulted in only a limited number of employees leaving their positions in Union County.

Grande Ronde Hospital was directly affected by the deadline, with health care workers falling under the umbrella of the vaccination mandate.

See, *Mandate*/Page A5

INDEX

Business & Ag.....B1	Horoscope.....B2	Spiritual Life.....A6
Classified.....B2	Lottery.....A2	Sports.....A7
Comics.....B5	Obituaries.....A3	State.....A10
Crossword.....B2	Opinion.....A4	Sudoku.....B5
Dear Abby.....B6	Records.....A3	Weather.....B6

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight 49 LOW Showers late		Friday 50/42 Rain, some heavy
--	--	--	--

CONTACT US

541-963-3161
Issue 124
3 sections, 36 pages
La Grande, Oregon

Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page A4.

