

HERMISTON

Good deed returns purse to owner

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

When a young man knocked on Dusti Hunter’s door last week, she thought he must have the wrong address.

Instead, he was there to return her purse, which she had left in a cart at the Hermiston Wal-Mart about an hour earlier.

“I didn’t even realize my purse was gone yet,” she said.

The gesture caught her off guard so much she didn’t even think to ask for his name, but Facebook later helped her find the Good Samaritan. His name was Alejandro Larios.

Larios said he didn’t think twice about taking the pink purse back to Hunter when he spotted it. He has had his wallet stolen before and knows what it’s like to have to replace everything.

“I saw it in a cart in the parking lot, and there were guys looking at it and I just said it was my girlfriend’s purse and grabbed it,” he said.

He looked inside for a name and tried to send Hunter and a relative a message on Facebook. When they didn’t reply right away he decided he would drive to the address on Hunter’s driver’s license to see if she was home. He recently moved to Plymouth, Wash., from Yakima, so he wasn’t very familiar with Hermiston’s roads. But he managed to find Hunter eventually.



Contributed photo by Vincente Muniz
This photo of Alejandro Larios was taken recently after winning employee of the month at the local processing plant where he works. His boss said it wasn’t a surprise Larios would return a lost purse when no one was looking.

“I asked her if she had lost a purse and she said ‘I don’t think so.’ I said, ‘Are you sure?’”

Hunter said she was shocked when she realized it was hers. She couldn’t believe she had been that careless, and if she had realized it was missing she would have expected it to be long gone. The fact that Larios went the extra mile deliver it to her doorstep instead of just turning it in to Wal-Mart impressed her, too.

“Just the thought of

everything being destroyed, of having my ID stolen, my credit ruined ... I’m so grateful I didn’t have to have that,” she said.

Later she replied to Larios’s original Facebook message and asked what she could do for him in return. He asked if she would write a letter of recommendation for him that he could use for future job searches. She complied, telling the story of the purse and writing that he was a “credible, honest and upstanding individual.”

“Just the thought of everything being destroyed, of having my ID stolen, my credit ruined ... I’m so grateful I didn’t have to have that.”

— Dusti Hunter, owner of lost purse

“When looking at him for any place he is applying for, know that he did all of this without anyone watching over his shoulder or any expectation other than finding the owner of the purse with everything intact,” she wrote.

Even though he didn’t have any expectation of a monetary reward, she included one in the envelope with the letter anyway.

Vincente Muniz, the manager at a local processing plant where Larios has worked for the last six months, wrote in a Facebook message that he wasn’t surprised when he heard that Larios had been so honest.

“[He is a] hard worker, reliable, loyal and respectful,” Muniz said. “He is also extremely funny and just great to have around.”

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PENDLETON

ASPIRE seeks \$10K from district budget

Board hears bond construction update

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

Pendleton High School’s ASPIRE program has hit a bit of a snag.

At a Pendleton School Board meeting Tuesday, ASPIRE coordinator Jill Gregg said the program is continuing to help students by providing volunteer mentors and information that help shepherd them through the process of applying for college and finding a career.

In the past, ASPIRE has also offered financial assistance to some students for various college prep expenses like application fees, signing up for the SAT, dual credit fees and college tours.

Last year, ASPIRE spent \$7,465 to help cover those costs, with the Safeway eScrip program and a donation from the Kiwanis Club covering 87 percent of those costs.

But expenses continue to rise as ASPIRE’s sources of outside funding start to dry up. Safeway announced earlier this year that it was cutting its participation in the eScrip program, with the last check from the supermarket chain set to arrive in early 2016.

With ASPIRE funds dwindling, the program can no longer afford to offer a subsidized \$10 per credit rate for dual credit courses, forcing students to pay a higher \$31 rate.

Classes like Honors Biology 2 and Spanish 3 now cost \$372 each, and with some students taking multiple dual credit classes at once, the costs associated with them could be prohibitively expensive for lower-income families.

To make up for the lack of eScrip dollars, Gregg appealed to the board to create a \$10,000 ASPIRE fund in its next budget to help cover the services it provides its students.

Board Vice Chair Debbie McBee, an ASPIRE volunteer, said she was already hearing about the adverse effects of the higher dual credit rates from students.

“I know some of the people I’ve been working with are coming in (saying), ‘My dual credit’s going to cost \$2,000. My family doesn’t have that. Do I drop dual credit?’” she said.

Superintendent Jon

Peterson said there is no easy solution.

“I can tell you what the other local districts are doing — they’re paying,” he said. “Some of the districts are paying for every kid, even if they’re not on free or reduced lunch ... We don’t have that kind of money ... It’s a dilemma.”

The board took no action on the issue.

Also on the board’s agenda was an update about the bond projects from the project manager.

Wenaha Group Vice President Dave Fishel said design work is starting on the major projects for next summer: Converting Lincoln Primary School and West Hills Intermediate School into the district central office and career technical education center.

Fishel said the West Hills gym would be turned into a hub for the culinary arts program and include a kitchen, classroom and restaurant.

Another major change to the old school will be the removal of the main entrance, cafeteria and kitchen.

The new entrance will be at the southern portion of the building and will be served by a new road connecting the upper West Hills parking lot with the lower high school parking lot.

The Lincoln conversion process will be a lot less drastic.

“The improvements are going to be almost unseen in a lot of respects,” Fishel said.

Improvements include ADA-accessible bathrooms and converting the classrooms into offices and meeting rooms.

While the new central office will be ready by the end of the summer, the more intensive West Hills conversion won’t be completed until late fall.

Fishel said the new elementary schools at Washington and Sherwood Heights were on schedule and on budget.

He said the real challenge will be in tearing down the old buildings this summer, creating the new parking and “side work” in time for the start of the 2016-2017 school year.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

ECHO

Inland Musicians ring in the holiday season

East Oregonian

The Inland Northwest Musicians are ready to help get people in the holiday mood.

The annual Christmas concerts are Friday at 7 p.m. and Saturday at 4 p.m. in the Echo Community Center, 20 S. Bonanza St. Santa Claus will make an appearance and hand out treats during the performances.

Under the direction of Conductor R. Lee Friese, the orchestra and chorale will perform such pieces as “’Twas The Night Before Christmas,” “Go Tell It,” “He Is Born,” “A Canadian Brass Christmas” and “Tidings of Great Joy, Suite 2: ‘We Wish You a Merry Christmas.’”

For an opportunity to continue the holiday cheer, the audience is invited to receptions following each



EO Media Group file photo
Several choir members spread throughout the room during the 2014 Inland Northwest Musician Chorale’s performance of “Advent Canticle” at the Echo Community Center. The popular Christmas concerts are Friday and Saturday in Echo and Sunday in Connell, Washington.

performance at Sno Road Winery, 111 W. Main St.

The concerts are free, but reservations are highly recommended. To make a reservation, call 541-289-4696 and leave a message

with the total number of seats needed and your phone number.

For those traveling out of the area this weekend, the holiday concert also will be presented Sunday at 4 p.m.

at Connell High School in Connell, Washington. The school’s choir will join the Inland Musicians on some of the pieces.

Seating isn’t an issue at the Connell performance, so reservations aren’t required. The concert includes a reception hosted by parents of the high school choir members.

The Inland Northwest Musicians is a nonprofit organization that takes live orchestral and choral music to communities in northeastern Oregon and southeastern Washington. The group doesn’t charge for its performances, but accepts donations from its audiences.

For more information about the organization, including how to join an ensemble, contact 541-289-4696, inwm@machmedia.net or visit www.inlandnorthwestmusicians.com.

BRIEFLY

Body found in Pendleton by I-84

PENDLETON — A 73-year-old man traveling through Pendleton was found dead Tuesday alongside Interstate 84.

Oregon State Police Sgt. Tom Spickall said the death of Neil Basil Schulte does not appear suspicious at this time.

Passersby Tuesday around 9 a.m. spotted a body off the shoulder of the interstate on the westbound side of exit 209.

Pendleton police received the call and notified state police. Spickall said the investigation revealed Schulte was traveling from Austin, Texas, to his home in Nordland, Washington.

“At this point [Schulte’s death] is not suspicious in nature,” Spickall said. “But we still have not done any conclusive examination.”

Spickall said state police

was working to release more information.

EOTEC board to meet with public

HERMISTON — Members of the public interested in hearing an update on the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center firsthand are invited to a public meeting on Wednesday, Dec. 16.

The meeting will be held at 6 p.m. at the Hermiston Conference Center. Members of the authority board and Frew Development will be on hand to give updates and answer questions.

The EOTEC project is expected to house the 2017 Umatilla County Fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo. In addition to fairgrounds and a rodeo arena, the project will feature an event center/exhibitor hall available year-round for conferences, trade shows

and other events.

The city of Hermiston recently pledged an additional \$600,000 to the project, and Umatilla County has agreed to give another \$600,000 to help fill a funding shortfall of approximately \$2.2 million.

One week left to sign up for health insurance

Oregonians have until Tuesday to sign up for health insurance through healthcare.gov if they want to avoid being caught without insurance on the first day of 2016.

Under the Affordable Care Act, individuals who don’t have health insurance in 2016 will face a tax penalty of \$695 per adult and \$347 per child or 2.5 percent of “countable income” — whichever is greater.

While open enrollment lasts though January 31, 2016, the last day to buy a plan that will begin on New Years Day is Dec. 15. After that enrollees through the health exchange risk a gap in coverage and a tax penalty.

Joel Metlen of the Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services said he would encourage people who already have insurance to shop on healthcare.gov again before Dec. 15 to see if there is a better plan for

their family and to make sure they are taking advantage of financial help available.

He said last year 18,000 Oregonians who qualified for subsidies on their insurance did not take advantage of it. Of the approximately 107,000 Oregonians who enrolled through the website in 2015, more than 77,000 received a premium tax credit, averaging \$199 per month.

Simmons Insurance Group, 702 E Main St. in

Hermiston, is one of the state-designated centers providing free help shopping for plans and signing up through healthcare.gov.

Anyone who wants help navigating the health insurance website or evaluating plans can walk in to Simmons Insurance Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. or call 541-567-6367 to make an appointment. Evening and weekend help is available on an appointment basis.



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“Daughters of Hanford” Speaker: Anna King

Tuesday, January 12th, 2016 at 7:00 p.m.
BMCC, Rm ST-200, 2411 NW Carden Ave., Pendleton

For more information please call Karen at 541-966-3177. Need not be member to attend.

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