

PENDLETON

Letters to Santa in the mail

Family Day follows Festival of Trees

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

Roger Ward had a peculiar request while writing his letter to Santa Claus on Saturday.

This year for Christmas, the 6-year-old kindergartener said he wants a remote-controlled airplane and Xbox, but Ward was even more excited to ask the big guy for a Venus flytrap.

"Because there's, like, tons of flies all over the house!" he said, which got a laugh from his mom, Robin.

Filling out letters to Santa was just one of the activities for kids during Family Day at the annual Pendleton Festival of Trees. There were also photos with Santa, decorating cookies, making ornaments and live entertainment on stage at the Pendleton Convention Center.

The Festival of Trees, presented by St. Anthony Hospital, held its gala and fundraiser Friday with proceeds going to the Pioneer Relief Nursery. Trees that went up for auction featured themes such as "Merry Mason Jar Christmas," "Camo Christmas" and "A Wild Fireside Campout."

Hospital spokesman Larry Blanc said attendance was similar to the 2015 event, which raised \$34,000. He said they hoped to bring in a similar figure this year.

Family Day continued Saturday, with free activities designed to get the community into the holiday spirit.

"It's to start out the winter season and celebrations," said event coordinator Kate Peck. "We just encourage families to come out and have some fun."

Letters to Santa was sponsored by the Children's Museum of Eastern Oregon. Robin Ward sat at the table next to Roger to help him with spelling before he scurried to drop his sheet into the large green "North Pole Express" mailbox.



Staff photo by George Plaver
Roger Ward, 6, writes a letter to Santa Claus while his sister, 8-year-old Laura, peeks over his shoulder during the Pendleton Festival of Trees Family Day Saturday.



Staff photo by George Plaver
Five-year-old Ilana Pitt mails her letter to Santa Claus during the Pendleton Festival of Trees Family Day.

Robin Ward's husband, J.D., works as a doctor in obstetrics and gynecology at the St. Anthony Hospital Women's Clinic. Their family moved to Pendleton just a few months ago, and

Ward said they have been impressed by the town's strong sense of community.

"It's cool that they do all this stuff for the kids. They love it," she said. "I think it helps them to appreciate

where they live."

Across the table, 6-year-old Jocelyn Arizaga was asking Santa for American Girl dolls, and 5-year-old Ilana Pitt wanted gummy bears and a type of toy called "hatchers."

"They're little eggs that crack open with a dragon that does fun things, or a pretty bird," Pitt said.

Pitt's mother, Jill, said they are already excited for Christmas.

"We listened to Christmas music this morning, and she wants to decorate Christmas ornaments," she said.

Santa Claus could not be reached for comment Saturday, as he was busy in his workshop. However, a North Pole spokesman confirmed Eastern Oregon children are, once again, on the nice list this year.

Contact George Plaver at gplaver@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

Hessel promoted to district forester

East Oregonian

and Malheur counties.

A new leader is in charge of the Oregon Department of Forestry's Northeast Oregon District.

Joe Hessel, who has worked in the district for more than 30 years, was promoted to district forester Dec. 1 following the retirement of John Buckman.

Most recently, Hessel had served as the unit forester for the La Grande and Baker units. Now he will oversee management of the entire district, which spans approximately 2 million acres of private forest lands in Umatilla, Union, Baker and Wallowa counties, as well as small portions of Morrow, Grant

"I am very excited about my new role," Hessel said. "I am honored to have the opportunity to work with a great group of professional and very dedicated employees."

Hessel also acts as operations chief for one of ODF's incident management teams, responding to wildfires and other emergencies in the woods. Part of his new position, he said, will be continuing to address the challenges in fire and forestry across northeast Oregon.

"Continuing the strong tradition of providing a high level of service to private landowners and the Oregon public is at the top of my list," Hessel said.



Joe Hessel

PENDLETON

Fire erupts at Rocky Mountain Colby Pipe

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

department wrapped up the work around 4 a.m.

Pendleton firefighters endured chilly weather to combat a blaze overnight in an industrial dumpster.

Pendleton Fire Chief Mike Ciraulo said the department received the emergency call-out Monday at 2:27 a.m. for the fire at Rocky Mountain Colby Pipe Co., 4650 McKennon Road, Pendleton.

"It took a considerable amount of resources to get it under control," he said.

Crews dumped around 2,000 gallons of water and foam on the fire, he said, and personnel had to make a trip back to the fire station to deliver more foam. Getting that much water and foam on the flames took every on-duty worker to haul hoses and coordinate the effort.

Ciraulo also said the 26-degree weather complicated matters, causing water to freeze on the ground. The

Ciraulo said Colby Pipe employees reported fires in the dumpster during the past three days, and material may have been continuously burning. Workers then dumped hot material in the dumpster, which ignited the fire.

Pendleton fire also notified the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality due to the burning plastic and runoff from extinguishing the fire. Colby Pipe is near the Umatilla River, but Ciraulo said the water ran into a ditch and froze.

The city can fine businesses that have a history of fires, the chief explained, but that isn't the case with Colby Pipe, at least in the year since he took on the job. The city prefers to educate first, he said, and the lesson here is not to add hot materials to waste.

The company declined to comment for the story.

HERMISTON

Stardust takes home hip-hop championship

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

Hermiston High School's dance team Stardust came out on top in the hip-hop category during a statewide competition this weekend.

Ashley Seibel, who coaches the team along with Laura Sanchez and Jake Royer, said the team had 16 girls and two boys competing in hip-hop, with another four students who only perform in the team's jazz numbers.

"I've been coaching eight years and this is the largest team I've coached to date," she said.

The category championships hosted by the Dance and Drill Coaches Association at Gresham High School on Saturday were invite-only based on scores at prequalifying competitions.

On Saturday the team danced to a medley of hip-hop songs by Beyonce, Drake, Missy Elliot and Lil Jon.

"It's slow and sultry at the beginning and in-your-face crazy at the end," Seibel said of the routine.

The routine was choreographed by senior Alex Anteau, who had impressed Seibel with her choreography work as an intern at the dance studio Dance Unlimited.

"She did really well so I said to her, 'You're really good at this, let's give it a try and see what you can do,'" Seibel said.

She said Anteau proved her talent is "immeasurable" and she will "continue to have a home with our coaching staff, long after she graduates this year."

Anteau said she loves choreography and dance, and hopes to someday have a job that allows her to do both. She practiced that as both a dancer in Saturday's routine and its choreographer.

"At practice I would be dancing with them, and then step out and see how it was going," she said. "It gets kind



Photo contributed by Ashley Seibel
The Hermiston High School dance team Stardust poses with their hip-hop championship trophy at Gresham High School.

of complicated."

Anteau said she wishes more people understood how much hard work dancing takes and how dedicated the members of Stardust are.

In addition to singing Anteau's praises, Seibel also said she was proud of the rest of the team.

"They are projection powerhouses," she said.

"They are projection powerhouses. They just know how to make you believe them. They know how to sell it."

— Ashley Seibel, HHS dance team coach

"They just know how to make you believe them. They know how to sell it."

The first-place prize was an improvement over 2015, when the team took third place at the same competition. Now that the fall dance season is over the team will start working on a jazz routine to perform at the OSAA championships in the spring.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

PENDLETON

Fire chief to discuss bond proposal

East Oregonian

Pendleton. The meal is \$11 per person. Also, donations will be accepted for the Pendleton Warming Station — people can give cash, checks, individually wrapped snacks, coffee or hot chocolate packets or warm weather clothing items.

Chief Mike Ciraulo of the Pendleton Fire Department will share information about the spring bond proposal for a new building during the Round-Up Republican Women's meeting.

The public is invited to the no-host luncheon gathering, which is Thursday at 11:45 a.m. at the Red Lion, 304 S.E. Nye Ave.,

For more information or to RSVP for he meeting, contact rounduprepublican-women@hushmail.com or 541-276-1206.

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