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Delayed festival set for June debut

Elgin Opera House to host Shakespeare Festival

By DICK MASON
The Observer

ELGIN — The Elgin Opera House's first Shakespeare Festival is set to emerge from the shadow of COVID-19.

Preparations for the June festival, canceled in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, are gaining momentum. The Elgin Opera House has received commitments from award-winning Shakespearean actors, including Imogen Stubbs, of London, England, and Bobby Bermea, of the United States, to appear and plans are in place for the production of four of Shakespeare's plays — "The Merchant of Venice," "Othello," "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" are set to be performed multiple times from June 17-26.

Terry Hale, the Elgin Opera House's executive artistic director, is excited about the number of talented people who will be speaking at or performing in productions at the festival.

"We have quite a crew coming in," he said.

Hale credits the lineup of actors to the work of Grant Turner, the associate artistic director of the Elgin Opera House, who is playing a leading role in organizing the Shakespeare festival.

"Grant is doing an amazing job," he said.

Hale hopes that the festival goes on to become an annual fixture in Elgin.

"We want this to become a tradition," he said.

Festival performances and presentations will take place at the Elgin Opera House, on its outdoor stage and in its second building on Alder Street, which is the home of the Hale Turner Little Theatre and a dance studio. A second performance site, the Jewel Theatre, is now being constructed in the building.

"It should be finished in one to two months," said Kathy Bonney, executive assistant of the nonprofit Friends of the Opera House.

Physical preparations for the festival received a big boost earlier this month, when the Union County Board of Commissioners voted to provide the Friends of the Opera House \$8,738 for

See, **Festival**/Page A6



Going with the flow

Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group
The Grande Ronde River surges near Riverside Park, La Grande, on Tuesday, March 22, 2022. A plan for improving the quantity and quality of water in the Upper Grande Ronde Basin, five years in the making, has received the go-ahead from the state.

Plan for improving Upper Grande Ronde Basin water quality and quantity recognized by state commission

By DICK MASON • The Observer

LA GRANDE — An effort to improve the flow of rivers and streams in the Upper Grande Ronde Basin, which includes Catherine Creek, has received a major boost.

The Upper Grande Ronde Watershed Partnership Place-Based Integrated Water Resources Plan has been recognized by the Oregon Water Resources Commission. The recognition, received following a unanimous vote of the water resources commission, means the plan can now be put into effect to address issues like flooding and low in-stream late-summer flows.

"This is a local plan meant to move our community forward in the next 100 years in a way which will help all and hurt none," said Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage, who helped develop the plan.

The plan, which was five years in the making, was prepared with the help of local, state and federal agencies, including the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Union County Farm Bureau, the Union County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Union County Cattlemen's Association, the Grande Ronde

Model Watershed, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and cities, plus many local farmers and ranchers.

Quality and quantity

The Upper Grande Ronde Basin is one of four in Oregon provided funding by the state commission to develop a plan for boosting its water quality and quantity as part of a pilot project. Beverage said the significance of the plan being recognized by the state cannot be overstated.

"I see this as a great milestone," she said.

Beverage said it is a major step not only for the Upper Grande Ronde Basin, but for the Oregon Water Resources Department and all planning groups in the other three basins in the future. She said the success of the plan development here will make it easier for the plans being developed in the other three basins to move forward.

The plan lists what its creators believe

are the nine most important strategies for addressing needs in the Upper Grande Ronde Basin.

"After six years of hard work, tough discussions and considering the water needs of all users, I am proud of the final list of the nine most important strategies identified to address our needs and concerns in the Upper Grande Ronde Basin," Beverage said.

She also looks at the plan from a philosophical perspective.

"Water is life, and this local plan will help us look into the future and make sure we provide clean and abundant water for future generations," she said.

Building resilience

The executive summary of the plan states that it will provide strategies for meeting the water needs of communities in the Upper Grande Ronde Basin while adhering to all existing laws and policies.

"This planning effort will help understand and meet the water needs of our communities, economy, and environment consistent with existing law and policy and will not jeopardize any existing rights to use water," the executive summary states.

Jed Hassinger, a Cove area farmer who helped with the development of the plan, was pleased with how its creation progressed over the course of about 100 meetings.

"It's been heartening to see the agricultural, municipal and ecological groups put political differences aside and work toward

See, **Water**/Page A6

'We tried to save each other'

Fall from waterfall brings complex challenges for first responders

Editor's Note: This is the first of a two-part feature. Look for the conclusion in The Observer in print and online Thursday, March 31.

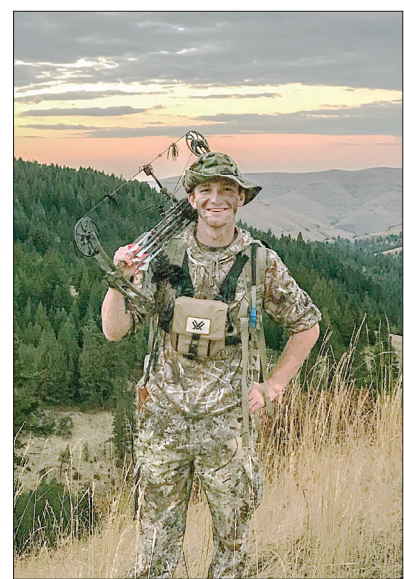
By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

PILOT ROCK — One day last July, three long-time friends headed to the mountains to cool off in a swimming hole. They never imagined one of them

wouldn't make it home. The young men — Kyler Carter and Braydon Postma, both 23, and Cody Watson, 21 — had a close-knit friendship. They'd bonded as young boys in Pilot Rock, playing ball, tag and climbing on the jungle gym. In later years, they hunted and hiked in the mountains, tubed in McKay Reservoir, participated in sports and played competitive games of Call of Duty: Black Ops II.

Basically, said Carter, "We were brothers." The tragic adventure began last July 1 on a sunny afternoon. The three waited until Watson got off work and then rode in Postma's pickup about 10 miles south of Pilot Rock into the mountains. The destination was a picturesque spot they'd visited dozens of times — a swimming hole on West

See, **Rescue**/Page A6



Cody Watson, pictured here during a bowhunting trip, was injured in a fall in July 2021 near Pilot Rock and died before rescuers could save him from a narrow canyon. Watson, 21, was a member of the Oregon Army National Guard, loved outdoor activities and planned to become a military pilot.

Sharon Gaines/Contributed Photo

INDEX

Classified.....B4	Home.....B1	Obituaries.....A5
Comics.....B7	Horoscope....B4	Opinion.....A4
Crossword....B4	Local.....A2	Sports.....A8
Dear Abby....B8	Lottery.....A2	Sudoku.....B7

WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section		
	Tonight 38 LOW Partly cloudy	Wednesday 53/32 Mostly cloudy

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THURSDAY IRS PROMISES TAX REFUNDS WITHIN THREE WEEKS

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