

PENDLETON

Round-Up wins top prize for second straight year

PRCA awarded it best large outdoor rodeo on Wednesday in Las Vegas

East Oregonian

With a rodeo that's more than 100 years old, there aren't a lot of firsts left to be had for the Pendleton Round-Up.

But the venerable event managed to add another to its history Wednesday, when the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association named the Round-Up the best large outdoor rodeo for the second year in a row.

Although the Round-Up has won the award previous to 2015, winning it in consecutive years is a new feat. Round-Up publicity director Randy Thomas attributed the win to the Round-Up Association Board of Directors challenging itself to raise the bar following last year's victory.

"It was definitely the exclamation point to last year's prize," he said.

Thomas said the PRCA's voting body — competitors, rodeo committees and livestock contractors — took notice of the Round-Up's efforts.

Due to last year's win, Thomas said rodeo committees from as far as Salinas, California, and Deadwood, South Dakota, came to Pendleton to see what the Round-Up was doing right.

With more eyes from the profession watching, Thomas said the association made some key changes, like moving contestants' families to seating on the west end of the arena and using the vacated east end for a pop-up gourmet restaurant called the 1910 Room.

The Round-Up also tried to better accommodate contestants, offering larger prize purses and vouchers for any vendor on the Round-Up Grounds.



Photo courtesy Pendleton Round-Up

Pendleton Round-Up directors celebrate being named best large outdoor rodeo for the second straight year by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association.

Thomas said these moves continue to add to the Round-Up's uniqueness on the rodeo circuit, which already defies

many industry truisms by holding events longer than two hours and growing grass on the arena floor.

Thomas said the board of directors will likely discuss the prospect of a three-peat at some point, but no one wants

to get too presumptuous. "In the agricultural world, a little humility goes a long way," he said.

HERMISTON



Contributed photo by Lacey McElroy

Portland Trail Blazers Damian Lillard, left, and Shabazz Napier along with mascot Blaze visit Tanner Gutcher of Hermiston in Doernbecher Children's Hospital.

Blazers visit Hermiston boy

Sandstone student suffers from rare syndrome

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Hermiston seventh grader Tanner Gutcher got a surprise visit from the Portland Trail Blazers on Tuesday while he was hospitalized at Doernbecher Children's Hospital in Portland.

Tanner, who has a genetic disorder called Angelman syndrome, is in the life skills program at Sandstone Middle School and plays Challenger baseball. His mom Lacey McElroy said he was thrilled to meet some real-life sports stars.

"Tanner was crazy, crazy excited," she said. "He could not stop laughing."

Angelman syndrome comes from a missing part of the 15th chromosome inherited from the mother. The more of the chromosome a person is missing, the more intense their symptoms. McElroy said Tanner's case is more severe and keeps him from walking or talking and causes seizures and other health problems. He was rushed to Doernbecher at 2 a.m. on Monday for a

digestive complication.

The Mayo Clinic website notes that "Frequent smiles and outbursts of laughter are common for people with Angelman syndrome, and many have happy, excitable personalities." Despite his many challenges, McElroy said Tanner is an "excessively happy" kid.

Still, being in the hospital is never fun, so the visit from the Blazers was a welcome distraction. Point guards Damian Lillard and Shabazz Napier visited Tanner's room first, along with mascot Blaze. Later, several other members of the team and coaching staff came in for a photo, and Tanner got a Trail Blazers hat and signed poster.

"They were great when we asked for pictures and everything," McElroy said.

She said she and Tanner turned on the television and watched the Blazers play the Indiana Pacers on Wednesday.

"It's cool to watch and say, 'Hey, we met them,'" she said.

She said Tanner spent most of the first two years of

his life at Doernbecher Children's Hospital and has made many visits since, so she's grateful that the hospital provides not only excellent care but also morale-boosting activities like the Blazers visit.

"Doernbecher is absolutely amazing," she said. "They have saved Tanner's life on more than one occasion."

Back home, she said the Sandstone Middle School staff has also been very supportive in accommodating Tanner's frequent absences due to hospitalizations. Two other huge supports, she said, are Tanner's grandmother Ginger McElroy and his stepfather Tanner Daugherty.

As of Thursday Tanner was still in the hospital. McElroy said she hoped they would be given the OK to go home soon. But in the meantime, he still had his Blazers hat and poster to cheer him up.

"He likes sports a lot, so having the guys come up was an awesome experience," she said.

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PENDLETON

PGG sells propane division to Morrow County Grain Growers

Dissolution of co-op continues

By GEORGE PLAGEN
East Oregonian

Another division of Pendleton Grain Growers was officially sold Thursday as the cooperative continues its march to dissolution.

PGG announced its propane business was purchased by Morrow County Grain Growers, a fellow agricultural co-op based in Lexington. Financial terms were not disclosed, though the deal includes all propane assets including vehicles and inventory.

Tim Hawkins, chairman of the PGG board of directors, said the co-op had been seeking a local buyer for the division.

"We believe that Morrow County Grain Growers, a local business that is well known to our members and other customers, is the right partner," Hawkins said in a statement.

Morrow County Grain Growers was incorporated on April 2, 1930, just two days after PGG. Today, the co-op has 600 members in Oregon and Washington, with business interests in grain, fuel, agronomy, auto parts and farm equipment.

John Ripple, co-op manager, said buying PGG's propane assets will add growth and provide a solid return on investment.

"We look forward to strengthening the energy services we provide to our members," Ripple said.

PGG members voted to dissolve in May amid dire financial reports. The

grain division — including upcountry elevators and the McNary Terminal — sold to United Grain Corporation prior to wheat harvest in June.

Through dissolution, PGG officials say they are focused on returning the best possible value to members. The amount of equity that will be returned to members remains to be seen. Rick Jacobson, PGG general manager, has said the dissolution process could take several years before it is all said and done.

Morrow County Grain Growers is expected to hire current PGG propane employees, according to the co-op.

Contact George Plagen at gplagen@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

BRIEFLY

Rep. Walden elected as chair of House Energy and Commerce Committee

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Oregon's lone Republican in Congress now heads up the U.S. House of Representatives' committee with the broadest jurisdiction.

The U.S. House Republican Steering Committee elected Rep. Greg Walden as the next chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, the oldest standing legislative committee in the House. Walden in a written statement said he and the rest of the committee "will focus on what's best for consumers, on creating better paying jobs and providing patient-centered health care."

Energy and Commerce oversees the nation's telecommunications, consumer protection, food and drug safety,

public health research, environmental quality, energy policy, and interstate and foreign commerce. Walden is the first Energy and Commerce chairman from the Pacific Northwest. He beat out Joe Barton, who chaired the committee in the past, and Illinois Republican John Shimkus, chair of Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy.

Athena Holiday Bazaar Saturday

ATHENA — The annual Athena Holiday Bazaar offers local holiday shopping Saturday.

The bazaar now in its seventh year, features more than 40 crafters and artists, home based businesses and fundraising vendors from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Athena Elementary School, off Highway 11 st 375 S. Fifth St., Athena.

The event also offers raffle prizes and a children's craft table. And Santa will drop by for a visit from noon to 2 p.m.

For shoppers on Facebook, search "7th Annual Athena Holiday Bazaar" to see vendor specials and pictures of the goods.

Company plans solar power farm

BAKER CITY (AP) — A California-based company hopes to start construction on a 23-acre solar power farm in eastern Oregon within the next few years.

The Baker City Herald reports that residents of the small town of Unity gathered to discuss the proposed project on Tuesday. Unity is about 45 miles south of Baker City and has a population of 75. The 2.75-megawatt farm would be built on

private land north of Unity. Enerparc Inc. of Oakland, California, hopes to start construction of the 6,000-solar panel farm in 2018 or 2019.

Enerparc representatives say the power generated at the farm would be sold to Idaho Power and would not affect local electrical rates.

Rancher Bill Moore says he owns property next to the proposed farm and believes it should "go full speed ahead."

Idaho sheriff: Oregon mom killed baby, self

MURPHY, Idaho (AP) — Law enforcement officers in southwestern Idaho say a 31-year-old Oregon woman apparently drowned her baby and then killed herself in Owyhee County.

Sheriff Perry Grant said a farm worker called emergency workers Tuesday morning to report he'd found a Ford Focus parked by a bridge near the small community of Hammett. The deputies who responded found 31-year-old Desiree Vistercil of Jordan Valley, Oregon, and her 16-month-old daughter dead inside the car.

Vistercil, who died of a single gunshot wound to the head, was in the driver's seat. The child's body was found immersed in a bucket of water in the back seat, and a coroner later determined the child died of drowning.

Grant said that at this time, all evidence suggests that Vistercil killed the child and then herself, but he said the investigation is ongoing. He said he wanted to express his deepest condolences to the families of the deceased, and said his staffers have been shaken by the deaths.

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