

Students battle over books

By JENNIFER COLTON
East Oregonian

Adrenaline pulsed through Sandstone Middle School as two teams braced for the double-elimination tournament.

The teams huddled together, ready for the buzzer to sound. They bit their nails. They swallowed hard.

One team — the YMnMs — hadn't lost a battle. The other, the Goat-Shaped Blobs, wanted their chance to take the championship and head to the regional competition.

The audience hushed as the questions started: What did this character have to drink? Who said this line? In which book did this scene happen?

Eighteen teams competed in the Battle of the Books at Sandstone Middle School, and the undefeated YMnMs took the championship title.

"I'm relieved. Having so many people watching is ... it's a lot of pressure," eighth-grader Maria Tejada said. "It's fun, but it's a lot of pressure."

Oregon Battle of the Books is a statewide reading motivation and comprehension program. The program challenges students in third through 12th grade with trivia and critical thinking questions based on 16 pre-selected books. The Oregon Battle of the Books program is run by volunteers through the Oregon Association of School Libraries and partially funded through the Library



The YMnMs: Yaloani Alvarado, from left, Nazly Chavez, Maria Tejada and Sally Wooster compete in the Battle of the Books championship at Sandstone Middle School.

Services and Technology Act.

The students of the YMnMs — Maria Tejada, Sally Wooster, Yaloani Alvarado, Mirely Reyes and Nazly Chavez — have been involved with Battle of the Books for years and said they participate because they like to read, it's fun, and it's a challenge.

"The hardest part is remembering the details. The best is getting to read good books — and a variety of books. It isn't all the same genre," eighth-grader Nazly Chavez said.

This year, Armand Larive and Sandstone middle schools received a grant from the Oregon Battle of the Books organization that covered the registration fee and a book

box with one copy of each of the 16 books used in the middle school divisions.

Delia Wallis, librarian for Hermiston High School and Sandstone and Armand Larive middle schools, said the program challenges students and promotes reading.

"You have to know your stuff. You have to know what color was the bicycle Bob rode down the street," Wallis said. "It's very difficult."

For the first time, Hermiston High School will launch an Oregon Battle of the Books team next year.

For the 2015-16 school year, students are keeping their eyes on the page and on the next stage. The winners of the building competitions advance to the regional

competition March 5 at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton.

While the YMnMs have already earned their other place, other students are heading into their building finals this week.

At Hermiston elementary schools, finals are taking place in school gyms this week:

- Rocky Heights Elementary, Thursday at 9:15 a.m.
- Desert View Elementary, Friday at 8:15 a.m.
- Sunset Elementary, Friday at 10:10 a.m.
- Highland Hills, Friday at 1:15 p.m.

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BRIEFLY

Trio rescued after night in mountains

Three Walla Walla men spent a chilly Saturday night in the mountains of Umatilla County before rescuers found them.

William Hammond, Cameron Walcker and Joshua Meharry went to Harris Park south of Milton-Freewater for a day of dirt bike riding. But Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan said the trio did not return at noon as they planned.

Their family and friends searched for them starting at about 7 p.m., according to information in the sheriff's daily activity bulletin, and then Hammond's wife a little after midnight Sunday called the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office and said they were missing. They were dressed for biking and had water, she told dispatchers, but had not had food nor the right clothes for an overnight stay in the woods.

Rowan said the sheriff's office search and rescue unit went into action and also asked the Walla Walla County search and rescue team to help. Parties looked throughout the night, he said, and finally a relative spotted the group at about 10 a.m. Sunday on the South Fork of the Walla Walla River.

Rowan said it appeared the three men hunkered down in wet conditions after having some mechanical problems with the bikes. Rescue team members brought the men out, he said, and they went home safe.

Two seeking bench in Umatilla Co. Circuit Court

PENDLETON — An incumbent judge of the Umatilla County Circuit Court filed for re-election, and a local attorney again is trying to get on the bench.

Daniel Hill of Hermiston is seeking another four-year term in position 3 on the 6th Judicial District, which encompasses the circuit courts of Umatilla and Morrow counties. Hill is the presiding judge in the district. No one has filed to challenge him, according to election information on the Oregon Secretary of State website.

And Jon Lieuallen filed to run for position 2, the other local circuit court seat up for election. Lieuallen lives in Pendleton and is a partner with the Milton-Freewater law firm of Monahan, Grove and Tucker. Lieuallen in 2012 ran against Circuit Judge Lynn Hampton of Pendleton and lost.

Circuit Judge Ron Pahl of Pendleton now serves

in position 2. The district's trial court administrator Roy Blaine said Pahl has not decided if he will run again. Pahl was the previous presiding judge and is a former Pendleton Round-Up director.

And Dan Primus is seeking another term as Umatilla County district attorney. He has held the post since then-Gov. John Kitzhaber appointed him in 2011. Currently, Primus is running unopposed.

The deadline for candidate filings is March 8.

Equipment failure knocks out power for 1,165

HERMISTON — Power was out for a large swath of households in Hermiston for the second time in less than a week after an equipment failure Monday night.

Umatilla Electric Cooperative spokesman Steve Myers said an underground line coming out of the Hermiston Butte substation, located at UEC headquarters on Elm Avenue, failed shortly after 8 p.m. Monday night.

The substation serves several thousand customers, he said, but only 1,165 lost power. Myers said in order to make repairs those customers have been temporarily switched to the Feedville substation. He said for safety reasons the switch took several hours to implement gradually, which is why the last of the customers affected did not get power until about 8 a.m. Tuesday morning.

"Cold weather can slow down the process, because power loads are heavier when people have their heating switched on," he wrote in an email.

On Friday afternoon about 10,000 Hermiston-area customers experienced a power outage after a high-speed wind gust knocked out a transmission line and damaged other sections of line in town.

Tillamook Cheese Days return to SAGE Center

BOARDMAN — The upcoming Tillamook Cheese Days features a lasagna meal.

The public is invited to enjoy a hearty plate of lasagna with Caesar salad, bread, cookie and drink for \$5, which includes admission to the SAGE Center. The event is Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at 101 Olson Road, Boardman.

Cheese curds will be available for purchase. Also, Tillamook videos will be shown in the theater throughout the day.

For more information, call 541-481-7243 or visit www.visitsage.com.

East Moraine to receive additional \$900K

By GEORGE PAVLEN
East Oregonian

The Wallowa Lake Moraines Partnership could receive an additional \$900,000 from the U.S. Forest Service to purchase private land along the scenic East Moraine of Wallowa Lake.

The partnership — made up of the Wallowa Land Trust, Wallowa Resources, Wallowa County, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department and the Trust for Public Land — has been working since 2011 to protect the area for public access while maintaining a productive, healthy landscape.

But 3,000 acres of the East Moraine is privately owned, with 60 percent of that

belonging to the Ronald C. Yanke Family Trust of Boise. The family wants to either sell or develop the land, and has been negotiating with the Moraines Partnership on a potential deal.

The East Moraine of Wallowa Lake is one of the country's most perfectly formed glacial landscapes and one of the most iconic unprotected areas in Eastern Oregon, according to the local partnership. They originally asked for \$3.9 million from the Forest Legacy Program to buy 1,533 acres from the family trust, of which \$3 million was awarded last year.

The Forest Legacy Program was established to maintain working forests, and is funded through the federal

Land and Water Conservation Fund. The fund expired last September and was later renewed by Congress for three more years in December, leaving the East Moraine grant shrouded in uncertainty for several months.

With the program now reinvigorated, the Forest Service has ranked the East Moraine of Wallowa Lake third nationwide among projects to be funded through the LWCF. The remaining \$900,000 from the partnership's original proposal has also been written into the president's proposed 2017 budget. Kathleen Ackley, executive director of the Wallowa Land Trust, said the federal dollars will only cover a portion of the final bill, but "this definitely puts our skin in the

game."

Ackley said the partnership is not price-sensitive, and is willing to pay fair market value for the land.

"This pot of money does require us to go through a very specific appraisal process," she said. "We're continuing to move forward with negotiations. It's not going to happen overnight."

Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Democrats, praised the president's budget for its short-term funding of the LWCF. Meanwhile, the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts has called for Congress to make the fund permanent.

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HERMISTON

School district to increase financial safety net

By JENNIFER COLTON
East Oregonian

The Hermiston School District will grow its safety net in the 2016-2017 school year.

The school board met Monday for a work session to discuss financial planning parameters for the year. The parameters, set by the board, provide the basis for the district budget.

The board agreed to plan for modest enrollment growth and to keep the amount of money left in district accounts at the end of the school year at a minimum of 8 percent of the district's total budget. However, the board also provided an objective for the district administration to grow that balance to at least 9 percent.

An 8 percent slice of the district's budget is about \$4 million, and the balance provides both a safety net for the district and pays operating expenses during the summer months, before state funding is distributed in the fall.

For the 2015-16 school year, the district is currently saving about 8.75 percent, according to Deputy Superintendent Wade Smith. The management objective for the 2015-16 school year was to keep the balance above 8.5 percent.

"We still haven't fully recovered from the recession, so we knew growing that was going to be difficult, but we agreed to try to move toward 9 percent," Smith said.

Smith said that 9 percent

could be important when the district faces state-mandated PERS funding increases. PERS increases every two years, so the next increase will be in the 2017-18 school year.

In addition to the EFB amount, the board also set the parameter for enrollment growth at an increase of 50 weighted students. A student's funding "weight" includes aspects such as poverty level, English-language proficiency and disabilities. Smith said straight increases in enrollment do not always equal straight increases in state funding.

"This year, although we're up 200 students, we think we're going to get paid (for) an increase of about 80," Smith said.

The 2015-16 increase will offset a loss in funding for teacher experience. Schools with long-term experienced teachers receive additional funding. The hiring increase

in Hermiston last year — 62 new hires — meant the district did not receive that experience bonus.

In other business, the board:

- Unanimously accepted the consent items without discussion. The consent items included accepting resignations from Blaine Ganvoa, athletic director at Hermiston High School; Cynthia Moran, second-grade teacher at Rocky Heights Elementary; and Sarah O'Gorman, kindergarten teacher at Desert

View Elementary.

- Heard a presentation from Rocky Heights Elementary staff about recent events, goals and development.

- Discussed a proposal to move Outdoor School to the fall for the 2016-17 school year.

- Proclaimed March 7-11 as Classified Employee Week.

- Met in executive session to discuss the superintendent's evaluation. No action was taken after the executive session.

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