

Ukraine demonstration to take place in La Grande

Organizers say it will be a chance for unity

By ALEX WITTWER
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — A demonstration in solidarity with Ukraine will take place in La Grande's Max Square on Saturday, March 12.

The demonstration — organized by Union County residents Anne Morrison, Cheryl Simpson and Kate Gekeler — will include a booth for donations to humanitarian efforts in Ukraine, a kids table, and live music featuring AI "Too Loud" MacLeod. Donations will go to three organizations that provide

aid to Ukrainian citizens and refugees.

"The purpose of this is to show unity for the people of Ukraine, and what they're going through right now," Morrison said of the event that begins at noon.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has transfixed the world as the humanitarian toll rises. Already, reports estimate that nearly 1.7 million Ukrainian citizens have become refugees.

Gekeler, who organized a food drive at Eastern Oregon University last month, said the aim of the demonstration is to raise funds and awareness for the people of Ukraine.

"We wanted to do it while it's still in the media and money can still get into Ukraine," she said. "As things progress, it gets

more and more difficult to get funds in to actually help people, and we want to make sure we can do that before things shut down."

Western countries, including the United States, have imposed increasingly heavy sanctions against Russia in the two weeks since the invasion began on Feb. 24, including limiting finances and money transfers from Russian banks and financial institutions, halting construction of the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline between Russia and Germany and targeted sanctions against Russia's top oligarchs.

The United States announced March 8 that it would no longer purchase Russian crude oil, striking at Russia's energy sector in the latest



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

A small group of demonstrators gather Wednesday, March 2, 2022, on the sidewalk at Roy Raley Park in Pendleton to show solidarity with Ukraine. A similar demonstration is planned for La Grande on Saturday, March 12, at Max Square beginning at noon.

round of sanctions.

The growing crisis has left Morrison appalled. She said the demonstration will allow residents to "come out and express their feelings and feel like they're

expressing their unity with people in Ukraine."

"It's horrifying to think that Russia has invaded a neighboring country," she said. "Europe has already been through a

war not really all that long ago and Russia has started another war. I think that if Russia prevails, it will be extremely repressive and oppressive for the people who live in Ukraine, and that's causing so much damage now in the entire country, disrupting everything."

Gekeler noted that the demonstration will not be partisan.

"This is an opportunity for unity," she said. "We have gone out of our way to make sure that the liberal groups as well as the conservatives and progressives have all gotten specific invitations because this is not about party politics. This is human beings caring about other human beings, and that's something we all agree on."

LIBERTY

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chain issues that made it much more difficult to get the necessary supplies and materials.

What has really made the situation worse is that the price of many materials has skyrocketed due to inflation.

"Some materials cost four or five times more than they did before the pandemic," O'Toole said.

This perfect storm of circumstances means that the Liberty renovation project is now set back considerably. O'Toole said that if the restoration is to be completed this year, \$600,000 must be raised.

O'Toole said that had there not been a pandemic, the work could easily have been completed before today.

"That absolutely would have been true," he said. "Had it not been for the pandemic and the price increases, the theater would be open now."

Unfortunately, that is not the case, which is

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— Ashley O'Toole, chair of the Liberty Theatre Foundation board

why a capital campaign is being organized for the final phase of restoration for the Liberty Theatre. O'Toole said the objective of the campaign is to raise \$350,000 in private donations and \$250,000 in state and private grants by July 1.

"If we can close the funding gap by then, the theater will be open this year," O'Toole said.

The historic venue was built around 1910 and first named The Arcade. It became known as the Liberty Theatre about 1930 after being remodeled. It then operated through 1959. The theater was closed from public view for about the next 50 years before the renovation project started.

Major work completed over the past six months includes the restoration of the theater's more than 100-year-old chandelier. The chandelier, which cost

\$10,000, features 42 lights.

The framework for a ticket booth also has been installed between a pair of double twin doors, exactly where it was located in 1930.

"We are re-creating the classic vaudeville entrance," O'Toole said.

Other work still being done includes major plumbing, electrical and ventilation and heating projects. O'Toole said workers have accomplished more the past six months than during any other periods during restoration of the venue.

"It is exciting to see us reaching major milestones frequently," he said.

Although much work remains to be done, O'Toole is excited about the strides that have been made recently.

"I am having to use my imagination less and less to visualize what it will look like," he said.



Dick Mason/The Observer

Ashley O'Toole, chair of the Liberty Theatre Foundation's board, checks on the ongoing renovation of La Grande's historic venue on Monday, March 7, 2022.

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