

REVITALIZATION GRANT

LHS Home Construction Program gets \$515,000

By Trish Yerges

The La Grande School District is pleased to announce that the district was recently approved for a revitalization grant award in the amount of \$515,000 that will be spent as seed money for the new Construction III home building class through the Career Technology and Engineering (CTE) program at LHS.

Superintendent George Mendoza stated, "We applied for a grant with the help of field representative, Jessica Keys, from the office of U. S. Senator Jeff Merkley."

The district worked through Senator Merkley's office to ask for one-time funds. "We wanted to get a congressionally directed spending bill, and we needed to apply for that," Mendoza explained.

In addition to this, the district spent time working with the City of La Grande to have them write letters of support, and they also held discussions with GTC Construction, City of La Grande, Grande Ronde Hospital and Union County Commissioner Paul Anderes about what could be done together to improve housing in the community.

"During the last year and a half, the district purchased two lots of land to be able to build a house. The high school began implementing curriculum for our Construction I and Con-

struction II as well as started to implement home and landscape design courses as part of our CTE programs," he said.

After revamping the curriculum and addressing staffing need the district also started to partner with other organizations so that they could move forward with their home construction and trades program goals.

"When it came to the congressional directive spending, the district applied for a grant of \$515,000 so that we could have the seed money so we could buy the materials, pay for the first year of the teacher and start moving forward with building our first Tiger Home," he went on to say.

The district's goal is to address housing needs in the community because the lack of housing is currently a barrier to people wanting to move into and work in La Grande.

"There are people from EOU that want to purchase homes, and there aren't any available--same thing with Grande Ronde Hospital and for our district employees when they are moving here," Mendoza explained. "So there are issues with housing, and we want to address that."

However, the primary purpose of the Home Construction Class is to create a pathway program so students are able to develop trade skills and become the future general and sub-

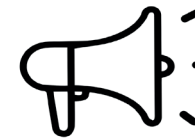
contractors working in La Grande.

"Then when we have more needs for housing, we have people to carry out those trades in our community or region," he said. "If you're going to have great jobs and a great economy, you also have to have housing, and we wanted to start moving in the direction of starting to design and build affordable homes and then teach our students important trade skills."

The first Tiger Home floor plan is likely going to be a two story, two resident townhouse structure with three bedrooms, two baths, a living room and family room and hopefully a two-car garage.

"If we could build two townhouses to start things out, we'd like to partner with Grande Ronde Hospital. That's their biggest need. They would like to purchase homes from us if they can, and (preferably) have them close to the hospital," Mendoza said.

The district's first choice of home is to build a wood constructed townhouse, and when the district chooses a contractor to work with, that contractor might have their own townhouse designs that can be used or edited for the district's needs. Other options to a townhouse would be a duplex or an affordable single-family home. Those decisions will be made later when the district starts working with a general contractor.



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Students participating in the construction classes will earn CTE elective credits, and if they work their way through the three consecutive construction classes, they can earn a pathway certificate in the trades as well. "Usually those are three or more elective credits earned," Mendoza said.

The Construction I class covers an introduction to woods, cutting, simple designs and building projects. The Construction II class would be more project based and understanding more about electrical, plumbing, dry walling and other finish trade work. Darren Henrickson is currently the teacher of those classes. Rhonda Calhoun also teaches a course in design. These classes can enroll between 20 and 30 students each.

Lastly, Construction III would involve the actual building of a Tiger Home project, and the district is looking this fall for a teacher for that class. Preferably, the teacher will be certified as a teacher and as a general contractor. The teacher will supervise the students' learning and work as well as plan and organize the construction from skilled sub-contractors. If student interest in this class is greater than expected, the class may be divided into A and B sections so that proper supervision and safety is assured on the building site while students handle electric tools and machinery.

"This is starting to move us to a pipeline experience that helps us create a more skilled labor force and address the housing needs in our community. This will be important to us," Mendoza concluded.



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