

## Quick takes

### Fireworks spark fires July 4

11 reasons why we need to rethink fireworks in our community at all. We have had a severe drought for years now and people still are stupid enough to go out and play with fire. Just stupid if you ask me.

Dave Lima

Fireworks are not a bad thing as long as people are smart about it, but that is where it stops, being smart ...

Tanner Remillard

### New head of BMCC Trio

Roman Olivera is the one who helped me register for my very first classes last year and encouraged me when I felt too old.

Michelle DeBord

Thanks for all of your help in math. I hated it, but you helped me dig in and get it done! You rock!

Lisa Schweigart

Congratulations. You can do it! What's next a PhD?

Flora Estrada-Urias

Maybe? LOL.

Roman Olivera

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week's takes. Tweet yours @Tim\_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

## No one can manage wildfires anymore

By ALLISON LINVILLE  
*Writers on the Range*

It was midsummer in 2015, and the aircraft-dispatch board behind me was covered in scrawled phone numbers. Twenty-five aircraft managers were working the record-breaking fire season on the Idaho Panhandle, my first season as an aircraft dispatcher. Phones rang constantly, radios added their chatter, and every computer screen displayed maps of fires, weather or the location of airplanes.

For the Idaho Panhandle National Forest, 2015 ranked as the biggest fire year since 1926. Decades ago, a large fire was anything over 500 acres. These days, 500 acres would be considered small, and it's not unusual anymore to see a fire torch 4,000 acres in just a few hours. Recent history tells us there's a new trajectory for wildfire — toward fires that no one can understand, predict or "control."

According to the National Interagency Fire Center, based in Boise, the five worst years in wildfire history all occurred in the last decade. At one point in 2015, there were 27,000

firefighters trying to put out blazes across the West. In the dispatch center on the Idaho Panhandle, we worked 12-hour days, six days a week, from July until October. Our job was to move the necessary pieces — the aircraft, crews, and equipment — to whatever places fire managers and incident commanders told us to. And that summer, it was an almost endless job.

Like everyone working in fire last year, we were exhausted, overworked and overwhelmed.

In Montana, fire managers were watching fire models and using their extensive training and experience to manage fires just as they always had, only to have people on the ground begging them to understand that they were seeing something totally different. "Their models weren't showing what a beast it actually was," said a firefighter on the Flathead National Forest. She was talking about a fire that she barely escaped before it blew up.

It occurred to me last August that wildfires have become qualitatively different. And it was a disturbing thought, the realization that no one had the ability to manage fire anymore. Fire managers can't understand the fires we have today, because

their training and experience are no longer relevant to modern-day fires.

Given the conditions now piling up — hot summers, long fire seasons, low snowpack, heavy fuel loading, an ignorant public, erratic storms — there is simply not enough education or experience available to help teach a fire manager what to do. It's not the managers' fault; it's not any one person's fault.

People with 30 years of experience are seeing things they've never seen on fires before. No one in 2014 could believe or understand all of the extreme fire behavior they saw that year, and then the erratic fires of 2015 surprised them again. This is not a manageable force of nature, and no one is qualified to manage it, because it's never existed before.

When I've mentioned this to people who are not involved in fighting fire, I can see on their faces that they won't, or can't, believe me. Most people continue to think that we still have to put out every fire — an outdated idea — but even more worrisome is the fact that many people, including the fire managers themselves, apparently do not yet realize what wildfire has become,

an unprecedented force.

I am afraid of this force, and of the idea that we can still handle it. I recently left Forest Service dispatch for a variety of reasons, but one was that I was amazed we hadn't had any fatalities on the national forest that year. Amazed.

I don't think it is necessary to always send crews in to save people's homes or other structures. Sometimes, the most effective way to manage fire is to just keep people out of danger. The risk to firefighters is always present, but the risk now seems elevated beyond comprehension.

In order to avoid losing lives in this time of unprecedented fire behavior, fire managers — and all Westerners — need to recognize that there is no model for what we are already seeing this summer. The wildfire that destroyed 200 homes and killed an older couple near Lake Isabella, California, this June travelled 11 miles in its first 13 hours. "It was like a tornado," a homeowner told the Associated Press, "but it was fire."

The power of modern wildfire is astonishing and horrifying, and it far surpasses any previous experience or knowledge. Welcome to the future.

## Wiesel spoke for those who couldn't

The Charleston Daily Mail, July 6

It was a harrowing tragedy that words can't even begin to describe.

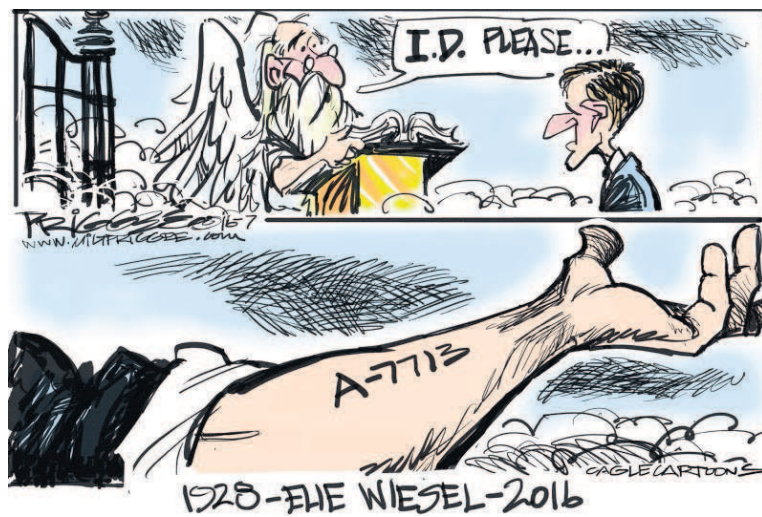
Yet through Elie Wiesel's writing and advocacy, generations of readers and historians have a better — though still incomplete — understanding of the Holocaust.

Wiesel, who recounted the horrors of the Holocaust in his acclaimed memoir "Night" and went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize, died last Saturday at age 87.

"In the aftermath of the Germans' systematic massacre of Jews, no voice had emerged to drive home the enormity of what had happened and how it had changed mankind's conception of itself and of God," reads his *New York Times* obituary. "For almost two decades, the traumatized survivors — and American Jews, guilt-ridden that they had not done more to rescue their brethren — seemed frozen in silence.

"But by the sheer force of his personality and his gift for the haunting phrase, Mr. Wiesel, who had been liberated from Buchenwald as a 16-year-old with the indelible tattoo A-7713 on his arm, gradually exhumed the Holocaust from the burial ground of the history books."

At age 15, in 1944, Wiesel



and his family were sent to Auschwitz in Poland. He was ultimately freed a year later from Buchenwald.

"If I survived, it must be for some reason," Wiesel said in 1981. "I must do something with my life. It is too serious to play games with anymore, because in my place, someone else could have been saved. And so I speak for that person. On the other hand, I know I cannot."

His advocacy wasn't limited to just the Jewish people. Wiesel also stood up for Soviet Jews, Nicaragua's Miskito Indians, Ethiopian-born Israeli youth, Argentina's "Disappeared," Cambodian refugees, the Kurds, and victims of famine and

genocide in Africa, apartheid in South Africa and war in the former Yugoslavia, according to CNN.

Wiesel was a journalist and a professor. He used those platforms to educate his audiences about the horrors of the Holocaust and the importance of speaking out.

"Wiesel is a messenger to mankind," the Nobel citation said. "His message is one of peace, atonement and human dignity. His belief that the forces fighting evil in the world can be victorious is a hard-won belief."

Wiesel may have departed this Earth, but he still has much to teach us. The message and legacy he left behind must carry on.

## Schools a good start for lead removal

The Bend Bulletin, July 2

Schools in the Bend-La Pine district were tested for lead in drinking water recently, and all came up with a clean bill of health. Other districts in the area will test in their schools this summer, and it's likely that Bend-La Pine will have to test again.

That's because the state Board of Education is considering rules governing pollutants such as lead and radon. If the rules are adopted as expected in August, what's been done here so far is unlikely to be enough.

Lead and radon are at the forefront these days in part because the Portland school district found too much of both in some schools earlier this year. Similar problems turned up in Eugene, Beaverton and Gresham.

As a result, the state Department of Education is creating rules for districts requiring healthy and safe facilities plans for every building districts own or use as schools or public charter schools.

Assuming the rules are adopted, the plans are likely to call for testing of every drinking fountain and sink in each building for lead. In addition, schools will have to test for lead in paint, dirt and dust, and they'll have to test for radon gas.

There's good reason for all this. As the federal Environmental Protection Agency notes on its website, lead is particularly dangerous to children, and the younger the child, the greater the danger. Lead poisoning can lower a child's IQ and create behavioral problems, hearing loss and other problems. Nor is lead limited to water. In fact, it's more likely to be found in paint, dust and dirt.

Lead was often used in public water pipes before the mid-1970s, though it wasn't banned for home use for another decade. Almost half of Bend-La Pine elementary schools were built before the mid-1970s. Even in newer buildings, lead still can sometimes be found in minute amounts in faucets and elsewhere.

All this is going to cost money, and unless the state funds it, the burden will fall on individual school districts. The state Legislature needs to ensure districts have the money to do the testing.