

LIAM: Community supports family with money and love

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"It comes in waves," she said. "It's the little things that get you — a song, a phrase."

Hebard cried when she read a paper Liam had written in school mentioning how much he liked singing in the car with his mom. That, she said, put her on the edge.

"We sang whatever was on the radio," she said. "'Sweet Home Alabama' was always a favorite."

The outpouring of the Pilot Rock community and others in the area still hasn't stopped. On Saturday a benefit dinner and auction will be held at the Pendleton Eagles Lodge to pay expenses, and also raise money for the Liam's Legacy Foundation.

The support, however, has gone beyond financial.

During the Pilot Rock/Stamfield basketball game on Jan. 26, for example, players and fans from both towns came wearing camouflage to honor Liam, who loved wearing camo. Hebard was especially touched when Stamfield players approached her en masse.

"They found me and gave me flowers," she said. "Each and every one gave me a hug."

In another show of support, teams, employee groups and others posted photos of themselves wearing camouflage on social media. They used the hashtag CamoForLiam.

Recently, at the Pilot Rock Senior Center, members of the Rocky Ridge Quilters sewed a quilt in memory of the eight-year-old, which will be auctioned at Saturday's benefit dinner. Gathered around the quilt, they ranged in age from 12-year-old Jonathin Hascall to Alma Day, the oldest member who serves as instructor and mentor to less-experienced members.

The mission this day was hand sewing the quilt's border. The design includes several different camouflage patterns. As the quilters stitched, they chatted and laughed, but underlying the frivolity was a determination to help buoy a local family after an unimaginable loss.

"This community always rallies," said Karen Fulbright, who spearheaded the Liam quilt. "The community is so strong."

"When there's a disaster, we pull together," said quilter Neva Hascall.

Hebard feels the love. "It's hard for me to wrap my head around what people have done," she said. "It's phenomenal."

She said the shock of losing Liam is slowly wearing off and "we're just starting to grieve."

In Hebard and Hinkle's living room, Liam's ashes sit in a wooden box adorned with the Batman logo. Some of Liam's ashes are inside heart-shaped lockets worn by family



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Members of the Rocky Ridge Quilters sew the binding of a quilt they made in honor of Liam Flanagan, the 8-year-old boy who died of necrotizing fasciitis in January. Since Liam loved to wear camouflage, the quilt features several different kinds of camo patterns.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Sara Hebard holds a locket containing ashes of her son, Liam Flanagan, who died in January of necrotizing fasciitis at age 8.

members.

Hebard said she and Hinkle are legally married, but planned to do a bigger ceremony with family and friends on July 7, the day after Liam's birthday. After Liam's death, the couple pondered canceling the wedding, but then focused on what Liam would want.

"Liam would have been furious with me," Hebard said. "He was so excited."

They will go ahead. Hebard will carry a photo of Liam as she walks toward her groom.

"Liam's going to walk me down the aisle," she said.

At Pilot Rock Elementary School where Liam attended, students and staff are still grappling with the death, said

Principal Steve Staniak. He said second-grade teacher Marcy Jerome spent time on the first day back helping her students deal with their feelings.

"She was amazing with them," Staniak said. "There were lots of tears. They talked about memories of Liam."

Staff will continue to monitor and urge students to talk about their feelings, he said.

"This will stay with them for a long time," Staniak said. "Liam was a sweet little boy — one of those kids who always had a smile on his face. Kids were kind of drawn to him. We're all missing him."

Since Liam's death, Hebard has spent many hours researching necrotizing fasciitis.

Should parents worry about deadly bacteria?

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

A description of necrotizing fasciitis, sometimes called flesh eating disease, reads like a horror novel.

Powerful bacteria storm a person's body, releasing toxins, destroying tissue and eventually triggering organ failure unless doctors can stop the rampage.

In January, Liam Flanagan from Pilot Rock died after he wrecked his bike and cut his leg. A doctor sutured the wound with seven stitches. He seemed on the mend — until an infection started to rage. Over the next days, surgeons were forced to amputate parts of the second grader's body. He died on Jan. 21 at age 8.

The story prompted a lot of angst from parents on social media about risk to their own children. But, should they worry?

Dr. Paul Cieslak, medical director for communicable diseases and immunizations with the Oregon Health Authority, cautions against overreacting.

"The fact is, it is very, very uncommon," he said. "Those most at risk have underlying immune system problems such as diabetes, liver disease or AIDS."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, between 700 and 1,100 cases were reported each year since 2010 in the United States. In 2016, in Portland's tri-county area of 1.8 million people, there were five cases of necrotizing fasciitis.

The culprit is most often a bacterium called group A streptococcus.

"It lives in the pharynx (throat) in a certain percentage of the population," Cieslak said. "It causes strep throat in children."

The bacteria is common, but occasionally it can go on the attack, entering a break in the skin and wreaking havoc.

"People often fail to realize the pathogenic potential of the bacterium," Cieslak said. "It gets my vote for the nastiest bacterium out there."

"Necrotizing" means "killing," he said. The bacteria gets into the fascii, the connective tissue under the skin that stabilizes muscles and other organs, and begins to kill tissue.

"Once the bacteria gets into the fascial layer, the main thing needed is surgery to scoop out the dead tissue," he said. "Without that, it can kill you within hours. It moves very rapidly."

Parents should be on the lookout for four important indicators: pain, redness, heat and swelling.

Since the bacteria does its work deep under the skin, sometimes pain is the most prominent sign that something is seriously wrong.

"The pain," Cieslak said, "is out of proportion to what you see."

He's seen more than one case. Once an infection gets past a certain tipping point, he said, all you can do is call the surgeon.

His advice? Don't waste time worrying, but stay vigilant when signs of infection appear.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

This quilt, created by Pilot Rock's Rocky Ridge Quilters to honor Liam Flanagan, will be auctioned off at a benefit dinner and auction on March 10 at the Pendleton Eagles Lodge. Since Liam loved to wear camouflage, the quilt features several different kinds of camo patterns.

Dinner & auction

Spaghetti feed to raise money for the family of Liam, who died from necrotizing fasciitis in January

- March 10
 - Pendleton Eagles Lodge
 - Dinner 4-5:30 p.m.
 - Auction 5-7 p.m.
- Tickets available at the door, Individual \$10, 12 and under \$8 Family of four or more \$35

She joined a Facebook group for survivors and family members. She reached out to the father of a five-year-old autistic boy who nearly died from the monster bacteria. She started Liam's Legacy, a foundation with the mission of helping other families that experience necrotizing fasciitis or other tragedies. She is still working on the mission statement.

"My goal is to never let Liam's memory die," she said.

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EOU: 'Re-establishing itself as a major player in the region'

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Rep. Greg Smith, who sponsored the bill, agreed that the designation as Oregon's Rural University could help EOU with recruitment of students from rural areas who don't want to attend school in a big city.

"They'll know that they'll be coming to an environment they'll be comfortable in," Smith said.

Officials in other parts of the state have sometimes eyed closing the small university as a way to save the state money, so Smith said he also felt the designation will remind lawmakers from more urban areas of EOU's importance in serving Eastern Oregon residents.

Jer Pratton of Hermiston, who serves on EOU's board, said being Oregon's Rural University sets EOU apart from the state's other public institutions and helps define the university's purpose.

"When funding issues come up it sends a better message and we can advocate for EOU in a stronger position," he said.

David Nelson of Pendleton, another EOU board member, said higher education is a "highly competitive world" where universities have to make the case that they deserve funding — a case strengthened by the legislature officially recognizing the university's importance to rural students.

EOU's progress

The rural university designation may help EOU's future, but things have already been looking up for the school.

In 2014 morale at the university, which draws hundreds of Umatilla County students,



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Regional advisor Wendy Sorey speaks with lone juniors Laura Ayala, center, and Renee Peterson attending Eastern Oregon University at a job fair Wednesday at the SAGE Center in Boardman.

was low. EOU was in financial difficulty, cutting majors and laying off staff. Students told the *East Oregonian* during a visit to campus that they had seen friends give up on the university and transfer elsewhere.

While low enrollment numbers are still a struggle four years later, Seydel, Smith, Pratton and Nelson all said other areas — from financials to academics to the success of the university's sports teams — have improved considerably.

"We've got a lot of work to do but we're certainly in a better place than we were three years ago," Nelson said. "We're on an upward trend."

Nelson said now that the university has its house in order and is "re-establishing itself as a major player in the region" it can focus on marketing and recruitment and get those enrollment numbers up.

Pratton said as a fiscal conservative he was worried about the university's financial position when the board of trustees was created in 2014 (before that, a single board oversaw all of Oregon's public universities). But he credited the board, its financial committee, then-interim university president Jay Kenton and current president Tom Insko — who is an EOU alum but came from a business, not education, background — with working together to help turn the situation around and put the university on solid financial footing.

"Beyond that, the quality of what's been happening there has been bumped up by several notches," he said, noting a number of new and improved services and programs on EOU's campus. "I'm very proud of EOU."

The university's reach

extends far beyond its hometown of La Grande. Only half of EOU's students this fall were attending the university on campus. Another 1,415 were taking classes online and 88 were high school students earning EOU credit at their schools through the Eastern Promise program.

Seydel said community colleges throughout the region — including Blue Mountain Community College's Hermiston and Pendleton campuses — have EOU staff on-site to advise students considering a transfer to EOU. The university recently renewed its "two plus two" agreement with BMCC to allow for a seamless transition for students transferring between the college and EOU.

Seydel said the university is also building partnerships with area industries and government agencies so that students can find more meaningful work study and internship experiences.

One thing EOU staff and students are particularly excited about is the \$9 million the university just received from the legislature for creation of a large indoor multi-use track and field facility on campus. The fieldhouse will help EOU expand its physical activity and health plus outdoor recreation and leadership majors, which Seydel said have been growing already, and give student athletes in-door, on-campus facilities for practices. Seydel said the facility will be one-of-a-kind for Eastern Oregon and will also be available for community uses ranging from walking on the track to holding youth camps.

BULLY: Father committed suicide

Continued from 1A

Some of the students listening to Greenwood wore ties and other business attire. Greenwood wandered among them as he told his tale.

Greenwood's turning point came after the suicide death of his father. The elder Greenwood had reached out to Cory and expressed regret at not being there for his son, but Cory wasn't ready to let go of his anger. Then, one day, Greenwood missed a phone call from his dad.

"I just wanted you to know that I always loved you," the voice mail said.

Something in his dad's voice alarmed Greenwood. He rushed to his father's shop, but no one was there. He kept calling his dad's cell phone. Finally, his dad picked up.

"It's too late," he said. Shortly after, his father shot himself in the head. The death shook Greenwood, but sparked change.

"I was 22 when I decided to be the best me," Greenwood said. "The first thing I had to do was forgive myself for my mistakes. Then I had to forgive the people who hurt me."

He forgave his father and the teacher who told him he would end up smoking crack on his mother's porch. He developed confidence.

"I had to decide to be me," he told the students. "It is your responsibility to be you. I wasted so much of my potential, but you don't have to."

After the keynote, Patricia Dawson, OSU Extension agent in 4-H programs, handed waters and lunches to students who filed by. She is a fan of the conference, which OSU Extension sponsors along with the Schamp Family, the Oregon Community Foundation, Good Shepherd Community Foundation, Wildhorse Foundation, Portland General Electric and the Umatilla County 4-H Youth Program.

"The overall objective is to inspire students to take positive life avenues," she said.

She said the program received a National Diversity Award this past November from the Association of Public Land Grant Universities and the United States Department of Agriculture.