



EAST OREGONIAN

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140th Year, No. 88

WINNER OF THE 2015 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

One dollar



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Pendleton City Councilor and business owner Al Plute owes thousands of dollars in back taxes on a cluster of properties on the corner of Southeast First Street and Emigrant Avenue, according to the Umatilla County Assessment and Taxation Department.

PENDLETON

Plute behind on property taxes

Expects to settle debt by May

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

City councilor Al Plute owes the city of Pendleton more than \$25,000 in delinquent taxes.

The embattled councilor, who is the target of a recall attempt, was unapologetic about the debts.

While tax records for the Bowman building and

the St. George Plaza could not be located as of press time, Plute estimates he owes \$6,000 on the St. George and \$16,000 on the Bowman, but said he is well on his way to being caught up.

Additionally, he owns a cluster of properties



Plute

near the corner of Southeast Emigrant Avenue and Southeast First Street. According to Umatilla County tax statements, Plute owes \$4,318 on those properties, which includes a parking lot for tenants of the nearby St. George apartment complex. Plute's tax bills range

from \$135 to \$2,359, the latter having recently received a \$77 payment. He said that his money was tied up in battling a lawsuit with Pendleton Plumbing and he made a business decision to divert his funds to his legal fees. "It costs a lot of dough to pay for two attorneys," he said.

Now that the lawsuit is settled, Plute said he has

See PLUTE/3A



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Friends of Mat Ramm share hugs after a celebration/cystic fibrosis awareness event for Ramm at Pendleton High School.

'Breathe easy, Mat Ramm'

Cystic fibrosis shortens life of Pendleton grad, doesn't diminish it

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

Friends and family said goodbye to 21-year-old Mat Ramm on Saturday at Pendleton High School. Those who knew him say he packed much into his short life despite having cystic fibrosis, a brutal disease of the lungs and digestive system. Before Ramm died on Dec. 29, he planned his own celebration

of life, starting a GoFundMe account to raise money for the event. He hyped the memorial gathering on social media as a CF awareness event and a chance to swap Mat stories.

This was pure Mat Ramm, said his mother Marissa Hascall. She said her son had a gift for reaching out to others even in the darkest of times. Only days before he died, Hascall said, Mat entered Oregon Health &

Science University and noticed an injured man on a gurney in the emergency department.

"Keep your head up, man," Ramm told him, "It's going to get better."

"That was my kid," Hascall said. "He cared about everybody."

On Saturday, many of those he touched arrived at Warberg Court sporting T-shirts that read "Ramm Strong." "Breathe easy,

Mat Ramm" and "Cure CF." One friend, a fellow CF patient, left her hospital bed to attend. Hascall wore a special shirt that proclaimed, "My Son is my Hero." Attendees described a gritty and resilient man.

By age 3, said his mom, he took more than 20 pills and endured daily percussion treatments where his mom thumped

See RAMM/8A

PENDLETON

Chalmers selected for at-large council seat

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

It took an hour to interview the five candidates who applied for the vacant at-large seat on the Pendleton City Council, but it only took the council minutes to appoint Paul Chalmers.

Chalmers, the Umatilla County assessment and taxation director, was the only candidate to receive votes at a meeting Tuesday.

During his interview earlier in the evening, Chalmers stressed his more than two decades in county government, a commitment to public works and public safety and a desire to restore trust between the city and the community.

"I think city government has a responsibility for transparency," he said. "I think city government has a responsibility for integrity."

See COUNCIL/3A



Chalmers



More online
For video of the city council meeting visit eastoregonian.com

Vaccination deadline hits schools

By JENNIFER COLTON
East Oregonian

Hundreds of Eastern Oregon children could be sent home from school Wednesday.

Feb. 17 is "School Exclusion Day" for the state of Oregon, and any students behind on vaccinations or without documentation will be excluded from class in public and private schools, preschools, child care facilities and Head Start programs in the state.

Families with children on the exclusion list were notified in September and October, but as of Feb. 3, the county still required proof of vaccination for 738 students, according to Sharon Waldern, clinic nurse supervisor for the Umatilla County Health Department.

Of those students, 695 had incomplete records with Umatilla County Health, indicating students were missing one or more required vaccinations, and 43 students had no vaccination record at all. The numbers do not include families with approved exemption paperwork.

"Exclusion Day is important because one of the sure-fire ways to prevent contagious disease is to get vaccinated," Waldern said

See VACCINE/2A

Fire protection bill passes House

By GEORGE PLAVEN
East Oregonian

Coming off a record-setting wildfire season in 2015, Oregon lawmakers have passed a bill to help rural counties contain rangeland fires before they get too big and cause too much damage.

Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, spearheaded the legislation that allows counties to form rangeland protection associations under local emergency management.

In the past, rangeland protection associations could only be formed by ranchers and landowners coordinating with the state Board of Forestry. The idea is for neighbors to act as volunteer firefighters in remote areas where there might not be any other fire protection.

House Bill 4007 expands that

authority to counties, which could provide their own training, equipment and insurance to the volunteers. The bill applies only to counties with 200,000 or more acres of rangeland that fall outside any forest protection district.

"There's large tracts of unprotected land in Eastern Oregon," Smith said. "It doesn't receive priority in fire-fighting, but has huge implications for landowners."

Smith described HB 4007 as "an essential piece of legislation" that will help catch and extinguish wildfires while they are still small. The bill passed the House 59-0 on Monday. Rep. Brent Barton, D-Oregon City, was excused from



Smith

voting. "The earlier you can put a fire out, the better it is for everyone," Smith said.

Wheeler County Sheriff Chris Humphreys testified in favor of the bill, saying rangeland protection associations will give emergency management agencies another tool to deal with the growing wildfire problem across the West.

Humphreys said there are about 500,000 acres of unprotected land in Wheeler County. That's nearly half of all land in the county. In 2012, he was notified by local, state and federal agencies they

See FIRE/8A

