

# Students complete project with a special purpose

Umatilla robotics students build off-road wheelchair for a young Baker City boy

By ERICK PETERSON  
East Oregonian

UMATILLA — Gus Macy, the 6-year-old son of Levi and Karla of Baker City, is set for a very enjoyable summer, according to his mother. Team Confidential, the Umatilla High School robotics team, is responsible for some of his latest summertime plans.

The team made a wheelchair specifically for Gus, who has spina bifida and is unable to use his legs.

“What we determined to do as a robotics club is to give him a chance to have more activities with his family outside of normal wheelchair activity,” Team Confidential coach and UHS teacher Kyle Sipe said.

He described it as a “trike, retrofitted into an e-bike.” It’s electric, so Gus, who is unable to peddle a bicycle, can use his thumb to control the throttle and operate the chair.

Karla Macy said such chairs, built for off-road adventuring, can cost more than \$20,000. This one, she said, will make a big difference in her son’s life.

“This is a new and exciting way for him to get around,” she said.

## A heartfelt project

Sipe said this was not only a big project for his students — it was meaningful. Students planned the chair’s construction during the pandemic lockdown of 2020-21. When they couldn’t see one another in person, they dia-



Gus Macy, 6, of Baker City, in spring 2022 tries out the wheelchair Umatilla High School students built for him.

grammed the chair remotely.

Students conversed with each other via the internet about the build. When the coronavirus restrictions ended, team members got together once again. At least 35 students pitched in on this project, working whenever they had a free moment.

“I couldn’t hazard a guess as to how many hours they spent, but it was a lot,” Sipe said.

Heidi Sipe, Umatilla School superintendent and wife to the robotics teacher, also worked to make this gift possible. She said their effort was like other work they have done in the past.

“I always do the organizing and financing piece, and Kyle makes the real work happen,” she said.

The superintendent said she discovered this need while at a

legislative meeting. Gus’ mom was a speaker at the meeting and advocating as an early childhood intervention educator.

“I met her there and was really inspired by her,” Heidi Sipe said.

They stayed in touch and discussed the possibility of the Umatilla robotics team helping Gus.

The robotics team often is busy, but their schedule opened up during the pandemic. There was no in-person school and competitions were canceled.

“The kids needed a project,” she said.

Local companies and people also were willing to fund the project. Cattle Drive Leather Co. was the primary sponsor.

The Lorence Family and Evangeline Gifts were sponsors, too, and Amazon Web Services helped fund the team’s trip to

Baker City to deliver the bike to Gus.

## Team program fostering community involvement

Avery Gutierrez, Confidential officer and member for three years, said she was happy about this project. She said she hadn’t done community service work previous to joining Confidential. Lately, she has performed yard work and helped out in other ways with her team.

She said this sort of work brings her closer to others and she enjoys learning new skills. Though the wheelchair project is not robotics, per se, it did involve wiring and more.

“We started by getting measurements — his height and weight — and we worked to adjust it to his needs,” Gutierrez said.

According to Gutierrez, Gus hugged his mom and gave everyone on the team high fives upon receiving the chair.

Meghan Owens, lead of programming and electrical for Confidential, has been with the team for four years. Like Gutierrez, most of her community service has been through her robotics team, she said, and like Gutierrez, Owens gets a lot from her service.

“We get really connected with our community,” she said.

She added she has learned much about the people of her community, as well as the area’s history, businesses and services. She also said Gus was happy about the chair, even though he had an accident on his first drive.

## Gus’ new adventures started with a spill

“It only took him about five minutes to figure out how to tip it over,” Karla Macy said.

Gus steered it into a curb and took a tumble. But she said Gus was fine, and Team Confidential built the chair with safety in mind. A car seat, with a five-point harness, is part of the wheelchair. And he has a helmet.

“What’s really good about it is that it’s a pretty good size, and I think it’s something he can use,” she said. “I think this is something that can last him his whole life, with some minor adjustments.”

Gus’ mother expressed much gratitude for the chair and the kindness of the robotics team.

According to Macy, the robotics team spoke with Gus when designing the chair. Later, when they met him in person, one student presented him with a stuffed toy.

“Those students from Umatilla have been so awesome,” she said.

## Baker City woman sentenced to 73 months

Pearl Naomi Adair previously sent to prison on Union County charges

By JAYSON JACOBY  
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — A Baker City woman who has been convicted of multiple crimes in different areas of Baker County since 2019, including Baker City, Durkee and Halfway, has been sentenced to 73 months in prison.

Pearl Naomi Adair, 41, who is described as homeless in court records, was sentenced on Wednesday, June 22, by Judge Matt Shirtcliff in Baker County Circuit Court on two convictions in Baker County. Adair will be incarcerated at the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, the women’s state prison in Wilsonville.

She had been sent to Coffee Creek on April 21, 2022, to serve a 17-month sentence on a Union County case. Adair pleaded guilty in April 2021 to first-degree theft for stealing an antique sewing machine from a La Grande business in December 2020. She was sentenced to 24 months of probation on that conviction, but her probation was revoked in March 2022 because she failed to report to her probation officer or complete substance abuse treatment as required, according to Union County court records.

Adair was returned from Coffee Creek to the Baker County Jail on May 25 at the request of her attorney, Robert Whitnah of Baker City, prior to the June 22 sentencing, Baker County District Attorney Greg M. Baxter said.

Adair has been in custody, either in the Baker County Jail or at Coffee Creek, since early October 2021, Baxter said.

Prior to sentencing

Adair, Shirtcliff noted her recurring criminal history, most recently an Oct. 6, 2021, incident in which she entered a house in Baker City while the couple who lived there were home.

Adair pleaded guilty June 22 to first-degree burglary, a Class A felony, in that case. She was sentenced to 26 months in prison on that charge, Baxter said.

Two other charges, for third-degree theft and second-degree criminal trespassing, were dismissed.

The resident of the home took cellphone videos showing Adair in his backyard on the evening of Oct. 6, 2021.

According to a police report, when the resident confronted Adair and told her to drop the items she was holding, she claimed the items belonged to her.

Baker City Police arrested Adair on Oct. 7, 2021.

The rest of the 73-month sentence includes the 17 months on the Union County theft and 30 months on a first-degree burglary conviction in Baker County in 2021. That prison sentence was initially suspended, Baxter said.

Shirtcliff imposed the three prison sentences — 26, 17 and 30 months — to run consecutively, yielding the total term of 73 months.

Baxter said he argued for the sentences to run consecutively rather than concurrently — in which case Adair would have served a maximum of 30 months, the longest of the three terms — because “there were separate victims and she had been given multiple opportunities to better herself while on probation.”

The 30-month sentence was based on Adair pleading guilty April 23, 2021, to first-degree burglary. She admitted spending a night in the Eldorado Motel in Baker City in February 2021 without paying for it, according to court records.

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