

## Driving courses cruise into region

East Oregonian

Several AARP Smart Driver courses are being offered in the area.

The class helps drivers stay safe, educated and confident behind the wheel. Participants learn defensive driving skills, safety strategies and how to manage common age-related changes in vision, hearing and reaction time.

The class is geared for those 50-and-older, but all drivers are welcome to attend. Participants may be eligible for insurance discounts and are encouraged to contact their insurance carrier. No tests are required.

The upcoming classes

cost \$15 for AARP members or \$20 for non-members, are:

•Saturday, Oct. 8, 8:45 a.m. to 4 p.m. at St. Anthony Hospital, 2801 St. Anthony Way, Pendleton. (541-861-0024).

•Friday, Oct. 28, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Blue Mountain Community College, 311 North Columbia Street, Milton-Freewater (541-938-7176).

•Thursday, Nov. 17 at 11 a.m. at Bob Shannon Safety Center, 330 S. First St., Hermiston (541-667-5092).

•Saturday, Nov. 19, 8:45 a.m. to 4 p.m. at St. Anthony Hospital, 2801 St. Anthony Way, Pendleton. (541-861-0024).



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

The 9,000-square-foot Pendleton Grain Growers retail store in Athena has sat empty since the company sold off most of its assets to United Grain Corporation last year.

## ATHENA: Also working to restore Gem Theatre and library

Continued from 1A

“Help us save downtown Athena! Investors wanted to purchase the PGG building and make it a center of commerce: general hardware store, brewery, bakery, school-based industry, farmer’s market, multi-use in Athena.”

Tuesday night’s meeting at the Athena Public Library drew 16 people. They tossed around ideas about how to buy the building, which Umatilla County assessed at \$133,320.

Rob McIntyre — Elizabeth’s husband and a driving force in the restoration of the Gem Theatre, also in Athena’s downtown — said the goal was to raise \$50,000. Jennifer Spurgeon, city councilor in next-door Weston, suggested 50 people could each contribute \$1,000. If each person at the meeting convinced three others to do the same, she said they should be able to come up with funds in short order.

“Call it an investment in the town,” said McIntyre.

At the meeting, 11 people pledged \$1,000.

The city of Athena was not looking to buy the old store, Shafer said, so he liked the idea of citizens leading the effort. He said he hopes the positive vibe continues at the next meeting about the PGG building, which is Thursday at 6 p.m. at the Weston Public Library, 108 E. Main St., Weston.

Athena resident and political activist Larry Nye said during the meeting that the building could be attractive to small businesses that don’t use much water and need a downtown location.

Together with other efforts, such as the restoration of the Gem Theatre and the city library, Nye said Athena has the ability to host small conventions.

The closure of the town’s only bank, however, casts a shadow over Athena.

The board of the Bank of Eastern Oregon did discuss opening a branch to replace the outgoing U.S. Bank branch. But Gary Prophet, chief operations officer at Bank of Eastern Oregon, said U.S. Bank will not sell

its accounts, and that makes starting a branch from scratch much more difficult.

Shafer and state Sen. Bill Hansell (R-Athena) wrote letters opposing the closure to the federal Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, which regulates national banks. Hansell said his Senate office in Salem received the response last week.

The Comptroller cannot prevent a bank from closing a branch, according to a copy of the letter, which Hansell’s staff provided. The agency, though, forwarded Hansell’s concerns to its community affairs department, which could hold a meeting to “explore the feasibility of obtaining alternative(s).”

Hansell said he did not take that as an encouraging response.

Still, Athena residents remain positive about revitalizing their town, which also is the goal of the Athena Mainstreet Association. Board member April Vorhauer-Flatt said the organization operates under the guidance of Oregon Main Street, the state program that works with communities to help breathe new life into historic downtowns.

One of Athena Mainstreet’s first projects was decorating the downtown with planters of flowers. The splashes of color made a real difference, she said, after the city removed many downtown trees.

Vorhauer-Flatt said this year Athena Mainstreet coordinated a downtown cleanup and now is working on getting a mural onto an outside wall of the Athena Grocery. She said Athena graphic designer Amy Rogers is leading the project and now is looking for an artists or group of artists to help with the effort. The group also is working on Christmas lighting for downtown.

She said the work is shared between “young people wanting to get involved and community volunteers who have been doing things forever.”

Contact Phil Wright at [pwright@eastoregonian.com](mailto:pwright@eastoregonian.com) or 541-966-0833.

# SCHOOL: Sipe said only maintenance worker Ron West knows how to fix the boiler

Continued from 1A

District is seeking in November is less about redefining the characters of Umatilla’s schools and more about modernizing their aging infrastructure, especially at the nearly 70-year-old Clara Brownell.

As she had been doing all month, Sipe gave potential voters a tour of the middle school and explained many of facility’s worst traits, which clash with its charms.

Central to its deficiencies is its heating and cooling system.

Sipe explained that Clara Brownell’s original single-paned windows are still in use, causing classrooms to get either terribly hot or cold depending on the season.

School staff can use a wall-mounted air conditioner or the school’s antiquated heating system, but both options are noisy and distracting.

The heating system is linked to a boiler, which is contained in a room with equipment original the school’s opening where asbestos is covered only by thin plastic sheets.

Sipe said only maintenance worker Ron West knows how to fix the boiler. If he leaves the district, the knowledge of how to maintain the school’s heating system goes with him.

Plumbing is also a major issue at Clara Brownell, requiring the district to direct water only to the kitchen and bathrooms. In the bathrooms, students need to use a foot-pump trough to wash their hands.

The district has sometimes had to cancel school when its heating or plumbing doesn’t work.

The Wenaha Group evaluated Umatilla’s three school facilities — Clara Brownell, McNary Heights Elementary School and Umatilla High School — and gave the middle school a 38 out of 100, the lowest grade between the three of them.

But the bond is about more than the middle school. It would also be used for projects at the other locations, including a new roof and expanded cafeteria at McNary Heights and HVAC upgrades at Umatilla High School.

All three schools will also get new security systems, like one-touch lockdown and an indoor entrance that will require visitors to check in with the office before proceeding into the school.

As a member of the Umatilla School Board, Jon Lorence has been



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

A cantankerous old boiler at Clara Brownell Middle School would be replaced if voters pass a \$10.5 million Umatilla School District capital improvement bond. The boiler was installed in 1947 when the school was built and breaks down frequently, resulting in lack of heat or cancellation of school. Ron West, who calls himself the school’s mechanical maintenance man and must deal often with the beast of a boiler, will be glad to see it go.

tasked with selling the bond to the community.

Lorence said one of his main challenges is quelling concerns that the bond would increase their tax bills.

Rather than add on additional costs, the bond proposal would extend the \$3.13 per assessed \$1,000 rate established under a previous bond from 2023 to 2035.

“It’s not like we’re going to cause

a big ol’ shock to the tax bill,” he said.

With the bond slated to pay for new windows and the replacement of rotting wood along the border of the roof, and the district budgeting money for a new coat of paint, Clara Brownell has a shot at looking better than the building the Army erected in 1947.

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## TRIAL: Shooting of Finicum not up for discussion

Continued from 1A

didn’t actually enter the room where the artifacts were being stored.

Warren’s testimony was supportive of the defense’s assertion the occupation was a peaceful protest. She described being greeted warmly by the occupiers, and not witnessing any weapons at the refuge during her visit.

Warren’s testimony ran counter to evidence from the prosecution in the initial weeks of the trial, which included photos depicting armed guards stationed at the entrance to the refuge. Warren testified she never felt threatened during her visit.

During cross examination from Assistant U.S. Attorney Ethan Knight, Warren acknowledged the Siletz Tribe has disavowed her visit to the refuge.

“I’m not speaking for the Siletz,” she responded.

Knight also questioned her about why she chose to meet with Ryan Bundy despite declining to speak with the FBI

on her visit to Burns.

“I didn’t trust the FBI,” she said.

During a line of questioning from defense attorney Mumford about her distrust of the FBI, Brown became agitated and ordered Warren to stop talking when her testimony seemed to start veering toward bringing up the shooting death of Robert “LaVoy” Finicum two days after her visit. The judge has previously ruled the shooting is not up for discussion during this trial, except to mention that it happened and when it happened.

The defense also called to the stand FBI agent Ben Jones, who testified about his first interaction with defendant Ryan Bundy.

“The first time we met was at church,” Jones said, in response to a question from Bundy.

Shortly after the occupation began, the FBI asked Jones and another agent, both of whom are Mormon, to attend the Church of Latter-day Saints in Burns.

“We knew you were Mormon, and

we thought you might be attending,” the agent told Bundy during questioning.

“I was there to see if you were recruiting people or what you were doing there,” Jones also said.

Jones said he told the congregation he was an FBI agent, as well as a Mormon, during his Jan. 10 visit to the church. He and Bundy shook hands but did not exchange words, he said.

Through testimony given by other FBI agents in the afternoon, the jury heard the FBI had received intelligence Jan. 1 — the day before the occupation began — that a takeover at the refuge was a possibility. Jurors also heard the FBI began tracking Ammon Bundy’s general whereabouts sometime after Jan. 1 by pinging his cellphone.

Testimony for the defense continues Thursday morning. It’s possible Rev. Franklin Graham, one of the third-party negotiators who helped the final four occupiers leave, will take the stand. Ammon Bundy could also take the stand Thursday.

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