

TODAY

On Dec. 18, 2019, the U.S. House impeached President Donald Trump on two charges, sending his case to the Senate for trial; the articles of impeachment accused him of abusing the power of the presidency to investigate rival Joe Biden ahead of the 2020 election and then obstructing Congress' investigation. (The trial would end in acquittal by the Senate.)

In 1787, New Jersey became the third state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

In 1863, in a speech to the Prussian Parliament, Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck declared, "Politics is not an exact science."

In 1865, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, abolishing slavery, was declared in effect by Secretary of State William H. Seward.

In 1892, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky's ballet "The Nutcracker" publicly premiered in St. Petersburg, Russia; although now considered a classic, it received a generally negative reception from critics.

In 1917, Congress passed the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibiting "the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors" and sent it to the states for ratification.

In 1940, Adolf Hitler signed a secret directive ordering preparations for a Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. (Operation Barbarossa was launched in June 1941.)

In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the government's wartime evacuation of people of Japanese descent from the West Coast while at the same time ruling that "concededly loyal" Americans of Japanese ancestry could not continue to be detained.

In 1956, Japan was admitted to the United Nations.

In 1957, the Shippingport Atomic Power Station in Pennsylvania, the first nuclear facility to generate electricity in the United States, went on line. (It was taken out of service in 1982.)

In 1958, the world's first communications satellite, SCORE (Signal Communication by Orbiting Relay Equipment), nicknamed "Chat-terbox," was launched by the United States aboard an Atlas rocket.

In 2000, the Electoral College cast its ballots, with President-elect George W. Bush receiving the expected 271; Al Gore, however, received 266, one fewer than expected, because of a District of Columbia Democrat who'd left her ballot blank to protest the district's lack of representation in Congress.

In 2003, two federal appeals courts ruled the U.S. military could not indefinitely hold prisoners without access to lawyers or American courts.

Ten years ago: The last convoy of heavily armored U.S. troops left Iraq, crossing into Kuwait in darkness in the final moments of a nine-year war. Vaclav Havel, 75, the dissident playwright who became Czechoslovakia's first democratically elected president, died in the northern Czech Republic.

Five years ago: A suicide bomber blew himself up outside a military camp in the southern Yemeni city of Aden, killing at least 52 soldiers; the Islamic State group's Yemen-based affiliate claimed responsibility. Actress Zsa Zsa Gabor died at her Los Angeles home at age 99.

One year ago: The U.S. added a second COVID-19 vaccine to its arsenal, as the Food and Drug Administration authorized an emergency rollout of the vaccine developed by Moderna Inc. and the National Institutes of Health; a vaccine from Pfizer Inc. and Germany's BioNTech was already being dispensed. Vice President Mike Pence became the highest ranking U.S. official to receive the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in a live-television event aimed at reassuring Americans the shot was safe.

LOTTERY

Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2021

Megabucks
13-34-38-42-43-48
Jackpot: \$7.1 million

Lucky Lines
3-6-10-16-19-24-27-31
Estimated jackpot: \$47,000

Powerball
19-20-40-42-59
Powerball: 15
Power Play: 3
Jackpot: \$353 million

Win for Life
37-58-75-77

Pick 4
1 p.m.: 6-8-8-2
4 p.m.: 9-8-5-6
7 p.m.: 0-6-5-2
10 p.m.: 3-4-3-4

Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021

Lucky Lines
2-5-12-16-20-23-26-31
Jackpot: \$48,000

Pick 4
1 p.m.: 6-9-6-0
4 p.m.: 4-5-3-4
7 p.m.: 2-0-5-5
10 p.m.: 5-6-7-7

Rallying to help

Friends, family aid Elgin couple badly injured in winter crash

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

ELGIN — Community members are rallying to help a couple who were badly injured in a recent car accident.

Michael Whitten and his girlfriend, Suzanne Hoffman, were hurt in a winter-related crash outside of Elgin on Monday, Dec. 6, and are facing hefty medical bills. Friends and family have come together in helping the two overcome the injuries and afford their bills ahead of the holiday season.

"We're super appreciative," Whitten said. "There's so many emotions to describe the support we've received."

Following the first snowfall of the season in Union

County, a truck collided with Whitten and Hoffman as the two vehicles were driving over a bridge near Elgin. Whitten was hospitalized locally for his injuries, while Hoffman was transported via Life Flight to Boise.

Whitten stated that he was driving when they were crossing the bridge into Elgin just before Timber's Feedery around 10 a.m. With the recent snowfall, the vehicle slid on a slab of ice as the truck was passing. The truck hit Hoffman's side, leaving her severely injured.

"My list of injuries is almost too long to list," Hoffman said.

Hoffman has undergone a number of medical procedures due to injuries to her knee, ribs, hip and brain. Whitten had surgery for a fractured foot on Dec. 14 and is now going back and forth between Boise and Elgin to look out for the couple's kids, who are ages 13, 10 and 8.

As the medical bills stacked up and the holi-

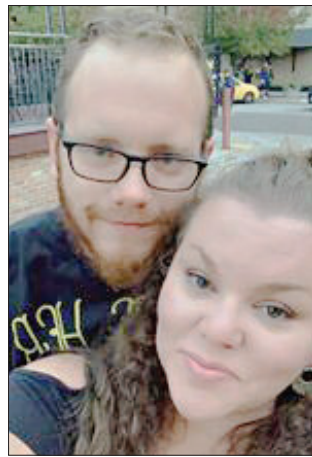
days approached, the couple found themselves without their only vehicle and looking to still take care of three children. Friends and family showed their concern by creating an online fundraiser to help the couple get through their recovery.

"I started the fundraiser in attempts to help them bridge the gaps for their medical care, help their family with the three children and help the family who has been in Boise with Suzanne," said Nicole Billman, who organized the fundraiser.

Billman grew up with Hoffman and the two have been friends since the seventh grade. Hoffman works for Oregon Family Support Network and Michael works at Walmart. The couple has resided in Elgin for the past four years.

"We will get through this stronger than ever, especially with the village we have behind us," Hoffman said.

As of Dec. 16, the



Suzanne Hoffman/
Contributed Photo

Suzanne Hoffman and Michael Whitten pose for a photo together. The Elgin couple were badly injured in an automobile crash on Monday, Dec. 6, 2021, prompting friends and family to come together to help with medical bills and care for their three children.

GoFundMe for the couple had raised just under \$3,000 from 34 donors. The goal of the fundraiser is listed at \$15,000. The online fundraiser can be accessed by going to www.gofundme.com and searching for "Help Michael After Car Accident." "We're doing better," Whitten said. "We're getting there."

County to pay off \$300K loan

Union County received loan nearly a decade ago to purchase Baum Industrial Park

By DICK MASON
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Union County will soon pay off a \$300,000 loan it received from the Union County Economic Development Corporation about 10 years ago to purchase the Baum Industrial Park.

The Union County Board of Commissioners voted 3-0 on Wednesday, Dec. 15, to pay off the loan plus the remaining interest, which is about \$4,300.

"This is a huge milestone," said Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage.

Union County received the loan about a decade ago and had been making annual interest payments but not payments on the principal amount. The county is now able to pay off the loan because of the sale of four lots at the Baum Industrial Park, 62500 Commerce Road, over the past 18 months, Beverage said. The lots at the park range in size from 1-5 acres.

The businesses purchasing the lots are all Union County firms that needed land to expand. Beverage said the recent sales reflect the strength of a portion of Northeastern Oregon's economy.

"Some businesses are really thriving and others are having difficulty," she said.

Beverage said it is a relief knowing the loan is set to be paid off.

"We are free and clear," she said.

Matt Scarfo, chair of the board of commissioners, is

also pleased with the move.

"It always feels good to get a loan paid off," he said. Commissioner Paul Anderes agrees.

"Anytime you can retire a debt, it is a good thing," he said.

Anderes said the fact that the Baum Industrial Park is drawing in more businesses means that there will be future job growth in Union County.

Ten businesses are now operating at Baum Industrial Park and employ between 250 and 300 people. There are about five other businesses at Baum Industrial Park, already operating in other parts of Union County, which have purchased lots for the purpose of expanding in the future.

Companies purchasing land at Baum Industrial Park must adhere to rules of operation set by Union County.

Land at the Baum Industrial Park costs \$19,900 an acre. Infrastructure available to businesses at the site includes water service, sewer service, fire hydrants, electrical power and fiber optic service. This infrastructure was paid for with a \$400,000 loan Union County received from Business Oregon, a state agency that promotes business development. The loan from Business Oregon was paid off by Union County two years ago.

The Union County Board of Commissioners' future plans for Baum Industrial Park include the installation of a truck-to-railroad spur, connected to Idaho Northern Railroad.

Truck drivers would be able to load items onto rail cars at the site. Beverage said this would make it easier for companies to ship items throughout the United States.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Christmas decorations sit on the shelves at the People Helping People second-hand store in La Grande on Friday, Dec. 17, 2021. Thrift stores have seen an increase in customers as supply chain issues hamper large chain retailers' stock of Christmas goods.

Second-hand Christmas

Demand for holiday decorations increases at thrift stores

By ALEX WITTWER
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Santa is getting a little help this year decorating the town with the help of second-hand stores.

Local thrift stores are seeing an uptick in Christmas shoppers, especially new ones, as supply chain issues dim prospects for artificial trees, decorations and lighting at big box retail stores.

"The amount of people buying Christmas (decorations) has been a lot bigger in the second-hand stores this year," said Randi Stauffer, a manager at People Helping People, 2635 Bearco Loop, La Grande. "The cool thing about second-hand stores is you're able to find that vintage Christmas, that antique Christmas and that retro Christmas."

The second-hand store's warehouse has aisles and boxes full of ornaments and Christmas supplies, including retro-looking bulbs and ornaments. A discerning eye might catch a personalized snowman ornament engraved with the name John in its base, or a red bulb decoration emblazoned with a family photo from decades past.

Walmarts in La Grande and Pendleton had sold out of artificial trees as of Thursday, Dec. 16. Christmas lights and decorations that once lined the shelves in Pendleton also took a tremendous hit, with very little supplies remaining. In Hermiston, the stock of

Christmas supplies remains relatively healthy, though the supply of artificial trees are dwindling.

The price for consumer goods — like Christmas decorations — also has increased due to global problems with shipping costs, labor shortages and fuel prices, according to numerous reports from the New York Times, Washington Post and Reuters.

Those self-same supply chain woes haven't done much to hurt the supply of Christmas supplies at second-hand stores, however, which stock their shelves primarily through donations by individuals and estates. That means that as supplies dwindle at the big box retail stores, customers of all ages flock to the second-hand stores in search of Christmas goods.

"There are new faces we've never seen before," Stauffer said. "We're having the younger generations come in and get more Christmas stuff too."

A manager with People Helping People in Pendleton corroborated the increase in businesses as seen at the La Grande store, stating that the staff has also seen an influx of customers filling the store looking for Christmas deals. That trend has only increased in the run-up toward the holiday.

"And still — people are still getting Christmas trees, they're still getting the supplies — the Christmas lights (sales) have not stopped," Stauffer said. "We've probably sold the most Christmas lights we've ever had over the year, this year."

Fire officials warn of Christmas tree dangers

By ALEX WITTWER
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — It's that time of year again when snowfall fills the valley, lights twinkle from decorated homes and firefighters urge residents to place fire safety at the top of their Christmas lists.

"Although Christmas tree fires are not common, when they do occur, they're more likely to be serious," La Grande Fire Department Capt. Merle Laci said in a public service announcement video.

In a video from the National Fire Protection Agency, a test environment shows a dry Christmas tree quickly turning into a raging inferno, devouring a room in less than 30 seconds and turning everything, including the presents wrapped under the tree, into blackened charcoal.

"If people keep their trees up too long, they can get super dry. If you have an actual tree, water it on a regular basis," La Grande Fire Department Chief Emmitt Cornford said.

Watering regularly can keep the tree from getting too dry. Fire officials also urge residents to use only UL approved lighting for their trees, and to keep them away from any potential heat source. More than one third of Christmas tree fires are started due to an electrical issue, according to the NFPA.

"Christmas trees, once they dry out in your home, they can become a fire hazard. And if they do catch on fire they can grow very quickly in your home," Laci said.

Laci said residents should turn off their Christmas lights when they go to bed for the night, or when they leave for extended periods of time. As well,

keeping electrical sockets from overloading is also vitally important.

But when it comes time to discard of the jolly pine, firefighters urge residents to use recycling services instead of taking matters into their own hands.

"They are not something you want to burn in the house," Cornford said. "Years ago, we had a fire that turned into a house fire because a gentleman tried to burn his old, dry Christmas tree in the fireplace. It goes a lot faster than people understand. Best to get rid of it."

Laci urged residents not to toss away the tree out of sight, allowing the tree to dry even further, but to properly dispose of the tree through a recycling program.

"After Christmas, get rid of the tree," she said. "Don't leave the tree in the garage or in the home. They're a fire hazard, and you've just moved the fire hazard from one place to another."

NEWS BRIEFS

OSP conducts search warrant on dispensary

UNION COUNTY — The Oregon State Police Drug Enforcement Section recently conducted a search warrant on an unlicensed marijuana dispensary in Union County.

On Thursday, Dec. 16, OSP and other local law enforcement served a search warrant at Highway 30 Cannabis on Adams Avenue in La Grande after receiving tips about unlawful distribution of marijuana products at the store. Law enforcement also served a secondary search at a storefront operation located on Stackland Road in Cove.

Through a long-term investigation, law enforcement reported that Highway 30 was not operating as a licensed dispensary through the State of Oregon and was reportedly distributing marijuana unlawfully. Investigators sought a warrant for Unlawful Possession of Marijuana, Unlawful Manufacturing of Marijuana Items, Unlawful Delivery of Marijuana Items, Laundering a Monetary Instrument and Engaging in a Financial Transaction in Property from Unlawful Activity.

During the search, law enforcement seized evidence from the locations and no arrests were made. According to OSP's press release, arrests and charges are to be expected in the near future.

The investigation into the unlicensed marijuana dispensaries is still under investigation by law enforcement.

OSP was aided by the La Grande Police Department, Baker City Police Department and Homeland Security Investigations.

Police identify driver in fatal Interstate 84 crash

NORTH POWDER — An early morning single-vehicle accident near North Powder left the driver of a Dodge 3500 pickup deceased on Wednesday, Dec. 15.

The individual driving the vehicle was identified by the Oregon State Police as Robert Miller, a 54-year-old from Shelton, Washington. Miller was fatally injured and pronounced dead at the scene of the accident.

Miller's vehicle, which was pulling a 20-foot trailer, left the westbound lane of Interstate 84 near the North Powder exit and descended into the median. The truck went down a steep embankment and flipped over on the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. The accident was reported to the Baker County 911 dispatch center at 6:29 a.m.

OSP Sgt. Dave Aydelotte stated that the driver was deceased by the time that first responders arrived at the crash site. Life Flight was called in for the incident, but turned around after hearing that Miller did not survive the crash.

Miller was the only passenger of the vehicle and no other cars were involved in the accident. According to OSP Senior Trooper Greg Retherford, the driver was wearing a seatbelt and did not eject out of the vehicle upon impact. I-84 was not blocked off following the accident.

The incident delayed Union Pacific Railroad trains throughout the morning until the scene was fully cleared. OSP was aided by the La Grande Fire Department, the Union County Sheriff's Office and Union Pacific Railroad.

—The Observer