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**HAPPY
VETERANS DAY**
SPECIAL SECTION INSIDE



EAST OREGONIAN

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2015

140th Year, No. 19

WINNER OF THE 2015 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

One dollar



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Retired Pendleton firefighter Ken Garrett served in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War and was stationed in Japan.

Pendleton veteran recounts time in Japan during Korean War

Plans to climb Mount Fuji again

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

Pendleton resident Ken Garrett has experienced a lot in his nearly 84 years — worked at a sawmill, fought a war, led a distinguished career at the local fire department, raised a family.

In between old photographs and press clippings collected in a binder, Garrett includes all of those facts and more in a short memoir he wrote. But one event specifically stands out to the Korean War veteran.

Garrett's indelible memory concluded an ocean away, but it was set in motion by his childhood in La Grande.

The week of Dec. 7, 1942 was a terrible one for the then 10-year-old Ken. His dad was in the hospital with

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Contributed photo

Ken Garrett, left, stands with his friend Lee Travis while climbing Mount Fuji in July 1954.

PILOT ROCK

City fires its only certified police officer

With no force of its own, will contract with Pendleton PD

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Pilot Rock City Council voted 4-0 Tuesday night to fire Gary Thompson from the police department effective immediately. The city now has no police force of its own.

Thompson, moments after the meeting, said he was awash in emotions but had done what he could to prepare for the moment.

Thompson, 43, was Pilot Rock's lone state-certified officer and worked for the city since early 2015. The city suspended him Oct. 30, and Tuesday the council held a special meeting at 6 p.m. to consider disciplining Thompson.

Thompson elected that the meeting be in executive session. That bars most members of the public while usually allowing reporters, though the law limits reporting to the general nature of the meeting.

Thompson gave an opening statement, then Councilmen Bob Deno, Deacon Perkins and Ray Corwin questioned Thompson. Councilman James Hinkle had no questions for him, and

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State looks for ways to avert prison expansion

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown urged lawmakers, counties and state agencies Tuesday to work together to reduce the state's prison population before March and avert a \$9 million emergency expansion at Deer Ridge Correctional Institution in Madras.

Lawmakers have indicated the only way to pay for that expansion is to raid a state fund designed to keep offenders out of prison.

Such a move could doom Oregon's justice reinvestment — the concept of investing in county-level programs that support and supervise offenders who otherwise might be sent to prison, Brown said.

Brown's office organized a meeting in Salem Tuesday of more than 300 representatives from the state's 36 counties to discuss options for quickly decreasing the influx of prisoners.

"I'm here today because I believe there is still a chance that this worst-case scenario will not come to pass," Brown said. "It requires all of us to take a leap of faith."

The tug-of-war between the demand for prison space and justice reinvestment began in October when the state Office of Economic Analysis projected that the male prison population would grow faster than previously anticipated. That unexpected growth would require the Department of Corrections to add 150 to 200 prison beds by

See PRISON/10A

Stanfield High School students honor veterans

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

As students at Stanfield Secondary School sat on the gym bleachers Tuesday, respectfully listening to facts about the military during a Veterans Day assembly, one student made it clear that the upcoming holiday was a very personal one for her.

Emma Sanders stood before her classmates and recounted the moment years ago when her father deployed to Iraq. She tried to be brave at the airport, she said, but she was just a little girl and she ended up with her arms around her father's legs, crying that she didn't want him to go.

"I have my dad back," she

More inside

Sam Boardman Elementary School students honor local veterans Page 3A

said. "Some people don't get their dad back and that hurts."

Her father, David Sanders, joined the Marine Corps in 1989 and also spent time in the Army in Iraq. Emma said she remembers blurry video chats with him, but also plenty of moments in her childhood that he missed due to his military service.

"We used to have family snuggle time, and since he wasn't there we would put his picture on

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Class of 2015 graduate Pfc. Payton Wright talks about missing his hair with former classmates on Tuesday during a Veterans Day ceremony at Stanfield Secondary School. Wright joined the Marine Corps after graduating high school.

VA struggles to end homelessness, claims backlog

By KEVIN FREKING
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Though it has made much progress, the Department of Veterans Affairs is likely to miss its target on two ambitious goals: ending veteran homelessness in 2015 and ending the backlog in disability claims.

The latest count available showed about 50,000 homeless veterans on a single night in January 2014. That's a decline of 33 percent from January 2010. Results from the January 2015 count are expected later this month.

The disability and pension claims backlog also is on a downward path, although not before the claims processing system became so overwhelmed that lawmakers and veterans groups demanded changes at the VA.

The number of claims pending for more than 125 days soared from about

180,000 at the start of 2010 to more than 611,000 by March of 2013. It now stands at about 76,000.

Those are the kind of trends that politicians would surely like to cite during election season.

Yet, as one crisis began to fade at the VA, another blossomed. Reports of thousands of veterans waiting months and sometimes years for health care have taken priority and colored the way all other issues are viewed.

Investigators looking into delayed care found that inappropriate scheduling practices were a nationwide systemic problem. More than a year after the scandal broke congressional Republicans want to know why the number of employees fired is so low. VA Secretary Robert McDonald faces complaints that he has overstated the

See VETERANS/8A



Michael Lopez/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin via AP

JROTC's Mason Christopher carries the folded flag to a fellow cadet to be placed on the fallen soldier display during a Veterans Day assembly at Walla Walla High School Tuesday.

