

## Here, There, & Everywhere

**BOYS/GIRLS DODGEBALL** - Coed dodgeball, with one session for Lorna Byrne Middle School students and another for third- through fifth-graders, will be held by the Boys & Girls Club Illinois Valley Section. The middle school event will be held Friday, March 9 from 7 to 9 p.m. at the LBMS gym. The tournament for younger students will be held Friday, March 16 in the Evergreen Elementary School gym from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Teams can be formed ahead. Snacks will be provided. Phone 592-6151 for more information.

**CRIBBAGE CLIMATE** - An all-comers cribbage tournament to raise money for Illinois Valley Safe House Alliance will be held Saturday, March 10. The fundraiser, sponsored by Hometowne Interiors, will be held at its location at 139 S. Caves Ave. There will be cash prizes and door prizes. Details are in an ad in this issue.

**SAR AT 40** - Josephine County Search And Rescue (SAR) will hold an open house to celebrate its 40th anniversary on Saturday, March 10. The public event will run from 1 to 5 p.m. at 250 Tech Way in Merlin, said Jo County Sheriff's Office. There will be cake, coffee and a tour, plus visitors can meet SAR volunteers. Take Exit 61 off Interstate 5; Monument Drive to North Valley Drive (North Valley Industrial Park) and turn right; then first left onto Corporate Way; then right onto Tech Way.

**EVANGELICAL FREE CHANGE** - Rudie Neuman, of Spokane, officially will become new pastor at Valley Evangelical Free Church in Cave Junction on Sunday, March 11. Neuman, 55, has extensive experience as a minister and counselor. He and his wife, Sue, are in the process of moving to Cave Junction. The new pastor will replace Les Knapp, who has served in the position the past two years. Knapp, active in the valley's all-church group, plans to "semiretire" and perhaps help other congregations by serving as temporary pastor when needed. He and his wife, Sherry, are longtime ministers.

**GRIEF RELIEF** - "Living With Grief: Before & After the Death" is the title of a teleconference and local panel discussion set for Thursday, March 22 from 5:30 to 8 p.m. It will be conducted at Lovejoy Hospice offices in Grants Pass at 939 S.E. Eighth St. Phone 474-1193 for more information and to reserve a boxed meal.

**ALZHEIMER ASSISTANCE** - A public information meeting with the possibility of forming a support group for those who deal with Alzheimer's patients will be held Friday, March 23 at Illinois Valley Senior Center. There will be a presentation from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. by Regina Stephain, of Rogue Valley Alzheimer's Association. Following it, valley care-givers will have a chance to attend a brief workshop regarding a possible group for mutual support and other educational events. For more information phone 774-9348.

**SHOO FLU** - Influenza vaccine is being administered at the Josephine County Public Health office Mondays through Fridays from 8 to 11:30 a.m., and 1 to 4:30 p.m. The address is 715 N.W. Dimmick St. in Grants Pass. There is a \$30 fee, but Public Health will bill Medicare, Oregon Health Plan, and BlueCross-BlueShield of Oregon.

**NOTEPAD - I.V. Senior Center** directors will meet Thursday, March 8 at 10 a.m. at the E. River Street site. Any member can attend ... **A pancake-plus breakfast** will be served to all comers on Saturday, March 10 from 8 to 11 a.m. at I.V. Senior Center. See the Kerby Belt Lodge ad in this issue for details ... **Women's Cafe** will be held March 10 in Takilma Community Bldg. Details are in an ad in this edition ... **Career Day** at Lorna Byrne Middle School, with many I.V. businesses participating, was held Wednesday morning, March 7 ... **Bumper stickers:** \*Bumper stickers are not your life. \*Don't read bumper stickers. \*0-55 in 11 minutes. \*Car unlocked. Keys under German shepherd. \*My other car is also a piece of junk.

**LAST WORDS** - You will never find anybody who can give you a clear and compelling reason why we observe daylight-saving time. (Dave Barry)

Kerby Belt Lodge

## BREAKFAST

Saturday, March 10, 8 to 11 a.m.  
I.V. Senior Center, 520 E. River St.



Eggs-Bacon  
Taylor's Sausage  
Hash Browns  
Biscuits & Gravy  
Juice-Coffee-Tea

**Proceeds support youth activities & scholarships**

I will never be an old man. To me, old age is always 15 years older than I am.  
- Francis Bacon -

## Statewide insurance for school districts draws fire

(Continued from page 1)

Prewitt said that the pooling plan would immediately cost the state \$99 million, and could adversely affect local school districts.

"It eliminates the ability of local school districts to bargain in the most effective way," Prewitt said. "Right now, health insurance plans are an item school districts use to bargain with local unions. We will have that choice taken away from us if SB 426 does pass."

OSBA Associate Executive Director Ron Wilson said that smaller school districts could ultimately suffer as a result of SB 426.

"There's a lot of risk here, because it could be forcing school districts to have to take resources right out of the classroom and give them to a statewide employee health insurance benefit board," Wilson said. "We're very concerned that rather than saving any dollars, this could cost school districts money."

Three Rivers School District (TRSD) Superintendent Jerry Fritz described the pooling plan as "problematic."

"Our initial assessment is that it will not bode well for Three Rivers," Fritz said. "If it plays out the way we're projecting, it could cost us anywhere from \$1.2 to \$1.4 million beyond what we were expecting to pay."

TRSD Human Resources Director Debbie Breckner said that she is "very, very nervous" about what the pool could mean for the district.

"Without a concrete, mathematical, unbiased look, I can't support it," Breckner said. "There's a lot missing, in my opinion."

Breckner said that TSRD negotiates its own contracts for the benefits it offers employees. But under SB 426, larger, self-insured districts in Medford, Portland and Clackamas County would be able to opt out of the pooling plan.

That option is made available to those districts because their existing insurance plans are more cost-competitive than those that would be offered under the pooling proposal.

However, smaller school districts would have no such choice.

"Based on the numbers I see, we have the ability to beat the pool," Breckner said. "Why aren't we given the same option?"

As is often the case with complex statewide issues, much of what is really going on can be explained by the behind-the-scenes maneuvering of politicians and their financial backers.

The statewide insurance pool plan is garnering much support from the Oregon Education Association (OEA), the statewide teachers union.

Oregon House District 3 Rep. Ron Maurer (R-Grants Pass) said that the real issue is a continuing battle between OSBA and OEA.

"The bottom line is, it's

not about health insurance -- it's about power," Maurer said. "My theory is that the OEA sees this as an opportunity to defeat their opposition, which is the OSBA. How they're going to do it is, they're going to take away the funding source for the OSBA."

Maurer, a former member of the Grants Pass School District 7 Board of Education, said that the OSBA gets more than 60 percent of its operating revenue from a surcharge on its health insurance trust fund.

Deckert claims that such a situation is extremely uncommon.

"I'm not familiar with any other organization whose operating revenues come from royalties from health insurance," Deckert said. "If there is one, I haven't heard about it."

But these political struggles most certainly have local implications. During collective bargaining negotiations between local school districts and teachers unions, OSBA provides expertise to the districts, and OEA does so for the unions. Prewitt, a longtime member of the Phoenix-Talent School District, said that passage of SB 426 would represent a major victory for OEA.

"It means that the OEA will once again gain bargaining control over school districts when it's time to negotiate a new contract," Prewitt said.

Although Deckert is the primary sponsor of SB 426, he did so at the request of Gov. Kulongoski's office.

According to campaign contribution and expenditure reports, OEA donated \$254,000 to Kulongoski's 2002 campaign and \$265,000 to his 2006 reelection effort.

After the election, Kulongoski appointed former OEA lobbyist Chip Terhune as his chief of staff. Also, OEA past president James Sager serves as Kulongoski's senior policy adviser on education issues.

Maurer said that OEA's support of Kulongoski, as well as his key staff appointments, have much to do with the true rationale behind SB 426.

"I think the connection is probably unmistakable," Maurer said. "The term I keep hearing around the building is 'payback'."

Prewitt explains the situation in similar terms.

"If SB 426 passes, school districts will be pretty much out of the insurance business, they won't have any options, and will have to take the plan written by the governor's friends," he stated.

SB 426 already has passed out of the Senate Education Committee and Joint Ways and Means Committee, and it's anticipated that it will reach the Senate floor for a vote within the next two weeks. The speed with which it has been pushed through has caused concern among local

school officials.

"It feels like this came on the scene very quickly," Fritz said. "There's an extraordinary push to pass it through before it's been thoroughly researched. That's a problem."

Maurer said that to date, SB 426 has not been given the proper scrutiny.

"It's going largely under the radar," Maurer said.

Fritz added that what is missing is a "thorough, impartial" study on the bill and its potential effects. However, Deckert said that the bill has been in the works for five years, and that further study is unnecessary.

"I wouldn't support delaying this for another six or seven months to study this one more time," Deckert said.

Sen. Jason Atkinson (R-Central Point) said that despite being a member of the minority party in that cham-

ber, he hopes to prevent SB 426 from being passed into law. However, he acknowledges that doing so likely will be an uphill battle.

"I'm actively trying to stop that bill," said Atkinson. "I'm hoping I can count enough 'no' votes through people who represent rural school districts to kill this thing," Atkinson said.

"But it's going to take a lot of time and a lot of relationship building to get a 'no' vote."

Whether or not Atkinson is successful in his efforts remains to be seen. But what is becoming increasingly obvious is that competing interests in Salem will continue to affect the very people that politicians are purporting to help.


"It seems to be more of a political issue than a down-and-dirty look at what's best for the kids," Breckner said.



## Carousel Fabrics & Crafts

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Hours: 11-4, Mondays-Fridays



## The Dome School Women's Cafe

**Art Exhibit**  
**Singing & Dancing**  
**Poetry Reading**  
**Writers ~ Healers ~ Musicians**

**Saturday, March 10**  
**5 to 7 p.m. - Art Show**  
**7 to 10 p.m. - Performances**

Admission is on a sliding scale: \$8 - \$15

**Everyone is welcome!**  
(please, no small children)

Info: Dome School - 592-2866  
9367 Takilma Rd., Cave Junction


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1 (800) 228-7601 Ext. 63451

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## HomeTowne Interiors

**Benefit Cribbage Tournament**  
Saturday, March 10 for  
Illinois Valley Safe House Alliance

**Door Prizes - Cash Prizes**

Doors open 8:30 a.m., starts 9:30  
\$10 entry fee through March 9, \$15 on March 10  
139 S. Caves Ave.  
592-2413