

# A local leader selected for Ukiah School

Ukiah School District appoints alumna and longtime teacher, Laura Orr, as superintendent

By SHANNON GOLDEN  
The Observer

UKIAH — In the main lobby of the Ukiah School building, shadow boxes and picture frames hold a century of memories from past students. Decades-old letterman jackets share the wall with years of class photos.

For Laura Orr, the new superintendent of Ukiah School District, the wall holds four generations of family memories, too. The faces of her grandmother, father and now her own children greet her as she walks to her new office each day.

Orr was born and raised in Ukiah and completed her kindergarten through senior year in the storied white building. She went on to receive her bachelor's degree from Eastern Oregon University and continued her education in Utah, where she received a master's in science education at Western Governors University.

Upon returning to her hometown to teach, Orr joined a staff comprised of her former teachers.

"That was weird, but it wasn't weird for very long," she admitted.

For more than 18 years, Orr taught science classes for grades five through 12 in Ukiah. As of July 1, she transitioned once more into a new role at Ukiah School District.

The Ukiah School Board deliberated between local candidates and candidates from out-

side the region, but ultimately appointed Orr for the position of superintendent.

"Laura will be a great fit for the position as she possesses the drive, ambition and adaptability that Ukiah School District needs to be successful in the future," said Wendt Eddy in a July 20 InterMountain Education Service District press release.

## School Connectivity

For Orr, one of the district's most pressing challenges — and first orders of business — is internet connectivity.

"Modern education requires connectivity," she said.

Due to the region's lacking infrastructure, the school's internet is often spotty. This makes online learning and testing particularly hard. Orr noted all of Ukiah's high school students are planning to take at least one online dual credit class this coming year.

With funding support from IMESD, Ukiah School will receive a dedicated fiber internet line within a year — a multi-million dollar project the district would never be able to afford on its own.

"It's going to make maintaining a modern education for our students possible," she said.

At the moment, nine educators and support staff — including Orr — keep the school running.

"Everybody knows what's going on and helps take part in things," She said. "It's full support



Laura Orr/Contributed Photo

Laura Orr, the new district superintendent for the Ukiah School District, stands in front of Ukiah School on Friday, July 29, 2022.

all the way around."

Orr said she hopes new state incentive programs will help provide districts with what they need to encourage and support talented, local educators to teach in their very own communities.

Despite the unique challenges the district is facing, Orr contends that simply supporting students in their endeavors is the easiest part.

"With good teachers and good materials and good connectivity and intentional support to help them, they'll go as far as they wanna go," she said.

## Teaching and community matters

Orr is a local and regional science education advocate and a member of several boards, outreach programs and research projects around the country. She also encourages students to get involved in scientific research of their own.

Orr has been an active member of NITARP, the Teacher Archive Research Program organized by NASA and Caltech's Infrared Processing and Analysis Center. This program partners educators

with a professional astronomer for a year-long original research project.

"Through it, you learn better techniques and skills to take back to students," she said.

For several years, Orr selected a few interested students from Ukiah to work with her on the research and present at national conferences. To Orr, this program gives students confidence that they, too, can make strides in scientific research.

"You don't have to be a special smart kid from a big school with a fancy research department," she said. "You could be just an interested kiddo from Eastern Oregon that just really thinks baby stars are cool."

Outside of school, Orr is active in the Ukiah community as one of the directors of the Ukiah Rodeo, leader of the town's 4-H clubs and a coordinator of the local NITARP astronomy research.

As she takes on the role of superintendent this fall, Orr will wear many hats. She will also serve as principal of the school and will still teach two science classes every day.

Orr sees the unique challenges of rural education as opportunities, rather than liabilities. According to her, the many years she's spent at Ukiah school — as a student and a teacher — give her extra understanding, drive and energy to make it the best it can be.

"The community itself would not be the same without us," she said. "We need to honor that tradition and culture and grow it and support it."

# Storm leaves trail of damage, injuries in Wallowa

'Tennis-ball sized' hail damages homes, sends 'multiple' people to hospital

By ANDREW CUTLER  
and PHIL WRIGHT  
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA — Bruce Eien said he remembers feeling a sense of déjà vu Thursday, Aug. 11, in the aftermath of the severe weather storm that rolled through Wallowa County.

"It looked like how people were walking around after 9/11 — in a daze," he said. "That's exactly what it was."

The Enterprise resident, who has family who live in Wallowa, where much of the damage from large hail was centered, was touring the county to look at the damage in the aftermath of the storm.

"We were driving around, checking on all of the people we knew," he said, "making sure they were OK."

Earlier in the day, the National Weather Service in Pendleton issued a severe thunderstorm warning for much of Wallowa County until 5 p.m. Aug. 11. The warning included 2-inch-



Nicole Bellows/Contributed Photo

This photo, submitted by Nicole Bellows, of Lostine, shows unique storm clouds rolling through Wallowa County on Thursday, Aug. 11, 2022. "I had never seen anything like it. My husband is from Kansas and his remark was, 'If I was in Kansas I would say it's a tornado. It was moving fast and headed northeast,'" Bellows said.

sized hail and winds up to 50 mph. Camden Plunkett, a meteorologist for the weather service, said there were reports of baseball-sized hail in the county.

"For the hail that was received in Wallowa County, we are leaning toward tennis-ball sized hail up to 2½ inches," he said. "We did also have some reports of ping pong ball-sized hail about 1.5 inches in La Grande as well."

Plunkett said his office did hear about multiple injuries as a result of the hail, something Eien said he's heard while he was in Wallowa as well.

"We are hoping everyone is all right," he said, adding the county also received "frequent lightning strikes."

Staff at Wallowa Memorial Hospital, Enterprise, confirmed the hospital treated "multiple" patients for injuries from the hailstones. Staff also reported how unusual this was, with one commenting she has lived in Eastern Oregon more than 40 years and this was a first for her.

Eien said around 4 p.m. the power went out in Enterprise and about the same time, his wife received a text from her parents in Wallowa.

"We lost everything," he recalled the text saying. "We immediately got in the car. We didn't know what that meant."

Eien said as they reached Wallowa, the damage sharpened into focus — cars

with shattered windshields, downed trees and homes with severe damage.

"There was a tree that hit a house, some trees in front of the high school went over," he said. "Telephone lines, power lines went down."

According to the Pacific Power website, 887 customers were without power following the storm. The outage was first reported shortly before 4 p.m.

Power also is out to about 13 customers in the Minam area. The outage was also reported shortly before 4 p.m.

As of 8:45 a.m. Aug. 12, the Pacific Power outage map shows power remains out and is expected to be restored before 10:30 a.m. in

## UNION COUNTY HIT WITH LARGE HAIL

LA GRANDE — A thunderstorm passing over Union County dropped large hailstones between 3-4 p.m. on Thursday, July 11. Hailstones up to 1.5 inches in diameter were reported in La Grande, according to the National Weather Service office, Pendleton. The thunderstorm dropping the hail formed southwest of La Grande and then began moving northeast, said Rob Brooks, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service office in Pendleton. Wind gusts as high as 60 miles per hour were reported during the thunderstorm at the La Grande/Union County Airport.

—The Observer

both locations.

Power was out in other parts of the county, according to Pacific Power's Twitter feed.

More than 5,300 customers in Enterprise and Wallowa were without power late in the afternoon. The cause of the outage was severe storm damage, according to the utility's Twitter feed. Power was restored in Enterprise and Joseph before 8 p.m. on Wednesday.

Plunkett said the storm was a perfect chain of events to cause the large hailstones.

"We had really strong updrafts and then we had really strong wind shear that allowed an organized supercell thunderstorm to develop," he said.

The storm took about 90 minutes to pass through the county, Plunkett said, and once it crossed into Idaho, the storm weakened

significantly.

Plunkett said the expected 50 mph wind gusts did not materialize. There were reports of 60 mph gusts at the La Grande/Union County Airport.

"We did not have any confirmed wind gusts in Wallowa County," he said.

Severe weather is not expected in the county over the next several days, but Wallowa County could see some isolated thunderstorms in the afternoon on Aug. 12.

Plunkett also said there is not a lot of data available on supercells in Wallowa County. The last recorded event was a tornado with a rating of EF2 that hit June 11, 1968. EF means "enhanced Fujita scale," and a 2 on the scale means gusts of three seconds of 111-135 mph. The Western Regional Climate Center, he said, reports that tornado came with golf-ball sized hail.

# Ontario National Guard tankers mobilize for Kuwait deployment

The Observer

ONTARIO — The Oregon Army National Guard's 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry Regiment held a mobilization ceremony for 16 citizen soldiers deploying to Kuwait on Sunday, Aug. 7, at the Ontario National Guard Armory.

The citizen soldiers will augment the 2nd Battalion, 116th Cavalry Regiment from the Idaho National Guard for a one-year deployment. The 16 are assigned to the same company and will leave soon for Fort Bliss, Texas, located near El Paso.

"The training is not complete," Staff Sgt. James Hawley said, "and there is still more to do. We'll be at Fort Bliss, El Paso, Texas, for two months and then to Kuwait, where we will fall



Maj. W. Chris Clyne/U.S. Army National Guard

Maj. Gen. Michael E. Stencel, right, the Oregon National Guard adjutant general, shakes hands with deploying members of the 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry Regiment after a mobilization ceremony in Ontario on Aug. 7, 2022.

in on our tanks?"

While in Kuwait, the deployment group will be part of Operation Spartan Shield, a joint mission under the U.S. Central Command, and part of Operation Enduring Freedom. OSS focuses on providing theater security, all while strengthening and

building defense partner relationships in Southwest Asia.

The deploying citizen soldiers are all tank crew members, led by 1st Lt. Matthew Booher and Hawley, have been in training to prepare for this deployment.

# Wolf killing spurs \$11.5k reward

By AUSTIN DE DIOS  
The Oregonian

BAKER CITY — The Oregon State Police Fish & Wildlife Division is looking for the person or people who fatally shot a collared wolf in Northeastern Oregon last week, and conservation groups have offered a \$11,500 reward to anyone whose tip leads to an arrest or citation.

A 2-year-old female wolf known as OR-112, part of the Keating Pack, was found Friday near an embankment in the forest seven miles north of Halfway, Oregon. Troopers believe she was shot the day before.

The Oregon Wildlife Coalition and its partners have offered the award.

Another 2-year-old wolf was found dead in Eastern Oregon in January after it was hit by a car. Officials



Oregon State Police/Contributed Photo

The Oregon State Police Fish & Wildlife Division is seeking the public's assistance in locating the individuals responsible for shooting and killing a wolf — OR-112 — in the Pine Creek Wildlife Management Unit.

originally believed she had died of a gunshot wound.

In 2021, the state's annual animal count showed a small increase in the wolf population, with the minimum number of wolves increasing from 170 to 172. At least 26 wolves died in the state last year, up from 10 the previous year, according

to the report.

Humans were responsible for 21 of those deaths.

Police ask anyone with information to contact OSP through the Turn in Poachers (TIP) hotline at 1-800-452-7888 or \*OSP (\*677), or email TIP@osp.oregon.gov and reference case number SP22201971.