

FESTIVAL

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updating three signs and replacing awnings for the Elgin Opera House complex's Alder Street building, about two blocks south of the opera house itself. The money, which the Friends of the Opera House applied for, is from Union County's Transitory Tax Discretionary Fund. The transitory tax is also known as Union County's motel tax.

The \$8,738 will cover 65% of the project's total cost of \$13,443. Bonney said the funding from the county will make an enormous difference in efforts to prepare for the Shakespeare Festival.

"Oh my gosh, that was tremendous news," Bonney said.

The Friends of the Opera House was gifted the Alder Street building in 2015, after many years as a restaurant and lounge. The building had been vacant for a number of years.

The Hale Turner Little Theatre in the Alder Street building will be the site of the festival's opening production, "The Merchant of Venice," at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, June 17. It will be historic for it will make the United States premiere of a six-character adaptation by Bill Alexander, who is well known for his work with the Royal Shakespeare Company, according to the Elgin Opera House's website. Performances of the play traditionally have 27 characters.

The first performance of "The Merchant of Venice"

will follow an opening party attended by Bermea, who will star in the title role of "Othello." Also a writer and director, he has appeared in theaters from New York City to Honolulu, Hawaii. "Othello" will be performed five times during the festival; "The Merchant of Venice," six times; "A Midsummer Night's Dream," four times; and "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," two times.

Stubbs will first appear at the festival on Tuesday, June 21, to speak about her career and acting at 7:30 p.m. On June 25, she will be the featured guest at a 4 p.m. tea on the north lawn of the Elgin Opera House and speak that evening at the Jewel Theatre.

The actor and writer is best known in England for

her stage performances at the Ipswich Repertory Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, according to the Turner Classic Movies website.

All the plays will be performed by the Opera House Shakespeare Company except for "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," which is now being rehearsed at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton. Its cast will perform the play first at BMCC before coming to the Elgin festival.

One reason for the inclusion of the BMCC production is to expand the range of those participating in the June Shakespeare festival.

"Our goal is to make this an Eastern Oregon festival," Hale said.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

Director Grant Turner gives guidance to actors Abby Hale and Maddie Hale at the Elgin Opera House on Tuesday, July 6, 2021, as they rehearse Shakespeare's "The Comedy of Errors," which was performed on the new outdoor stage. In June 2022, the Friends of the Opera House is hosting its inaugural Shakespeare Festival, featuring multiple performances, workshops and special guests.

RESCUE

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Birch Creek above a cascading waterfall that spills into a steep rocky canyon. They parked and walked about 2 miles to the deep pool where they swam, talked and took photos and videos. The rocks near the edge were slippery with moss.

What happened next is both a blur and a succession of still frames in their minds.

"I fell first," Postma said. "Cody tried to save me. Then Kyler tried to save Cody."

Carter described the moment even more simply. "We tried to save each other."

All the men survived the initial fall, but Cody Watson would die before help could arrive.

To honor Watson, Umatilla County's Search and Rescue Foundation received a \$5,000 donation in his name from the Blue Mountain Insurance Professionals presented at the Wednesday, March 16, Umatilla County Board of Commissioners meeting. Joined by Watson's mother and grandmother was Scott Sager, of BMIP, who spoke to the commissioners about Watson.

"Cody was a sergeant with the National Guard," Sager said. "He was a very inquisitive, inspiring and motivated individual. He was on his way to a dream of being a military pilot. He died that night on that mountain."

Watson's mother, Holli



Dwight Johnson/Contributed Photo

A National Guard Black Hawk helicopter hovers July 2, 2021, during a rescue operation near Big Falls on West Birch Creek near Pilot Rock. Three men had fallen from a waterfall into a narrow canyon. Cody Watson, 21, died before first responders could reach them.

Hill, presented the \$5,000 check to three SAR members in attendance who wrapped her in a hug. The money likely will go to the county's new SAR foundation for purchasing a lightweight rope system to help with extractions in steep terrain like the ravine on West Birch Creek.

Aftermath of the fall

After falling, Postma remembers landing in

shallow water and a rocky creek bed, Watson hit nearby and Carter fell into deeper water on his stomach with his head submerged. He appeared unconscious. When Postma flipped him over, he felt relieved as Carter took a breath.

The trio attempted to make sense of what had just happened.

"We were dazed and confused," Postma said.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Holli Hill, right, mother of Cody Watson, receives a hug on March 16, 2022, after presenting a \$5,000 check to representatives of the Umatilla County Search and Rescue at a Umatilla County Board of Commissioners meeting in Pendleton. The donation honors her son, who died in a fall in July 2021.

"There was so much adrenaline."

They took stock. Carter had two collapsed lungs and his glasses were gone. Postma had a broken right leg and pelvis. A bone stuck out of his arm. Watson had the most injuries.

"His leg was completely shattered," Carter said.

Postma and Watson, both members of the Oregon Army National Guard, started thinking strategically. Watson needed a tourniquet on his leg. They decided that Carter should hike out.

Before leaving, Carter used his shoelaces and a stick to splint Watson's leg and fashion a tourniquet. He stared up at the sheer rock walls and decided to head down the creek to find a better way up and out of the ravine. He planned to hike back to the pickup, get his cellphone and call 911.

As twilight faded into inky blackness, he realized that this wouldn't be easy.

As he walked, carefully avoiding the edge, he remembers feeling lost. Finally he opted to wait until dawn to get his bearings. He worried about his friends down in that hole since they were likely cold with the mist of the waterfall constantly blowing over them. After dawn, he made it to the pickup.

He grabbed a rock and broke the window of the pickup, found his cellphone and called 911, telling the operator that he and his friends had fallen off a waterfall and had serious injuries. The next call went to his mother, who spread the word to the families.

Search and rescue operation begins

A little after 9 a.m., SAR supervisor Sgt. Dwight

Johnson got a call at home that three men had fallen about 50 feet into a deep, brushy canyon. One had hiked out and two lay injured at the bottom, one with a tourniquet on his leg.

Johnson began gathering resources.

"Our unit is all volunteer," he said. "Our key rope guy wasn't available so my next call was to Union County for mutual aid. They have more rope-trained people than we do."

Johnson activated Umatilla County's SAR unit, then requested a Black Hawk helicopter from the National Guard with the ability to hoist people from narrow, hard-to-reach places.

"We knew a litter pack out would be difficult (in that terrain)," Johnson said. "It's one of the hardest things to do. All the helicopters (crews) were off on a holiday."

It would probably take five hours. Johnson ordered the flight anyway. The helicopter soon would head to Pilot Rock from Salem.

The list of responders grew. LifeFlight, Pilot Rock Fire Protection District, Pendleton Fire's rope rescue personnel, U.S. Forest Service fire crew from Ukiah, a Forest Service short-haul helicopter, Union County's rope team and Umatilla County Fire District No. 1 Chief Scott Stanton who ran the operation along with Johnson.

In the canyon, sleep evaded Postma and Watson. They spent the night trying to stay warm, talking about family and friends and wondering if this would be their last conversation.

WATER

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goals with mutual benefits. We've been able to acknowledge each others' needs and put together a plan that offers benefits for everyone and takes proactive steps to mitigate issues we're likely to face in the future," Hassinger said in a statement he made to the planning group.

Hassinger said he is excited about putting the plan into effect.

"Now that we've made it through the planning phase, I look forward to the rubber hitting the road as we implement our plan. Using the strategies outlined in it, I'm hopeful that we'll make real improvements to the water quantity and quality issues that we've been dealing with and also make our basin more resilient in the face of whatever changes the future holds," Hassinger said.

Storage options

Some of the steps to improve water quality and quantity in the water-



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

The Grande Ronde River runs high near Imbler on Tuesday, March 22, 2022. Addressing flooding concerns in the winter and spring and low flow in the summer are among the goals of long-term water management plans in the Upper Grande Ronde Basin.

shed include looking into accessing aboveground storage opportunities, such as expanding portions of rivers and streams to prevent the creation of ice jams in narrow stretches that can lead to flooding.

Options the plan calls for studying also include storage sites that would not impact stream channels. The plan sets the stage for investigative work to be done into the possibility of having reservoirs to which water from streams could be diverted. Storage of the water would help prevent flooding in the winter and

spring, and its release in the summer would boost low stream flows.

Another option could be pumping water from Catherine Creek into under-

ground caverns in the spring when flows are high, and then pumping it out in the summer when flows are lower.

This study will be conducted with the aid of grants, including a \$114,000 Oregon Water Resources Department feasibility study grant and a \$75,000 Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board in-stream flow grant.

Hassinger said that the storage in underground caverns would likely be best done at higher sites. This would be an ideal situation because it would create the deeper water salmon need at higher levels and provide more irrigation water to farmers on the floor of the

Grande Ronde Valley.

"It would be the win-win everyone is looking for," Hassinger said.

He added that improving late-summer stream flows would boost water quality. Much late-summer water now in the Upper Grande Ronde Basin streams is poor, Hassinger said, because the low flows cause water to have high temperatures and low dissolved oxygen levels.

Tim Wallender, also a Grande Ronde Valley farmer who assisted with the formation of the plan, said he would prefer to have aboveground water storage. He explained that he would feel more comfortable about being able to

visually monitor the water being stored.

The plan also calls for steps to be taken to better collect river flow data in the Upper Grande Ronde Basin, said Dana Kurtz, an environmental scientist who served as a technical consultant for the development of the plan. Improved river flow data would help to better determine how much water is available, resulting in informed decisions about water management.

Links to the Upper Grande Ronde Watershed Partnership Place-Based Integrated Water Resources Plan can be found at www.union-county.org/planning/place-based-integrated-water-resources-planning.

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