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EAST OREGONIAN

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WINNER OF THE 2013 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

One dollar

Oregon may lose its wildfire insurance

Policy deductible may cost too much for tight firefighting budget

By **HILLARY BORRUD**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Lawmakers working on the next two-year budget say that one of the major challenges they face is how to pay for firefighting costs.

They're worried a company that has previously sold the state an insurance

policy to help cover firefighting costs will either refuse to issue such a policy this year, or the deductible will be so high that it no longer makes sense for the state to purchase insurance.

Oregon usually purchases a policy from Lloyd's, the London insurance company, to help cover firefighting costs; the state uses its tax-supported

general fund and landowner contributions to cover the remaining firefighting costs not paid for by the federal government.

"The other wild card that hasn't really come up in discussion much is fire season costs," said Rep. Peter Buckley,

See **WILDFIRE/8A**



Grant County Sheriff's Department
The state of Oregon may lose its wildfire insurance coverage as rising premiums and deductibles could make the policy unaffordable.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Junior Angel Corona works on a traditional root gathering basket in an art class Wednesday at the Nixyaawii Community School in Mission.

Animals lose victim status in Oregon

Supreme court reverses ruling based on Stanfield abuse case

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

The Oregon Supreme Court vacated two landmark rulings — including its own — that animals could be crime victims in a case that began in Umatilla County.

The 15-page ruling of March 5 stated the Oregon Court of Appeals in 2012 and the supreme court in 2014 should never have considered the matter in the first place.

The new ruling stems from State v. Arnold Nix. The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office in 2009 seized 69 farm animals from Nix's Stanfield farm. A jury in 2010 found Nix guilty of 20 counts of second-degree animal neglect, which were misdemeanors at the time. The state asked for sentence on 20 separate convictions, making each animal a victim.

But the defense argued livestock were not victims under Oregon Revised Statute 161.067, which determines punishable offenses for multiple victims or repeated violations. Then-Umatilla County Circuit Judge Jeffrey Wallace sided with the defense and sentenced Nix on a single, merged conviction.

"In order to be considered eligible for multiple sentences," Wallace said Monday, "the question was: Is an animal a victim for the purposes of the statute?"

There was no case law at the time on the issue, so answering the question fell on Wallace's shoulders. And the reason there was no case law is because second-degree animal neglect was a misdemeanor in 2010, and Oregon law does not allow the state to challenge a judge's sentencing on misdemeanors.

Oregon in 1989 adopted sentencing guidelines, but those applied only to felonies. If a judge does not follow the guidelines, the law allows the state to appeal. But there is no similar law covering

See **ANIMALS/8A**

Cultural cultivation

District develop initiatives to better teach Indian students

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

The Pendleton School District is tasked with tackling a problem that only a handful of districts in Oregon face each year — closing an achievement gap for a sizable American Indian student population. Pendleton Superintendent Jon Peterson looks at it more as an "opportunity gap," something that affects all minorities across the state, whether they be Hispanic students in Hermiston or African Americans in inner-city Portland.

In Pendleton, American Indian students, most of whom are drawn from the nearby Uma-

tilla Indian Reservation, graduate at a 45 percent rate. That's not only more than 30 percent lower than white students, it's below the paltry 54 percent statewide rate for Indian students.

Ramona Halcomb, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation education director, said historical and generational trauma has weighed heavily on Indian students.

Halcomb pointed to 20th century developments like Indian boarding schools, which were often the sites of forced assimilation and abuse, as having an adverse effect on Indian education.

So to tackle the opportunity gap, the district has been aggressive about offering more opportunities to American Indian students.

Last year, the district received a \$100,000 state grant to create an American Indian-centric curriculum. The intent is to craft classes for Pendleton High School and Sunridge Middle School that will involve studies of Umatilla history and culture.

Assistant Superintendent Tricia Mooney said the district is using a portion of the money to buy a copy of the recently published Umatilla dictionary for every third through eighth grade classroom in the school system. The classes specifically dedicated to American Indian topics will get a classroom set.

To aid in their quest to become more culturally inclusive, the district also is hiring a "heritage language" kindergarten teacher for

See **STUDENTS/8A**

Pendleton dancer, Hermiston coach bring home individual awards

By **KATHY ANEY**
East Oregonian

Local dancers brought home fourth-place finishes from Saturday's OSAA Dance & Drill State Championships in Portland.

While both teams finished impressively high in the rankings — Hermiston in the 5A Intermediate Division and Pendleton in Show — a couple of individuals shone even brighter. Kendyl Thorne, of Pendleton, raked in a trio of awards, while Hermiston head coach Ashley Seibel was named 5A Coach of the Year.

Thorne was named to the All-State Academic Dance Team. She also received an academic scholarship based on grades, character and a written essay and a dance scholarship awarded to the four best dancers. The scholarships totaled \$1,600.



Seibel

Pendleton dancers have won these awards in the past, but never all three at once.

The senior said she was in a state of disbelief.

"I was shocked. I cried," she said. "It was so surreal."

She had traveled to Gresham to try out for the All-State Team in January. Half of the group, all seniors recommended by their coaches, made the first cut. Thorne and the remaining dancers learned the entire state routine and performed for judges, vying for 24 spots open to dancers

See **DANCE/8A**



Photo by Michael Ladd

Kendyl Thorne dances Saturday during Rhythmic Mode's performance at Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Portland. Thorne won all three individual awards the state has to offer — All-State Dancer and two scholarships.

