

# EAST OREGONIAN

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 5, 2019

143rd Year, No. 165

WINNER OF THE 2018 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

\$1.50

## EASTERN OREGON

### EOMG to purchase La Grande, Baker City papers

East Oregonian

SALEM — EO Media Group's presence in Oregon is set to get even stronger.

Pending court approval, EOMG will be adding two more newspapers to the fold with the expected additions of the *La Grande Observer* and the *Baker City Herald*, Heidi Wright, chief operating officer of the EO Media Group, announced on Tuesday.

"We're excited to welcome the *La Grande Observer* and *Baker City Herald* into the EO Media Group family," Wright said. "Our family-held company has deep roots in Eastern Oregon since 1908."

The reported purchase price was \$775,000 for the two papers. Fourth-generation EO Media Group owner Kathryn Brown of Pendleton said she is excited about the purchase.

"My cousins and I are committed to keeping local journalism alive in the rural communities we serve," she said. "We look forward to providing credible and relevant news to Union and Baker counties for many years to come."

Wright said that if all goes well, the sale will be completed July 1.

Western Communications Inc. owns the two Eastern Oregon newspapers, along with the *Bend Bulletin* and a few other publications in Oregon and California. The corporation filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in January. Lawyers for Western Communications told the bankruptcy court the plan was to sell property and buildings, according to court records, and in a hearing last week said all the newspapers had offers.

"A few weeks ago, the (EOMG) put in a bid to take over ownership of the papers in La Grande and Baker City," Wright said. "These towns are in close proximity to the company's other publications on the east side of Oregon, which makes this a great opportunity to strengthen news coverage for all of Eastern Oregon."

The bankruptcy court has the final say in accepting EOMG's offer. Wright said the expectation is the court is going to give the approval.

Western Communications previously filed for Chapter 11 protection in August 2011, following a three-year dispute with the Bank of America, the company's largest creditor at the time. The company emerged from Chapter 11 protection in April 2012.

Earlier this year, the motor failed on the 53-year-old press that had long printed the *La Grande Observer* and the *Baker City Herald*. Since then, the two newspapers have been printed on the *East Oregonian's* press in Pendleton.

### CTUIR adopts new conduct code

East Oregonian

MISSION — A recent spate of violent crimes on the Umatilla Indian Reservation has spurred the tribes to create a new code that could effectively prohibit some people from entering the reservation.

The Confederated Tribes of

the Umatilla Indian Reservation announced Tuesday that it had approved an "Exclusion and Removal Code" that establishes a civil process for removing tribal members and non-tribal members from the reservation if they pose a threat to safety.

CTUIR Executive Director Ted Wright said the tribes

had the ability to trespass people from tribal property previously, but they never had a formal method for repeat offenders until now.

A press release states that the tribal government can remove a person for committing an act that "substantially threatens the health or safety of a person

that resides, works or attends school within the Confederated Tribes' Indian country; or threatens the integrity, economic security, or welfare of the tribal government."

The tribes could also ban someone from the reservation

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## FOR THE LOVE OF THE Outdoors



Staff photo by Kathy Aney  
Diane Willcox and Atticus Tesch hold the flag honoring Pendleton Outdoor School co-founder Vern Willcox, who died last summer. Atticus retrieved the flag this spring from the top Buck Mountain where Dianne and others hid it in September after a memorial service there.

### Sunridge teacher loved annual trek to top of Buck Mountain

By KATHY ANEY  
East Oregonian

Twelve-year-old Atticus Tesch could hardly wait to get going.

Atticus, a sixth-grader at Sunridge Middle School, would soon start climbing Buck Mountain. He and other Outdoor School campers were gathered in the dining hall to get instructions and hear about a new twist in the annual trek up the mountain. On this day, May 24, two medallions would be given to students. One would go to the camper who first reached the top of Buck Mountain. The other would be awarded to the child who found a hidden flag.

Jim Christiansen, who co-founded Pendleton's annual outdoor school with Vern Willcox in 1971, explained that the flag honored Willcox.

"He told us Vern Willcox had passed away recently," Atticus said. "He said we would retrieve the flag to give to his wife."

Friends and family had carried the flag to the top of Buck Mountain in September in remembrance of the beloved teacher. Willcox, who taught sixth grade for his entire 32-year career, loved Outdoor School and he adored sixth-graders.

"Sixth grade is the only class I'd teach — it's the best," he said upon retiring to an *East Oregonian* reporter. "(Their energy) is like popcorn going off all the time. They don't allow you to get in a rut."

"Mr. Willcox" looked forward to Outdoor School every spring at Buck Creek Camp, 35 miles northeast of Pendleton. The highlight for him was climbing Buck Mountain with the campers.

After retiring, he continued to volunteer.

Before dying of heart problems last August at



Contributed photo  
Vern Willcox, co-founder of the Sunridge Outdoor School, stands at the top of Buck Mountain in an old photo.

age 76, he told his wife, Diane, and his two children that he didn't want a service. They agreed. This was classic Vern Willcox, Diane said. He disliked the glare of the spotlight, even in death, it appeared.

"We were just going to do a little memorial service in the backyard so we could get closure," Diane said.

They changed plans, however, when so many people expressed dismay.

"We didn't realize how many lives he touched just by being him," she said.

On Aug. 31, friends, family, colleagues and former students gathered at Grecian Heights park to celebrate his life. The 125 chairs filled quickly and everyone else stood or sat in the grass. They reminisced and sang "Amazing Grace" to the accompaniment of a ukulele. A 21-gun salute honored the Vietnam veteran's time in the Army.

The guests signed a flag that showed Willcox standing on Buck Mountain wearing his floppy

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EO File Photo

The council boosted road funding for 2019-20, but not enough to reverse overall deterioration.

### Pendleton council OKs more money for streets, airport

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — On Tuesday, the Pendleton City Council unanimously adopted the city's \$85.9 million budget for 2019-20, paving the way for an increased road maintenance budget and a vastly expanded airport fund.

As a part of a \$3.6 million state tax street fund, the city will be using \$1.2 million for road maintenance, a level of funding it achieved by making some small cuts in the general fund.

But estimates show that \$1.2 million is only enough to prevent further deterioration and the city will need millions more to improve the overall health of the street system.

At an upcoming Pendleton Development Commission meeting, the council will consider spending \$3 million from urban renewal funds for street maintenance as a one-time windfall. The maintenance projects would have to be in the urban renewal district, which spans downtown Pendleton and some of the surrounding area.

The airport fund saw one of the biggest jumps of any fund in the city, growing by 143% in 2019-20.

Most of the increase is coming from a \$6.2 million FAA grant to repave the primary runway at the airport.

At Tuesday's meeting, the council also unanimously approved a \$6.6 million bid from Central Washington Asphalt and Precision Approach Engineering to design and build the airport runway.

Between the water and sewer funds, the city is also spending \$7.8 million to extend utilities to a new unmanned aerial systems industrial park.

The airport expects to make \$1.3 million from charges and fees in 2019-20. Adding together line items that were specifically labeled as UAS sources or revenue, the UAS range contributes \$791,000 to that figure.



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