



The Baker County Press

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TheBakerCountyPress.com

All local. All relevant. Every Friday.

Friday, December 25, 2015 • Volume 2, Issue 52

Mrs. Eastern Oregon puts literacy at top of platform

BY KERRY McQUISTEN
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When Baker City's Lori McNeil was crowned Mrs. Eastern Oregon back in August, she immediately got to work promoting a cause near and dear to her heart: Literacy.

Said McNeil, "I have been in education for almost 18 years. My experience has spanned across pre-K to adult professional development. Literacy

skills are essential in providing and maintaining a solid growth and development for everyday living. Strong literacy skills empower people in ways that go beyond understanding, and serve as building blocks into a deeper world that is unknown to those who do not possess as strong of skills.

"My passion for helping people develop literacy skills stems from the years of work within education

and the need I continue to see as I work with students of all ages."

McNeil, for example, is a volunteer with the Baker County Literacy Coalition as a weekly reader for elementary kids. Right now, she's gearing up for "Dr. Seuss week" in March—but that's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to her literacy efforts, which she hopes to continue.

McNeil's next state-level competition is coming up

on April 9, and if no other eastern Oregon contestant makes it to that level, her reign—and official literacy efforts—will automatically continue through the end of 2016, she says.

"If another applicant makes it," she added, "my title will cease but my platform work will not."

SEE MRS. EASTERN OREGON PAGE 5



Submitted Photo.

Lori McNeil, Mrs. Eastern Oregon, says literacy is a cause near and dear to her heart.

Hammond family garners eastern Oregon support



Submitted Photo.

Ammon Bundy, son of Cliven Bundy, traveled to Burns last week to attend a meeting in support of Harney County's Hammond family, two members of whom are scheduled to be incarcerated in January.

• CROWD TURNS OUT IN BURNS TO WEIGH IN ON BLM CONTROVERSY

BY KEN TAYLOR
SPECIAL TO THE BAKER COUNTY PRESS
WITH ADDITIONS FROM STAFF

Americans expect to reap the rewards of their hard labor, and that is exemplified in hard-working western ranchers and farmers.

Many in Harney County and across eastern Oregon believe the Hammond family has lost many of those rewards fighting a government with no limits or accountability after the federal government prosecuted local ranchers, Dwight and Steven Hammond, for burning grasslands to protect their ranch. Those fires ended up burning a small portion of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) managed land.

On December 15, a group of individuals from across Oregon, and some even from across the United States, gathered in Burns as a show of support for the family. The speakers included Ammon Bundy of the infamous case of the Bundy ranching family in Nevada, whose square-off against the BLM also garnered national media attention, and Ryan Payne.

Baker County residents Jake Brown of Halfway and Kody Justus of Baker City attended.

SEE HAMMOND PAGE 5



Submitted Photo.

The Burns District Office of the BLM.

Two killed in 1-84 crash



Photo courtesy of OSP.

A woman and a female juvenile lost their lives in this accident last Thursday.

Oregon State Police (OSP) troopers are continuing the investigation into last Thursday morning's fatal crash on Interstate 84 near milepost 330, just east of Durkee in Baker County. Upon arriving on scene, emergency crews found two vehicles had collided head on and a third vehicle was also struck.

Preliminary information indicates that on December 17th, 2015, at approximately 9:25 a.m., a blue 2003 Chevy Suburban operated by Billie Jo Aguilar, age 39, with a female juvenile passenger, age 12, and a female juvenile passenger, age 14, of Wendell, Idaho, had been traveling westbound on Interstate 84 when the Suburban lost control on the icy roadway and slid across the grassy median into the eastbound lanes. A 2014 Peterbilt commercial motor vehicle, operated by Kendall Lee Lenderman, age 42, of Dublin, Georgia, was traveling eastbound, had slowed but was unable to evasively maneuver when the Suburban impacted head on into the Peterbilt.

Both vehicles then continued to slide off the right shoulder of the eastbound lanes and impact into a 2014 Volvo commercial motor vehicle that was parked and occupied by John Patrick Henry, age 40, of Nampa Idaho. Shortly after impact with the Volvo, the Suburban and the Peterbilt caught on fire and both became quickly engulfed.

Both Aguilar and the 12-year-old passenger were deceased at the scene.

Good samaritans were able to get the 14-year-old out of the Suburban while it was on fire. The 14-year-old juvenile was transported to St. Alphonsus in Baker City and later life flighted to St. Alphonsus in Boise, Idaho.

Lenderman and Henry were not injured.

The Peterbilt was hauling a flatbed trailer with lumber and the Volvo was hauling a tanker trailer containing oil additive.

One lane of Interstate 84 was shut down over four hours and OSP is being assisted by the Baker County Sheriff's Office, Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and Huntington Fire Department.

This is an ongoing investigation and more information will be released when available.

Friday Mostly cloudy with some lingering morning showers—a textbook Christmas morning. High in the mid 20s. Lows in the single digits.

Saturday Mostly sunny and cool, highs in the lower 20s. Lows near 10.

Sunday Mostly sunny and continued cold with increasing clouds towards the evening. High temperature near 20. Lows around 15.

Your weekend weather forecast for Baker County.



Official weather provider for The Baker County Press.

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