

Echo students honor veterans

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

ECHO — Some might think American youths are too immature and self-absorbed to understand sacrifices made by our nation’s veterans.

The youths of Echo might just take exception to that line of thinking. On Thursday, students from kindergarten to 12th grade took to the streets for the Echo School’s annual Veterans Day parade.

Each elementary grade adopted a military branch. They came in waves: the National Guard, Marines, Coast Guard, Army, Navy and Air Force. Middle school students dressed as important military-related figures. High school students formed a moving flag.

They marched down Main Street to the beat of patriotic tunes, looped around a block and marched back to the school. Some enthusiastically yelled, “USA, USA, USA” as they walked, evoking grins and applause



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Echo students took to the streets during a veterans celebration parade on Thursday, marching down Main Street and back to the school for a special assembly honoring local veterans. Each elementary school grade adopted a different branch of the service.

from family members and other Echo residents lining the parade route.

The celebration didn’t end there. The students trooped into the gymnasium where they spent another hour honoring local veterans, singing songs, reciting poems and listening to guest speakers that included Umatilla County Commissioner

George Murdock and Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner.

Afterward, students lined a dim corridor they dubbed “The Tunnel of Honor.” As veterans passed by, they applauded or gave enthusiastic high fives. At the end of the tunnel, the veterans found a multi-purpose room with cake (covered with American flag frosting, of course).

Around the room, the students who had dressed as military-related characters assumed the position of figures in a wax museum. They held each pose for eight minutes before moving to a new position. Sign boards explained their identities.

During the assembly, students listened quietly to wise words from their elders.

“Today it is our privilege to say thank you to all of our nation’s veterans, to let them know we appreciate their service and honor them for their sacrifices,” said Amador Estrada, who teaches math and Spanish and served as emcee during the assembly. “The price of freedom is high. We cannot forget those willing to pay for it.”

Judging by the looks on the faces of local veterans as they walked through The Tunnel of Honor, the youth of Echo know how to show gratitude.

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0810.

Umatilla County Planning lowers hardship fee

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Umatilla County soon will give a fiscal break to folks enduring a hardship and needing temporary housing.

The county board of commissioners at its meeting Wednesday voted 3-0 to knock \$400 off the fee for a conditional use permit for a temporary hardship dwelling.

County Planning Director Bob Waldher told the board the permit fee is \$750, but his department wanted to reduce it to \$350.

“We felt like (it) aligns a little more closely with the work that is involved in that,” he said. “And also

a fair amount of these that come to our office, we felt like the applicants are already in a bit of a hardship situation, and so reducing this fee should have a little benefit to them.”

This would apply to temporary homes, such as mobile homes, someone locates on property that already has a home, Waldher explained, such as a sick family member who wants to live on the property and needs care.

Commissioner George Murdock praised the proposal, and Commissioner John Shafer added, “Clearly you guys have the county’s best interest at heart.”

The change to the lower price takes effect Jan. 1. All

other conditional use permits will remain at \$750.

In other business, the board took the following action:

- Adopted the planning department’s code amendments to improve the aesthetic character and economic vitality of the Highway 395 North Corridor.
- Approved transferring the jurisdiction of a portion of Powerline Road to the city of Umatilla. The section is from Highway 730 to the end of the city’s urban growth boundary and includes Dean Place. The county also is providing \$200,000 to the city for improvements on Powerline, including engineering studies.

Murdock said the trans-

fer would help with residential development in the area. The Umatilla City Council also has to approve the deal.

- Approved a 20-year lease with Ed Staud & Son for the storage of propane on the county’s public works facility in Milton-Freewater. The rent is \$700 a month for two years, then increases to \$900 a month.
- Voted 3-0 in favor of the sheriff’s office reassigning a patrol deputy to serve as the school resource officer for Milton-Freewater schools. Undersheriff Jim Littlefield told commissioners this takes a deputy off patrol during the school year, but the sheriff’s office has the staff to cover the gap.

Pendleton parks tobacco ban continues to stand

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Pendleton City Council kept the ban on the use of tobacco in city parks.

The city in 2017 enacted the ban but with a sunset. The council Tuesday night nixed the sunset with a vote of 8-0. The unanimous decision, however, came at the end of plenty of discussion.

Councilor Becky Marks said she was concerned with “criminalizing” people who smoke in the parks. She said she liked the city’s anti-tobacco signs in the parks, but questioned the need for an ordinance.

City Attorney Nancy Kerns replied the police department has not been patrolling parks to cite violators and has no plans to start that kind of active enforcement.

ment. And Councilor Carole Innes said there is no need for the signs without a local law to back them.

Hanna Brady also addressed the council on the ban. She heads up Umatilla County’s Tobacco Prevention and Education Program and said rather than police or park staff handing out citations, “social enforcement” carries the day. According to a survey, she said, 56% of

people would feel comfortable asking someone not to smoke in a park.

Councilor McKenna McDonald said she has an issue with ordinances the police don’t enforce, but she liked social enforcement. Councilor Paul Chalmers said he sees the ordinance as a tool for police to deal with “inappropriate behavior,” in this case, using tobacco in a city park.

Judge throws out statements in Mattila case

PENDLETON — The jury in the manslaughter trial of John Mattila of Weston will not get to hear some statements he made to police.

Mattila was involved in a crash on Highway 11 the evening of Feb. 22 that killed Adelaida Solis Torres of Walla Walla, Wash. Defense Attorney Jody Vaughan sought to suppress comments Mattila made before an Oregon State Police trooper arrested him and advised him of his right to be silent.

Circuit Judge Jon Lieualen in an Oct. 30 ruling agreed with Vaughn and handed down the order to suppress the statements.

That includes Mattila’s admission he was drinking alcohol before the crash and some of the insults and slurs he made about the victim.

Vaughn also argued police lacked probable cause for arresting Mattila for driving under the influence of intoxicants. Lieualen in a separate ruling found there was probable cause.

The judge also ruled Umatilla County Deputy District Attorney Dan Pachico can present evidence of Mattila’s hospital

records that show his blood alcohol level that night. State court records also show the judge did not rule against the state using jail house photos showing Mattila grinning.

Mattila remains in the Umatilla County Jail, Pend-

leton. He has pleaded not guilty to first- and second-degree manslaughter, hit-and-run on an injured person, DUII and related charges. The case has a trial readiness hearing Nov. 22 to set trial dates.

— EO Media Group

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records that show his blood alcohol level that night. State court records also show the judge did not rule against the state using jail house photos showing Mattila grinning.

Mattila remains in the Umatilla County Jail, Pend-

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Wright leaving East Oregonian to lead La Grande newsroom

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — A long-time pillar of the *East Oregonian* newsroom is leaving for the chance to lead his own newsroom.

Phil Wright is headed to La Grande to take on the editor role at *The Observer*, beginning Nov. 18. Wright’s last day at the *East Oregonian* is Friday.

He takes over a newsroom that has been without an editor since March, something Publisher Karine Brogoitti said is long overdue.

“It wasn’t just about hiring an editor — it was about hiring the right editor to lead our news team and to propel us forward,” the La Grande publisher said.

Wright heads to La Grande after nearly 15 years as a reporter in Pendleton. During his time at the *EO*, Wright has primarily covered Umatilla County government, public safety and courts. He is excited by his first leadership opportunity.

“I’m intrigued with it. I’m excited. I’m nervous,” he said. “I think there’s some untapped potential in La Grande.”

He said while it is his first time leading a newsroom, he’s had the opportunity to learn from some good leaders during his time in Pendleton. He said he plans on taking a little something from each of them.

“I think I’ve worked with some really good editors. It’s a very biased judgement because I’ve only worked for the *EO*. But (former editors) Skip Nichols and Daniel Wattenburger and (current *EO* editor) Andrew Cutler are all good editors. I hope to pull some of what I learned from them and apply it in La Grande.”

EO Media Group Regional Publisher Chris Rush said *The Observer* is in good hands.

“We’re delighted to be able to fill this position internally with such a competent and experienced journalist like Phil Wright,” said Rush. “*Observer* readers will soon learn what *East Oregonian* readers already know — that Phil is dogged in seeking out important local news and reporting those stories faithfully and accurately. He’s a true community journalist with a passion for rural Oregon.”

Wright is a 1986 graduate of Pendleton High School and a 1993 graduate of then-Western Oregon State College. He later earned a master’s degree in English from Portland State

University.

“Obviously, we are losing a very talented reporter here at the *EO*,” said



Wright

Cutler, a former editor/publisher of *The Observer*. “And while we are sad to see someone with Phil’s talent leave, we are happy that he’s getting a chance to lead the newsroom in La Grande. I think the staff in La Grande and the readers of *The Observer* are going to see a number of positive changes as Phil gets acclimated to Union County.”

Brogoitti said at the end of the day, Wright’s commitment to quality journalism, along with his work in Pendleton, were among the reasons he was the right fit.

“As a veteran reporter for the *East Oregonian*, Phil understands what it means to be from Northeast Oregon and the values and cultural differences in rural communities,” she said. “It’s important that *The Observer*’s news coverage resonates with our readers and that we are bringing them the best that journalism has to offer. Phil brings that element in spades.”

The Observer was purchased by EO Media Group in July, along with the *Baker City Herald*, from Western Communications of Bend.

Western Communications filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in January. The company first sought to restructure, then decided to liquidate its assets. This was the second bankruptcy for Western Communications in the past 10 years. It emerged from another bankruptcy in 2012.

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Cineplex Show Times

\$5 Classic Movie
Showing Wednesday @ 12p
Saving Private Ryan

Doctor Sleep (R)
12:10p* 3:20p* 6:30p 9:40p

Last Christmas (PG13)
12:20p* 2:20p*
4:40p 7:00p 9:30p

Midway (PG13)
12:50p* 3:50p* 6:50p 9:50p

Terminator: Dark Fate (R)
1:30p* 4:20p 7:10p 10:00p

Maleficent:
Mistress of Evil (PG)
1:20p* 4:00p 6:40p 9:20p

Arctic Dogs (PG)
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