

BRAIN: Reaches almost full size by about age two

Continued from 1A

She told them that the wrinkles serve to make the brain compact.

"It we didn't have all those bulges and cracks, our brains wouldn't fit inside our heads. They enable us to process a lot more information. If you took a brain and put it in a blender, it would fill a two-liter pop bottle," Oja said. "That's how much material is there."

When Oja asked who wanted to touch a real brain, most hands shot up. The sixth-graders donned surgical gloves and got into a queue.

At the front of the line, Hunter Holford cautiously extended his pointer finger toward the gray matter inside the glass container. He slid his finger along the surface and commented on the texture. This brain, stiffened by chemicals, felt rubbery.

One by one, they reached in, touched and reacted, some with fascination, others with revulsion.

"Eeee-yew," said one girl, who quickly pulled her hand back.

Back in their seats, the students queried about everything from the central nervous system to dreams and déjà vu and how the skull accommodates a growing brain.

Oja explained about the fibrous membrane known as "the soft spot" in babies, which allows the brain to enlarge. The brain reaches almost full size by about age two, she said, which is why their heads appear somewhat



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
BMCC science instructor Kristen Oja talks about the brain while holding a model of the human skull and brain to a class of sixth-graders on Friday at Sunridge Middle School in Pendleton.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Sixth-grader Julianne Jones looks at a cutaway of the human skull while studying the brain on Friday at Sunridge Middle School in Pendleton.

out of proportion. Oja veered into current events when she brought up the spate of NFL football

players experiencing a degenerative brain disease called chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE).

"What are some other sports that might involve repeated blows to the head?" she asked.

Answers flowed back. Football. Soccer. Boxing. Rugby.

She encouraged wearing helmets for biking and skiing and urged all-around caution in the care and maintenance of their brains.

"We really need to protect our heads," Oja said. "We only have one brain."

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or 941-966-0810.

ALFONZO: Had a way of connecting to people no matter the language

Continued from 1A

teens up to no good." Ceja said. They picked on him because he was older. To avoid the harassment and confrontations, Alfonzo stayed in the laundry room.

"I couldn't stand to see him like that," Ceja said, so he opened his home to Alfonzo. Instead of paying rent, he helped around the house and took care of the dogs when Ceja was out of town for work.

No one knew when Alfonzo first came to the United States. He worked a circuit of farms from California to Washington. His friends said his hometown was Santa Clara del Cobre, Michuacan, Mexico, a place famous for its copper smelting.

Tricia Perez, 47, said Alfonzo learned the craft in his youth and became quite skilled. Ceja's nephew, Adrian Ceja, added Alfonzo studied karate and played in a band when he lived in Mexico and was a fine soccer player.

Perez said she met Alfonzo years ago through her father-in-law, who bought property locally and hired Alfonzo to help inspect the goods before the purchase. She also said her father-in-law brought Alfonzo along just to hang out with him. He had such a good nature, she said, that people loved him.

Shannon Byerly, Jesus Ceja's fiancée, said she misses Alfonzo for his genuine heart. She and Perez described how Alfonzo could not help but dance when a tune played.

"He would hear the music at one our family fiestas," Byerly said. "And he would have those happy feet and get up and dance."

And his genuine nature and willingness to always lend a hand are some of the characteristics his friends hold most dear. If you were washing a car, Adrian Ceja said, and Alfonzo was nearby, he just joined in the work.

Byerly said he did the work of three younger men in his stint at Smith's Frozen Foods, where he was hired about three months before his death.

Jesus Ceja said he lost the job after his alcoholism took hold and he began missing work.

Alfonzo struggled with an addiction to alcohol, and it began to effect his health. Ceja said a doctor told Alfonzo only half his liver functioned. He would stop drinking for a while, but always started again.

Ceja pleaded with Alfonzo not to drink, to seek professional help. His friend refused.

Alfonzo had a wife in Santa Clara del Cobre and 10 children, Ceja said, but no one from Alfonzo's family called to wish him a happy birthday or merry Christmas. Sometimes a relative would show up for a handout.

"Many times I sent money to his wife in Mexico," Ceja said. "The guy was lonely."

Alfonzo's father died when he was young, Ceja said, and his mother died in Mexico while Alfonzo was in the United States. Alfonzo took her death hard, Ceja said, and the grief may have fueled his alcoholism.

"I'm so sad at the way he died. He just didn't have the support from his family," Ceja said.

Some said Alfonzo was a legal resident of the U.S., others said his documentation was questionable. That may have played a role in why he stopped returning to Mexico and lost contact with family there.

Alfonzo also had a case pending in Umatilla County Circuit Court for a 2016 charge of driving under the influence of intoxicants. He was in and out of jail in Pendleton for missing court proceedings. Court records show the jail let him out on Nov. 14 due to overcrowding, but he did not return home.

Byerly heard about the body two days later and told Ceja she had a bad feeling.

Police soon confirmed her suspicion. Byerly called Ceja and broke the news to him while he was working on a roofing job at the airport in Richland, Washington. He came straight home.

"I didn't want it to be the reality," Ceja said.

Alfonzo's friends said he touched the lives of so many.

"He was a great guy," Byerly said. "He had this joy in his heart that you wouldn't expect from someone who had so little. And that's probably what I'll miss about him."

Alfonzo's body is going back to Mexico, where relatives there can view him a last time. People here who knew Alfonzo can go to a visitation Saturday, 3-8 p.m., at Pendleton Pioneer Chapel, Folsom-Bishop, 131 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. They also can express condolences online at www.pioneer-chapel.com.

RECYCLE: Styrofoam ruins cardboard recycling

Continued from 1A

ride out for a while. "We're stockpiling more," he said.

Recyclables are the sixth largest export from the United States to China, according to the Oregon Refuse and Recycling Association. As the market fluctuates, careless or intentional dumping of non-recyclable materials into drop-off sites like the one Sanitary Disposal has on Harper Road in Hermiston can cause a thin profit margin to turn into a loss.

"Recycling is expensive enough as it is to collect, and then if we have to toss it, that's really expensive, and that reflects on everyone's (garbage collection) rates," Jewett said.

Not following the rules on recycling can have a larger impact than most people realize. Signs at the collection depots state that window glass and light bulbs should not be dumped into the containers for clear glass, for example, but people do it anyway. If the window breaks before a Sanitary Disposal employee spots it and pulls it out, the entire load of glass has to be dumped in a landfill rather than risk the lead-tainted window glass being recycled into a food or beverage container.

"Suddenly you've got 30 tons of glass that are useless," Kik said.

They also get a lot of clear plastic mixed in with the glass, and people tend to not be able to tell the difference between tin and aluminum (hint: if it sticks to a magnet, it's tin; if not, it's aluminum) or don't bother to rinse the food out of the containers or pull the paper labels off.

Kik said another one he



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Bill Kik, maintenance supervisor at Sanitary Disposal, pulls Styrofoam someone put in a cardboard recycling bin in front of the offices in Hermiston.

sees frequently is people throwing Styrofoam pieces and packing peanuts into the cardboard dumpster.

"The Styrofoam just kills the load," he said. "A lot of places will just bale it up with all of that in there. We pull it out, but a lot of people don't and I guess that's what caused the problem with China."

Staff time spent removing packing peanuts from a load of cardboard or hauling lead-contaminated glass to a landfill instead of selling it adds up. Jewett and Kik said the more people can follow the rules posted on signs at the Harper Road, Harvest Foods and transfer station sites, the better.

The problem with China has hit Portland recyclers and other areas with co-mingled curbside recycling much harder, Jewett said.

"By us having our material separated at the depot, as long

as it doesn't get contaminated, it gives us a better chance to find a market," he said.

Pendleton Sanitary Service offers curbside recycling for newspapers, magazines, phone books, aluminum and motor oil on collection day, plus collection of other materials such as scrap metal and wood waste at the transfer station on Rieth Road and the recycle depot at Southwest 18th Street and Byers Avenue. President Mike McHenry was not available Thursday or Friday to speak to the effects of China's ban on Pendleton Sanitary Service, but it is not one of the companies that has received a disposal concurrence from DEQ to send recyclables to a landfill.

The DEQ issued a news release recently stating that as transfer stations slowed down their processes in an effort to reduce the amount of contamination in loads they

export, customers can help by making sure their recyclables are clean and by stopping "wishful recycling" in which they mix in items that are not on the approved list in the hopes that somehow it will be recycled anyway.

SYKES IS HIRING

WORK FOR A COMPANY AS original AS YOU ARE.



Save Time and Apply Online:
sykes.com/jobs



EAST OREGONIAN
EastOregonian.com

A Benefit For Subscribers

Your subscription includes unlimited access to EastOregonian.com so you can read the latest news anytime, anywhere.

It's easy to access!

Call 1-800-522-0255, ext. 1 Monday through Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. and we'll help you set up your EastOregonian.com login.

Or go to EastOregonian.com and click on "Register" in the upper lefthand corner to activate your online subscription for the first time.

Questions?

Call, email circulation@eastoregonian.com or stop by 211 SE Byers Ave. in Pendleton, or 333 E. Main St. in Hermiston during business hours.