

OMSI

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“Even when I have students who are difficult, I still feel so lucky,” said Kirby, who rates the La Grande School District’s students among the best he has worked with.

Kirby has put on demonstrations this week in the gyms of Island City, Central and Greenwood elementary schools and then given presentations in classrooms. At each, he has done much more than operate a Van de Graaff generator. Other demonstrations include showing students how to create their own circuit by touching each other’s fingers while standing in a circle. It includes two students holding a tube-like device with LED lights that lights up when a current from the human circuit passes through.

Kirby said this happens because people generate their own electrical current that passes through others they are touching.

“We all have electricity within us,” he said. “It is a source of energy being generated within us all the time.”

The OMSI educator is striving to help children discover that learning about science is fun and that they



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Michael Kirby, outreach instructor for Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, demonstrates how current flows using ping-pong balls with the help of Ava Weatherspoon, 9, at Island City Elementary School on Monday, April 4, 2022.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Cahnis Kazzee, 9, reacts to seeing her reflection while using a Van de Graaff generator at Island City Elementary School on Monday, April 4, 2022, during an OMSI electricity presentation in the gym.

should not be intimidated by it.

“Everybody has the ability to become a scientist,” he said.

A return of assembly gatherings

At Island City, Central and Greenwood, Kirby has served as one of the first outside presenters in the schools since the

COVID-19 pandemic hit Northeastern Oregon in March 2020. The pandemic forced all in-person instruction in Oregon schools to be canceled in the spring of 2020. When in-person instruction resumed, state safety rules still prevented guests from coming into schools or large assembly gatherings. Kirby has been able

to give demonstrations in gyms with minimal restrictions only since February after COVID-19 infection rates began dropping. He said he is booked solid throughout the state for the rest of the school year. He credits the busy schedule to the pent-up demand in schools for outside presenters created by the COVID-19 restrictions.

Island City Elementary School Principal Brett Smith said Kirby’s presentation was the first assembly Island City third and fourth graders had attended since the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

“They were super excited. There was a lot of anticipation,” said Smith, who added he is always impressed with the OMSI programs.

Central Elementary Principal Monica West echoed the sentiment.

“It was great to have an assembly like this,” she said. “It was something different, something we had not had in two years.”

Kirby will give this week’s final presentation on electricity in the La Grande School District on Friday, April 8, at the Willow School gym. His free presentation will run from 10-11 a.m. and will be for homeschool and La Grande Virtual Learning Academy students and their parents.



Sammie Watson/Contributed Photo

Strawberry syrup stains the exterior of a vintage Chevrolet Blazer that was vandalized during the Imbler prom on Saturday, April 2, 2022. Three classic vehicles were vandalized at the event, leaving the car owners shocked and looking for answers.

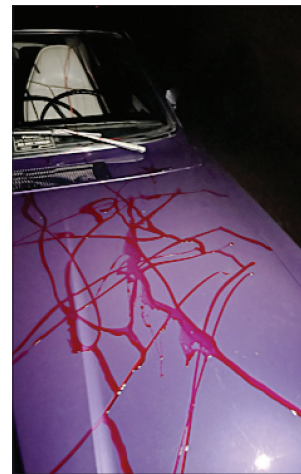
VANDALS

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La Grande, reached out to the students whose cars were vandalized and offered free services to help repair the vehicles — one of the students was a family member of the owners. The shop owners noted that one of the cars had been in for service just before the prom event. Moving forward, the group is looking at possibly listing a reward for information provided regarding the vandalism.

“We wanted to show that we have their backs,” said Sammie Watson, one of the family members that owns and operates the auto shop.

The White Barn has hosted Imbler’s prom for the past several years, at no charge to the school. The estate serves as a scenic venue with views



Sammie Watson/Contributed Photo

Strawberry syrup covers the exterior of a vintage Plymouth Duster that was vandalized during the Imbler prom on Saturday, April 2, 2022.

of the Grande Ronde Valley that hosts weddings and other events.

“It’s really unfortunate because these kids took a lot of pride in their cars,” White Barn owner Jeana Bingaman said.

PRIMARY

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That’s been the story in recent days in political action around the state.

Baker City mayor speaks at a right-wing rally in Salem

Baker City Mayor Kerry McQuisten, a Republican candidate for governor, appeared at the Reawaken America rally of radical conservatives on Friday, April 1, near the Capitol in the Salem suburb of Keizer. The event was sponsored by The River Church in Salem, a church active in conservative politics, and held at Volcano Stadium, a former minor league baseball park near Interstate 5.

Originally scheduled to be held in Bend, the event was canceled due to questions involving the enforcement of coronavirus restrictions at the Deschutes County Fairgrounds.

The Salem Statesman-Journal reported that stores at Keizer Station mall next to the ball park decided to close April 1 and 2 because of the rally and expected counterprotests.

Keizer is the latest stop on a national tour focusing on debunked claims that the 2020 election was “stolen” from former President Donald Trump, and COVID-19 conspiracy theories.

Photos on Twitter showed McQuisten with Morrow County Sheriff Ken Matlack and former Gen. Michael Flynn, who President Donald Trump pardoned of charges he lied

about contacts with Russian agents while working at the White House. Flynn also has appeared in a video taking “the QAnon Oath” of the far-right political conspiracy group, which ends with “Where we go one, we go all.”

McQuisten has made an energetic bid to break through the crowded Republican field for governor, which includes former House Minority Leader Christine Drazen, Sandy Mayor Bill Pulliam and 2016 GOP nominee for governor Bud Pierce of Salem.

McQuisten was recently endorsed by The Northwest Observer, a popular conservative political blog in Oregon.

Other GOP candidates taking a hard right on campaign trail

Marc Thielman, a Republican candidate for governor who appeared with Senate candidate Darin Harbick and Deschutes County Commissioner Patti Adair with

a QAnon-supporting pastor at a Bend church last week, gained notice while he was superintendent of the Alsea School District near Corvallis for refusing to enforce state coronavirus mandates. He resigned in February. He’s the subject of a \$3.7 million lawsuit against the district by the principal of Alsea Elementary School, who alleges a hostile work environment, sexual harassment, gender discrimination and whistleblower retaliation.

Willamette Week reports Thielman is scheduled to speak April 15 at a fundraiser for Dan Tooze, a Republican candidate for House District 40 in the Oregon City area. Tooze is a self-described member of the Proud Boys, a group involved in riots in downtown Portland, the Oregon Capitol and the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. Tooze has not said he was at any of those incidents.

Reed Christensen, an electrical engineer from Hillsboro, faces federal charges for allegedly

assaulting law enforcement officers while attempting to enter the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6. Christensen has made his arrest the centerpiece of his campaign for governor, saying he was trying to oppose “tyranny” by taking part in the riot’s attempt to stop the count of electoral votes that Joe Biden won in the presidential election.

Jo Rae Perkins, a candidate for the U.S. Senate seat held by U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, also has taken the QAnon pledge. She was the GOP nominee for the U.S. Senate in 2020, losing to incumbent U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon.

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2022

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