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Proposed Union County budget calls for cuts

Loss of Elgin contract prompts cutbacks to law enforcement positions

By DICK MASON
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The 2022-23 budget picture for Union County is a paradoxical one. The county's proposed total

budget, one approved by its budget committee on Tuesday, May 24, is up 13%, but all is not as bright as it might seem. The proposed budget calls for two corrections officer and three sheriff's office deputy positions to be cut.

The three deputy positions are set to be cut because the Elgin City Council voted on Wednesday, May 18, not to renew its contract for law enforcement services from Union County.

The contract expires at the end of June. The corrections officer positions would be cut due to rising personnel costs and because some revenue the county anticipated receiving for the positions did not materialize, according to Shelley Burgess, the administrative and budget officer for Union County.

Trimming the five law enforcement positions would save Union County \$470,000, Burgess said. Burgess explained that four

corrections positions were added a year ago with approval of the budget committee and that two of these positions are now being cut. Burgess said at the time the budget committee believed the county would receive grants that would help fund the four positions.

Due to personnel shuffling made possible by resignations, some of the law enforcement employees impacted by the cuts

will be able to take other positions within the Union County Sheriff's Office, Sheriff Cody Bowen said. Still, the sheriff said he will have to issue layoff notices to two patrol deputies.

"It is awful. These are people to me," he said. "They have families and children of their own. In today's economy, to have to tell someone they are being laid off is

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EOU graduation back to normal

Community Stadium ceremony returns after COVID-19, turf replacement interruptions

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — After a three-year hiatus, the Eastern Oregon University commencement ceremony will return to its normal routine.

The graduation ceremony will take place at 9:30 a.m. Saturday, June 11, at the university's football field at Community Stadium — following two years of altered ceremonies due to COVID-19 and the field's turf replacement in 2019, commencement will now be back to a standard format.

This year's graduation marks the university's 92nd commencement ceremony. EOU anticipates awarding up to 675 degrees and certificates this academic year, with more than 300 undergraduate and master's students set to walk across the stage. All who finished their courses in the summer of 2021, fall of 2021 or winter or 2022 are invited to participate in the spring commencement ceremony.

The last two years the COVID-19 pandemic altered Eastern's graduation plans, with the university turning to virtual gatherings and drive-thru ceremonies.

Last year, Eastern graduates packed their cars with family members and received their diplomas from EOU President Thomas Insko on the west side of campus. The brigade of cars, many clad

IF YOU GO

OHSU annual convention and awards ceremony: 8:30 a.m., June 10
EOU student awards assembly: 1:30 p.m., June 10
Master's hooding ceremony: 8:45 a.m., June 11
General commencement: 9:30 a.m., June 11

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Ellen Campbell, a trailblazing wildlife biologist, poses in May 2022 with the Artemis Award she received from the Wild Sheep Foundation.

True trailblazer

Retired La Grande wildlife biologist Ellen Campbell has helped open doors for other women biologists

By DICK MASON
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Retired La Grande wildlife biologist Ellen Campbell is a trailblazer, quietly breaking through many glass ceilings during the course of a four-decade career.

Campbell, who grew up in Baltimore and has been a La Grande resident 14 years, has left not shards of glass in her wake but instead new career paths for women to follow.

The respect she has earned as a pioneer is one of the reasons Campbell has

received a legacy-defining honor — the Artemis Outstanding Woman Conservationist of the year award from the Wild Sheep Foundation.

"She is very richly deserving of the honor," said Walter Chuck, president of the Oregon Wild Sheep Foundation, which is connected to the national Wild Sheep Foundation.

The Artemis Award recognizes many portions of Campbell's work as a wildlife manager including her work with Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep as a member of the Oregon Wild Sheep Foundation, her role in showing that women could succeed in a field dominated by men, her success as a big game hunter, community service work and much more.

"It is a very prestigious honor," Chuck said.

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Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep are among the wildlife Ellen Campbell has helped protect. This ram was photographed in Canada's Banff National Park.

Opioid crisis requires all hands on deck

Local treatment centers grapple with increase in opioid overdoses

Editor's Note: This is the final part of a multistory series addressing the trends related to opioid overdoses in Union County and across the nation.

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — As opioid overdoses increasingly afflict the nation, local treatment centers are

going full speed ahead to slow the trend.

As examined in the first two parts of this series from The Observer, the uptick in drug overdoses and addiction is reaching families and communities far and wide. With adjustments in state-wide legislation regarding the decriminalization of controlled substances, local law enforcement are adjusting their methods in efforts to slow the alarming trend. For treatment centers across the United States and locally in Union County, the recent surge has led to a state of emergency in addressing substance abuse.

"As a company who works with addiction, the weight of the current state of affairs falls heavy upon our shoulders," a statement from staff members at the Center for Human Development, La Grande, read. "The sheer influx has created a state of emergency for all who work with those struggling with substance use."

An uphill battle

The overdose uptick has been building for years in the United States, but the pandemic accelerated the numbers — in Union County, the law enforcement call center is on pace to shatter pre-

vious records for overdose calls. Union County reported 20 drug-related overdose calls through the end of March, which is well ahead of last year's total of 45 calls throughout 2021. In 2020, the county reported just 10 total calls.

Following the passing of Measure 110 in November of 2020, the approach to substance abuse in Oregon shifted to a focus on treatment and heightened services toward substance abuse as a public health issue. Allocations saved by limiting costs related to arrests, incarcerations and supervision of

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight 45 LOW A t-storm or two		Sunday 49/39 A few showers
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