

ART

Continued from Page A1

studying “The Hobbit” made a papier-mache of one of the book’s characters.

At Elgin High School, Wasley is now teaching students about pottery and fiber arts, such as weaving with a loom. Other mediums taught this year included introduction to drawing and papier-mache.

So popular are Wasley’s classes that all are now filled to capacity.

“We have no room for more students,” Greif said.

The superintendent laments that budget constraints are preventing the school district from adding more art classes and said it is an issue she wants to find a solution for.

“It is a great problem to have,” Greif added.

She noted that students are flocking to the art classroom at EHS before and after school to work on projects and be with friends who are also interested in art.

“Kids are always looking for a place where they belong,” Greif said.

Greif is delighted to see this because she has long been a fan of art education.

“I believe the fine arts make all kids better stu-



Elgin students Brianna Collins, left, and Madelynn Kennedy work on two of the five new pottery wheels in Elgin High School’s art classroom on Monday, May 16, 2022.

Dick Mason/The Observer

dents,” she said. “The arts open up different parts of their minds.”

The Elgin School District’s art program received a boost earlier this year when it received a \$20,000 grant from the Wildhorse Foundation. Much of the funding has been used to purchase five pottery wheels for the high school. Wasley said the grant has remarkably broadened the art program overall.

“The Wildhorse grant has given us wings to do great stuff,” the EHS art teacher said.

The Elgin School District received the Wildhorse grant

in January.

Wasley said the pottery wheels the grant paid for are making it more fun for students to create things out of clay.

“They add a thrill factor,” the art teacher said of the wheels.

Elgin seventh grader Carly McLaughlin is among the students who look forward to making items out of clay with the pottery wheels.

“It’s really relaxing,” she said. “It takes your mind off of things.”

EHS sophomore Dakota Anderson said she got off to

a slow start but now she thoroughly enjoys using the pottery wheels.

“The first day I was super frustrated, then I found my rhythm,” she said.

Greif said that the Elgin School District’s revived art program is off to a promising start, but she noted that the big test will be next school year, especially at the high school.

She explained that is when it will be known whether students enjoyed their art classes enough to come back to the class and hopefully convinced their friends to join them.

TUITION

Continued from Page A1

vary for students solely taking classes online.

Eastern is Oregon’s smallest public university, and like nearly every other public university in the state, it got a little smaller during the pandemic.

Only Oregon State University has avoided a decrease in enrollment this past fall compared with numbers before the pandemic, according to Oregon’s Higher Education Coordinating Commission.

Officials at the small university in La Grande are reporting an 8% decrease in enrolled students from 2019 to fall 2021 — a trend they say is critical to address.

“The real key to everything really is enrollment. That’s what we’re going to live and die on is enrollment,” EOU Trustee Brad Stephens said at the board’s meeting.

All of the public universities are instituting tuition increases for the upcoming academic year of anywhere from around 3% to 5% for in-state undergraduate students.

Rate at which tuition is climbing

Some universities like the University of Oregon and Oregon State University, have cohort-style tuition rates that differ depending on whether a student is new to the university or continuing.

Both UO and OSU are charging new in-state undergraduate students 4.5% more than current tuition rates.

University officials who aren’t facing the direct threat of lowered student enrollment have cited rising inflation costs as a reason for the increases.

Still, all of the universities have committed to staying under 5% increases.

If they go over that amount, they have to seek outside approval from the state’s Higher Education Coordinating Commission.

Getting approved for a higher tuition increase is not guaranteed, as UO and Portland State University learned in 2017.

The Oregon Institute of Technology was initially recommending a 7% increase in tuition and fees, but it lowered that increase to 5% last week, after a funding adjustment in their favor.

OPIOIDS

Continued from Page A1

A major holdup in the treatment plans envisioned by Measure 110 is a delay in distributing funds for more treatment centers. According to Oregon Public Broadcasting, Oregon is ranked second worst in the country for substance use disorder and last in access to substance abuse treatment.

Statewide, the rising prevalence of fentanyl contributed to overdose deaths rising by over 40% in 2021. Locally, law enforcement is seeing a significant rise in the synthetic opioid — a potent drug that can be consumed in what appears to be a very small quantity, so users don’t always know how much they are taking — as the next new and prev-

alent drug of choice.

“Drug trends change over time,” La Grande Police Lt. Jason Hays said. “Fentanyl is a drug that has a very specific medicinal purpose. It’s very strong.”

Upon the approval of Measure 110, funding for treatment was designated from the Oregon Marijuana Fund and the state’s savings due to saved costs related to arrests, incarceration and supervision of inmates.

Over \$270 million in grant funding for treatment centers was initially planned to reach across local Oregon communities by January of 2022, but delays in the application process have pushed that time frame back to this coming summer and early fall.

In addition to delayed funding for treatment, local providers

across the state are grappling with worker shortages amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We got the cart before the horse,” Bell said. “The promise that was made out of Ballot Measure 110 about an increase in availability of treatment has not come to fruition at all.”

Hays noted that the idea of substance addicts seeking out treatment on their own is up for interpretation along with the effectiveness of Measure 110. He stated that over the years, the police department has seen that individuals often require a “rock bottom” experience when it comes to making a choice — in the eyes of local law enforcement, that most effectively includes court-ordered treatment and legal consequences.

A new approach

As overdose uptick plagues the United States, law enforcement in Oregon communities like La Grande are now grappling with a lack of resources to enforce drug-related crimes and abuse patterns.

“Our legs have been chopped off from under us,” Bell said. “There is an absolute and clear correlation between the crisis that we’re experiencing here locally and the decriminalization of drugs.”

Bell and Hays noted that Union County’s law enforcement simply lacks the tools and resources to deal effectively with addiction and overdose.

“If that’s what we thought was genuinely the right thing to do within our society, those facilities should have been stood up prior,” Bell said.

With a new statewide approach in place, law enforcement is shifting more toward close professional relationships with local partners like Grande Ronde Hospital and the Center for Human Development.

Bell noted that for the time being, the police department is continuing to keep data and track trends in anticipation of a changed approach in the coming years. With treatment funding still being implemented across Oregon, law enforcement is still tasked with dealing with the uptick in substance-related overdoses.

“I can assure you that we would be addressing it, if we could,” Bell said. “We care about people and care about this community. We’re very aware of what is going on in this community and we want to fix it.”

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