

CLUB

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The club saw about 20 athletes compete in the fall, with about 15 taking part in the winter and spring. For eighth-grader Mattie Wolcott, the weightlifting program was an opportunity to participate in sports during the winter. After competing in cross-country in the fall, she wanted to do a sport other than basketball or wrestling.

"I decided to do weight training instead," Wolcott said. "I've done some weight training with my dad and joined because my friends were doing it too."

For Nelson, the lifting club presented an opportunity to compete in a sport she had always been interested in.

"I don't really do sports that anybody else does, besides volleyball," Nelson said. "I've wanted to do weightlifting for a long time, so



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Emersyn Miller pushes herself as she completes a squat during the La Grande Middle School Wildcat Lifting Club's competition on Saturday, March 12, 2022, in the LMS gym.

once I heard about it I was really excited to join."

Nelson also noted that the club picked up momentum as students

began to build interest in competing for the lifting club under Veloz Espinola.

"I think at first people were

sketchy about it because it's never been a thing," Nelson said. "Once people started doing it and talking about it, we got a lot of people interested. It feels so good."

In the girls weightlifting competition on March 12, Wolcott earned a top DOTS score of 264.55. Nelson was second at 247.66, and Ella Johnson took home third place with a DOTS score of 219.65.

"You feel really nervous, right up until you lift," Wolcott said. "Right after you feel okay but then you get really nervous again for your next lift. You just have to be really confident in yourself."

On the boys side, Quinton Smith earned first place with a DOTS score of 214.75. Eddy Orton placed second with a score of 192.56, while Kyler Myer was third at 150.87.

In front of teammates and a crowd of parents in the gymnasium, the athletes put all their

effort into reaching their lift goals.

"It takes a lot of mental focus, but when you're up there it kind of just goes away," Nelson said. "I think it's just a mental game. Even if you don't get it, it's about your mentality. I sometimes struggle with that, so I just try to tell myself that I'm going to improve either way."

This spring, the Wildcat Lifting Club is set to compete against other teams in Ontario, through a regional tournament hosted by the United States Powerlifting Association.

In just the first year of the program, the LMS lifting club is hoping to continue meeting goals and drawing in new athletes.

"I really hope that we still get to have it next year," Wolcott said. "Our coach is only a student teacher, but I really hope he'll be able to keep the program going and that more people will join."

PAPER

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as easily as you can. But the issue of your truth telling is another matter. You lie. By that, I mean you declare as fact something you know to be false."

Smith responded by saying he wouldn't respond to "negative suppositions," but also added Malheur County residents were "begging" Zaitz to sell his newspaper and that it had no support.

"P.S. ... if you need a buyer for the paper, I'll pay \$35,000 cash," he wrote at the end of the email. "No employees included."

Later in the chain, Zaitz told Smith he would share Smith's offer with the public.

"Let's see what the community — and the state — thinks of your idea of buying a paper to shut it down," he said. "Thanks for the offer. We'll be in touch."

Smith followed-up by clarifying he would not shut the Enterprise down if he bought it.

"I already have staff in place that would run the paper quite well," he wrote. "I never said it would be shut down."

In a response to a request for comment, Smith provided a written statement.

"The Malheur Enterprise, a privately owned company, publicly announced it was for sale," he said. "Gregory Smith and Company, also a privately owned company, made an offer to purchase the Mal-

heur Enterprise. Other than being publicly 'mocked' by the seller, no reply to our offer has been received. Moreover, Gregory Smith and Company has not publicly stated its reason for purchasing the paper. It is unfortunate, some speculate to the negative."

Smith's history with the Enterprise

A two-time Pulitzer Prize nominee with The Oregonian, Zaitz, along with his family, bought the Malheur Enterprise in 2015.

Zaitz eventually took over the paper's editorial operations and worked toward growing the weekly's presence. Zaitz expanded the newsroom and started collaborations with national news organizations as the Enterprise collected new accolades and awards.

Today, Zaitz said the Enterprise is profitable and growing. As he neared his 50th year in the journalism business, Zaitz said he decided to sell the paper because he felt it was the right time to hand over the Enterprise to a new generation.

"We're not going to sell to anyone that shows up with a check or a suitcase full of \$20 bills," he said. "The Malheur Enterprise is an essential source of local news and is a role model for local journalism. So it's import goes beyond just reporting on Malheur County. It's import is also helping show newsrooms large and small how to do effective local journalism that generates business success."



East Oregonian, File

The Malheur Enterprise is a small weekly newspaper in the agricultural town of Vale west of Ontario.

When Smith made an offer to buy the Enterprise, Zaitz said he took it seriously.

Elected in 2000, Smith is the longest-serving legislator in the Oregon House of Representatives. Although his district's lines have shifted significantly over the years, Smith always has represented a chunk of North-eastern Oregon from his home in Heppner.

But being a legislator is only a part-time position. His full-time work involves him serving a number of economic development positions throughout Oregon, both within and outside his legislative district. Some of his titles include being the project manager for the Columbia Development Authority in Boardman, the director of the Eastern Oregon University Small Business Development Center in La Grande and the economic development director in Malheur County.

His status as an influential lawmaker who also is in charge of raising money

for local projects and institutions around the state has earned him scrutiny in the media. The Willamette Week referred to Smith as the "best compensated lawmaker in Salem" while also noting his actions were "perfectly legal."

The Enterprise also has done reporting on the connections between Smith's personal business and his work in the Legislature, in addition to focusing on his work in Malheur County, publishing stories on his contracts with the county and his handling of local economic development projects.

Zaitz declined to provide further details on the editorial that prompted the exchange with Smith before it was published, but later summarized the Enterprise's various dealings with Smith over the years.

"He complained that our reporting on him represented criminal conduct," he said. "The sheriff looked into that and essentially laughed him out of Malheur County on that allegation. He has publicly ridiculed the Enterprise and has made representations that raise questions about whether the Enterprise is paying its taxes. This is a man who has a pattern of taking aggressive actions against the newspaper that is doing no more than reporting on matters of public importance."

After Smith made his offer, Zaitz followed through on his promise and shared excerpts from the exchange on the Enterprise's Facebook page and asked readers what they thought. As of the evening of Thursday, March 10, nearly 70 people have commented on the post. Almost all the comments either opposed Smith buying the paper, expressed support for the Enterprise's current ownership or both. Many questioned Smith's motivations.

Even if Smith doesn't get involved in the Vale media business, he'll continue to be a prominent figure in Eastern Oregon for the foreseeable future. No one filed to contest Smith in either the Republican primary or the general election, all but assuring him a 12th term in Salem.

SHOWS

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usage. With mask and capacity restrictions off the table, Jennings is encouraging individuals to come back out to live events, while also being responsible in making health choices.

"I'm encouraging people that feel like they should or want to wear a mask to do so. There's no judgment in it," Jennings said.

When concerts returned last summer, HQ faced a number of restrictions in terms of crowd size and COVID-19 precautions.

"If something is still required of us, we'll be posting that. I know we're pulling away from there and just encouraging people to show up," Jennings said. "There's a lot going on out there. We need to start getting back together around things and queuing on life through culture."

In addition to live shows returning, HQ's owners are encouraging local artists to utilize the space and what it offers.

"We're really interested in finding creative promotors in town who have ideas that require the space, whether it's film presentation or projection or supporting a music show," Jennings said. "We're looking for people who are interested in bringing new programming ideas to the space."

Union County Business Grants Available
 The 2022 Union County Business Assistance Grant Program is currently accepting applications from small businesses financially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Eligible applicants may receive up to \$10,000. Applications, eligibility requirements, and additional information is available on the Union County website at www.union-county.org or by calling 541-963-1001. Completed and signed applications packets must be received via email at bizgrant@union-county.org or hand delivered to 1106 K Avenue by 12:00 noon on Friday, April 1, 2022.
 This grant program is being made available due to federal funding received from the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund.

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