

# THE OBSERVER

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INSIDE



FAIR TIME ACROSS EASTERN OREGON IN **GO!**



Cassiopaia Smith/Contributed Photo

Cassiopaia Smith's son, Raiden, posed with Star Wars cosplay characters during the first Color the Blues Autism Walk on April 30, 2016. This year, attendees can expect cosplay characters dressed as Ghostbusters.

## MERA closures set for end of August

Phase two of forest management plan moving ahead at the end of August

By ISABELLA CROWLEY  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The second phase of the Red Apple Forest Management Project for the Mount Emily Recreation Area is set to begin at the end of August.

Results from the first phase were not well received due to trail and forest damage, which happened due to the inconsistent ground freeze conditions during the winter. Doug Wright, director of Union County Public Works, and ReedCo Forestry, of Union, the logging contractor, agreed to move the second phase earlier in the year, so that the logging could be done on harder ground to mitigate damage.

"Will there be a little trail damage, yes there will," Wright said during an August meeting of the Mount Emily Recreation Area Advisory Committee.

Any damage to the trails will be repaired, but Wright could not provide a timeline for when work would be completed.

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# Coloring the Blues for AUTISM AWARENESS

Colorful August 13 event will celebrate Union County community members on the autism spectrum

By SHANNON GOLDEN  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — On Aug. 13, Union County residents will celebrate community members on the autism spectrum with flying colors.

Color the Blues for Autism Walk is an annual, family-friendly community event hosted in collaboration with the Autism Society of Oregon. Cassiopaia Smith, Union County representative for ASO, said the event is not just for those directly impacted by autism, but for allies, too.

"A lot of our families have someone on the spectrum in their family or a friend on the spectrum," Smith said.

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Cassiopaia Smith/Contributed Photo

Participants stand together for a photo during the fourth annual walk on June 22, 2019, that was dedicated to Katie Helman. Helman was on the autism spectrum and lived with her dad, Darin, before she passed.



The Observer, File

Puddles of rainwater and mud on Friday, April 22, 2022, give evidence of the heavy equipment used in forest management work completed this winter in the Red Apple section of the Mount Emily Recreation Area near La Grande. The highly debated forest management project drew a mixed bag of concerns from local residents.

## Hamilton gives tearful testimony in Lee trial

Co-defendant and business client takes stand in Ronald Lee trial

By ISABELLA CROWLEY  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Steve Hamilton took the stand Friday, July 29, in a tearful testimony against Ron Lee before facing cross examination from the defense Aug. 1.

Lee is charged with murdering his wife, Loretta Williams, in November

2018 in Cove. They were in the process of getting divorced. Hamilton also is charged with Williams' murder and has pleaded guilty on two charges of hindering.

Hamilton said he and Lee had a business relationship that started after Hamilton and his wife brought a generator from their RV to Lee's repair

shop in 2018.

Hamilton told Union County District Attorney Kelsie McDaniel that Lee would call him nearly every day to speak and see if he was coming out to the shop. Hamilton — who at the time was the business administrator for Post Acute Rehab — would head out to Lee's shop after work a couple of times a week.

McDaniel asked if he had known Williams. Hamilton started crying before answering no.

Hamilton testified that Lee often talked about his problems, including his pending divorce from Williams.

Conley Road visits, trips with Lee

Hamilton documented for the jury the four times he visited Williams and Lee's property at 61307 Conley Road, Cove.

Hamilton said he drove to the property because Lee was worried Williams had sold a pickup and because Lee was con-

cerned about the condition of his horse.

Before recounting the fourth and final time he went to the property, Hamilton told jurors about two occasions he had driven with Lee.

Hamilton invited Lee to drive with him to Ontario to pick up a medical device for the rehabilitation center. On the way back to La Grande there was a crash on Interstate 84, which led Hamilton on a detour.

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight 50 LOW Partly cloudy

Friday 85/46 Partly sunny

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com. More contact info on Page A4.