

Lower Umpqua Library Notes



Lower Umpqua Library District (LULD) is having an Open House on Saturday, January 10, 2026. Refreshments will be provided. In addition to showcasing the library's collection to the public, the open house will include the celebration

of 106 years of library services in the Lower Umpqua area, and the kickoff event for Library Bingo, a reading and DVD program open to all ages

Participants in Library Bingo will earn raffle tickets throughout the year by borrowing items from the library such as books, movies, and magazines, which will be used towards quarterly and annual prize drawings. Library Bingo is a similar concept as the Summer Reading Program, except that it is year-round, includes movies as well as books, and is open to adults in addition to kids. The generalized bingo card will cover the breadth of the library's collection in adult, young adult (teen), and juvenile age categories and there will also be specialized bingo cards focused on specific subjects, such as cards for subgenres of romance and speculative fiction.

The Lower Umpqua area's very first library opened in 1920, although the present building was constructed comparatively recently in 1982. A 100th anniversary celebration had been

planned in 2020 but was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. Lower Umpqua Library District (serving Reedsport, Gardiner, Scottsburg, Ash Valley, Winchester Bay, and the surrounding rural hinterland) is the current iteration of a tradition of libraries dating back 106 years.

For those interested in local history, the library has several decades of the area's former newspaper the *Port Umpqua Courier*, starting in 1917. These are bound volumes, each combining 1-2 years of original newspapers into a book-like format. They are available for use inside the library but cannot be borrowed due to their fragile condition and limited availability.

As a reminder, preschool storytime continues to be held every Wednesday at 11 am.

Alex Kuestner, Library Director/
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Oregon Public Safety

Linn County Sheriff — Oct. 4, 2025: Deputies responded to Highway 34 at Peoria Road for a reported crash and discovered an Albany man, 30-year-old Christopher J. Smith, deceased from a gunshot wound inside the vehicle. Detectives quickly identified suspects, and two individuals were later arrested in connection with the homicide. Investigators say the incident appears targeted and there is no ongoing threat to the public.

Lane County Sheriff — Nov. 21, 2025: Deputies arrested an Eugene man following an ICAC (Internet Crimes Against Children) investigation under case number 25-5512. The arrest stemmed from an undercover operation involving digital communications. The suspect was lodged at the Lane County Jail pending further charges and review by the District Attorney's Office.

Douglas County Sheriff — Nov. 14, 2025: Deputies arrested 21-year-old Heath Lethlean of Roseburg on charges of Attempted Murder II following an assault investigation in the 1300 block of Gazley Road near Myrtle Creek. The victim, 73-year-old Stephen Balliew, suffered severe injuries and required hospitalization. Lethlean fled initially but was located and taken into custody without incident.

Douglas County Sheriff — Nov. 18, 2025: A social-media threat referencing Glide High School prompted a multi-agency safety response. Deputies investigated the post, interviewed individuals involved, and determined the threat to be not credible. Patrol presence was increased around the school as a

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Storage-Unit Fire in Roseburg Prompts Safety Reminder

Story by Milo Banks

A Wednesday evening fire at a commercial storage unit in Roseburg brought swift response from emergency crews and renewed attention to fire safety in local businesses. The blaze, located on NE Diamond Lake Boulevard, sent smoke rolling through the area as firefighters worked to contain flames inside one of the units.

The structure, used primarily for storage, was unoccupied when the fire broke out. Crews were able to prevent the flames from spreading to neighboring units, though several adjacent spaces suffered smoke and water damage. Firefighters remained on scene for hours, ventilating the building and ensuring hotspots were fully extinguished.

Investigators have not yet released a cause, but early indications suggest the fire may have originated among stored household goods. Electrical issues, accidental ignition, and improper storage remain possible causes as the investigation continues.

Local business owners note that storage-unit fires can escalate quickly because of the unpredictable mix of materials inside: old

furniture, chemicals, electronics, paper goods, and items that haven't been inspected in years. Firefighters say units packed tightly with belongings can trap heat, making extinguishing more difficult.

While no injuries were reported, the incident serves as a reminder for residents using commercial storage facilities. Fire officials encourage renters to avoid storing flammable

liquids, check for faulty wiring on appliances, and ensure units are not overloaded or stacked in ways that could lead to collapse or poor ventilation.

For Roseburg, this fire stands as a near miss—serious, but contained. As holiday season storage peaks and people begin rotating belongings for winter, it's a timely moment for the community to take stock of safety and prevent future incidents.



Florence Launches Safer Routes to School Project

Story by Scooter Brown

ODOT funding grant for Safe Routes to School

A long-planned safety improvement is finally underway in Florence, giving families new peace of mind on the daily walk or bike ride to school. The city has begun construction on its Safe Routes to School project along 35th Street from Siano Loop to Oak Street — a corridor heavily used by students headed toward nearby schools.

For years, parents have voiced concerns about narrow shoulders, fast-moving traffic, and dimly lit stretches that made mornings stressful and afternoons unpredictable. The new upgrade aims to change that. The plan includes improved sidewalks, clearly marked crosswalks, curb extensions, updated signage, and measures to slow traffic in key sections.

City planners say the goal is simple: give kids a safe, reliable path within walking distance of home and school. Many families in Florence rely on walking or biking, especially in neighborhoods where bus routes run infrequently or where parents work early shifts.

Residents along the project route have already seen survey crews, initial grading work, and the placement of construction

markers. The city says most of the work will be completed with minimal disruption, though drivers can expect some temporary lane adjustments.

Local teachers and school administrators say the project is overdue. Some have long advised parents to avoid certain intersections or to escort children on foot when possible. With the new infrastructure, they say more students can travel independently without facing unnecessary risks.

For a coastal town that has seen growth over the last decade, pedestrian improvements like this do more than help students—they help entire neighborhoods. Better lighting, safer crossings, and more defined walking lanes often reduce accidents, increase visibility, and calm traffic speeds.

Florence officials hope that once the 35th Street improvements are complete, it will serve as a model for future safety upgrades. With more families walking and biking, and with the community's growing emphasis on healthy transportation, the project signals a step toward a safer and more connected city.

