



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Michele Caron holds a barn owlet Monday at the West Richland raptor rehabilitation center outside of Richland. The center usually raises a little more than 100 barn owls for an entire season, but already has more than 300 at the facility.

OWLETS: Blue Mountain Wildlife caring for hundreds — and counting

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together, all legs and fuzz. They hissed en masse, sounding like a den of snakes. When they are big enough, these owls will go outside to nest boxes set on posts around the property. Most of the 31 boxes hold 12 birds. Each night Caron, or her partner Laurel McKeehan, dons a headlamp, climbs a ladder and dumps a bag of thawed mice into each box. In time, the birds venture outside and sit on branches and eventually try hunting. Finally, they fly away. Right now, the inn is full, but Caron knows it won't be long before space opens up.

When the owls are almost ready to leave, they take nightly practice runs. The look for rodents in the vegetation and let out the distinctive barn owl screech. At this stage, it's all for show. "The sky is alive with screaming owls," Caron said. "They fly and screech (and scare off their prey). The chance of them actually catching something is somewhat remote." Later, these nocturnal creatures learn to hover on white, velvety wings, locating rodents using stealth. A heart-shaped facial disc helps funnel sound toward



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
A fledgling barn owl sleeps in a pine tree Monday at the West Richland raptor rehabilitation center outside of Richland.

sensitive ears. Most of the owls were displaced from stacks of hay bales where they hatched. Because of a hot export market, Caron said, hay farmers are pulling tarps off of stockpiled hay and shipping it for sale. Nestled in the bales are the baby owls. Farmers, veterinarians and others from around Southeast Washington and Northeast Oregon bring the birds to Blue Mountain Wildlife. "They are hauling hay like mad," said Lynn Tomkins, executive director of Blue Mountain Wildlife. "We started getting owls the first

of March." Some of the owlets have injuries, such as broken bones from falling off haystacks. Tomkins treats these birds at the main facility in Pendleton and sends them back to Caron. Caron gets help from three mother owls that laid eggs in nest boxes on the property. These mothers are raising their own babies, while also fostering some of the orphans. Caron urged people who find orphaned baby owls not to feed them such things as hamburgers or hotdogs. Eating bone is vital to an owl. "If owls eat hamburger for a week, they can get metabolic bone disease," she said. "Their bones become soft and pliable. They try to fly and break their wings." The biggest worry these days is money, though people are responding to the need. Last week, almost \$14,000 in donations came in. To help financially, go to www.bluemountainwildlife.org/donate.html.

Caron says all the hours she spends with the owls is worth the work. She loves watching them progress and finally go back into the wild. "It's miraculous," she said. "Having a part in that is incredible."

LOVE: Annual service day gets to work

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Valette, one of the event's organizers, said he liked the town's community spirit, and the desire to make it better. Volunteers of all ages turned out, with several elementary and middle school-aged children holding up signs for car washes and picking up trash. "We really want to make it a better place," said nine-year-old Cord Cooley. Bailey Townsend, a Hermiston Assembly of God member, was washing cars at Les Schwab. She said since the event started in Hermiston three years ago, it has evolved slightly. The church did a block party, and has handed out snacks to kids at sporting events. Townsend said she loves Hermiston, her hometown,

because she wants to let people know that there are others that love them. "I see a lot of hurting people," she said. "But we want to let them know it doesn't have to be a sad, lonely world." Several people helped resident Andy Cooley clean up his yard, in the neighborhood off West Beech Avenue. "I think it's great," Cooley said. "I haven't been able to haul anything off, so this has been a great help. I could never do it on my own." Belinda Cardoza and Victoria Nunez were helping out with Templo Fe, Esperanza Y Amor. The church had about 50 members volunteering. "Love God and serve the world," said Nunez in Spanish. Hermiston Mayor David

Drotzmann showed up with employees from his optometry clinic. They dug weeds and spread bark dust at McKenzie Park. "The people are so giving," he said. "Of their time, of their resources. It makes it enjoyable to live in a place, raise a family, grow a business in a place like that." Many people said they didn't have to think about why they love Hermiston. "It's where I live," said Paul Wattenburger, as he cleaned up a gravel area near McKenzie Park. "It's that simple." Hector Ramirez, pastor of Templo Fe, Esperanza Y Amor, said he loves the town because of its people. "We care for them by showing actions that we love our city," he said.

GUNS: Speakers object to Oregon measures

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Lovett said protecting the Second Amendment is about protecting security of freedom, of property, and of life. He also said America was facing an attack on its traditions. "The first thing they did was take God out of our culture, and out of the schools," he said. Several other speakers discussed their efforts to protect gun rights. Jesse Bonifer, lead of the Umatilla County Oregon Three Percenters, gave listeners a brief history of gun control in the United States. He said his group recently crafted a Second Amendment Protection Ordinance. "It's basically a road block for anyone who wants

to take our guns in Umatilla County," he said. Some audience members traveled more than an hour for the event. Lori Brock, a Baker City resident, said she and her husband learned about the event on Facebook and wanted to take part. She said she was glad to see Second Amendment supporters being vocal, as she said many don't often get out and protest. "Most of us who enjoy our guns and freedoms are just pacifists and like to be in our homes and safe," she said. "I feel like our side gets overlooked, because you always see the opposition in the news." The lawn around the rally was peppered with signs in support of Sam Carpenter,

a Republican gubernatorial candidate from Bend. Eli Stephens, a Pendleton resident and member of the Oregon Three Percenters, said he was impressed with the crowd. "There's a very diverse crowd of white collar and blue collar, old and young, church people and non-church people," he said. Beers, an Athena resident, said the Oregon Three Percenters have grown in the last year, from about three members to 25. She said they do community service events, but also stand up for Second Amendment rights by writing letters and organizing rallies. "We are not anti-government," she said. "We are anti-corrupt government."

FIRE CHIEF: City on fifth chief in seven years

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retirement discussions to Ciraulo, but said it was the fire chief's decision. Ciraulo declined to say whether the retirement was his decision or a directive from city administration. "The city needs to move quickly to find their next chief, and I think that the plans and decisions ahead should be made by those who will be here when those plans come to fruition, and that won't include me," he said in a statement. Although Ciraulo said he was undecided on staying in Pendleton in an interview with the *East Oregonian*, the press release states that he is considering moving to Indiana to be closer to his grandchildren. In his part of the public statement, Corbett said the city wanted to focus on "all the positive things he has accomplished while with us" rather than on "the hole he will be leaving." The "capstone" of Ciraulo's abbreviated tenure was the passage of the \$10 million fire station bond in 2017, which created funding for a new primary fire station and equipment. Ciraulo was active in conducting tours of current fire station at 911 S.W. Court Ave. to spotlight its deficiencies, site selection and lobbying the city council to put the bond on the ballot. Despite being prohibited by state law from advocating for the bond, Ciraulo was

front and center during the bond campaign, reporting on the facts behind the bond before deferring to a member of the city council or political action committee member to speak in favor of voting for it. City voters hadn't approved a municipal bond since 1996 and a previous attempt at a fire station bond failed to make the ballot. Nonetheless, 60 percent of Pendleton voters approved the bond during the May 2017 election. In addition to the bond project, Ciraulo also applied for grants to expand staff and replace emergency equipment and vehicles while looking into options on how to sustainably fund those new expenditures. In an interview, Ciraulo said the fire station project will continue uninterrupted and he has informed everyone involved about his departure. Ciraulo said he's appreciated the way the community has embraced him and his wife, who owns and operates Bella Cosa, a Main Street gift shop. A former division chief for the Clark County Fire & Rescue in southwestern Washington, Ciraulo was hired in 2015 to replace interim fire chief Roy Palmer. Stuart Roberts, police chief and public safety director for the city, was heavily involved in Ciraulo's hiring. At the time, Roberts

lauded him for his 30 years of experience in firefighting and emergency services and his community service, which included a dozen years as a city councilor and mayor of Battle Ground, Washington. Before Ciraulo took the helm, the fire department had been through four chiefs in five years. Ciraulo eventually won respect from both his subordinates and city officials from outside the department. In a 2016 city manager evaluation, an anonymous city councilor praised Ciraulo's hiring as a move in the right direction. According to city salary scales, Ciraulo was earning \$112,392 per year at the time of his departure. Speaking on Monday, Roberts said he was a part of Ciraulo's retirement discussions over the previous weeks but did not participate in coordinating the announcement. Assistant Fire Chief Shawn Penninger will be installed as interim chief, Roberts said, and a plan on filling Ciraulo's duties will be created soon. Roberts said time is of the essence during a time of year when fire season, Fourth of July and Pendleton Whisky Music Fest are fast approaching. Given the seasonal circumstances, the city might not have the luxury of immediately undergoing a months-long process to find Ciraulo's replacement, Roberts said.



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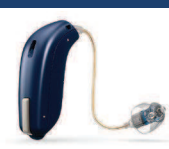
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