

Celebration: ‘It is literally a big family, one big Army family’

Continued from Page A1

of giving back to his family members — those related to him and fellow Guardsmen — and thanking them for the support that they provide.

“A lot of these guys have been here for several years,” Ford said. “It is literally a big family, one big Army family.”

For the last six years, the Pendleton Lions Club has helped to cover the cost of the meal, music and a free holiday gift raffle at the event as well as facilitating donations of toys and gift bags for the children.

“It’s a Christmas party unlike any other you’ll find in this town,” said John Taylor, secretary of the Pendleton Lions Club. “It’s one of the most important things that we do every year.”

The Pendleton Lions Club closed out the party with a \$1,000 donation to the regiment’s Family Readiness Group.

Lorrie Swiger, coordinator of the Family Readiness Group, said the dinner is one of two that the group arranges each year. She said it is important for spouses and families to get to know each other and spend time together, especially with the pending deployment.



Santa Claus, Ken Hegge, poses for a picture with 5-month-old Leighton Leasy as Mrs. Claus, Beth Hegge, waits nearby with candy canes.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

“It’s a good day to give back to the families,” she said.

The Family Readiness Group helps to provide support to the families of deployed Guard members, both emotionally and by making connections with resources for the families. The readiness group operates a raffle at the dinner to

help fund the dinners and provide assistance to families in need.

“If they need someone to yell at or talk to, we’re here,” Swiger said. “And if something around the house is going to break, it usually happens in the first months of deployment, so we’re here to help.”

For Chief Warrant Officer 4 Tom McCoin, the Christmas dinner held a little bit different significance. McCoin finished his final training mission with the unit just before the party and celebrated both his retirement and his 60th birthday on Sunday.

“It’s a tear-jerker,” said McCoin. “We’re all a family.”

McCoin, a Condon resident, was born and raised in Eastern Oregon and said having the opportunity to return to area with the National Guard was the ideal way to finish out his career. He said that having the opportunity to train National Guardsmen in Pendleton was very rewarding.

“I’m old enough to be most of their father,” McCoin said. “To see the young ones and their babies is, well, the military is in really good hands going forward.”

Gratitude: Paying attention to all these soldiers who have served our country

Continued from Page A1

after Wreaths Across America, which started with the laying of 5,000 wreaths at Arlington National Cemetery in 1992.

A decade ago, parent Patty Jo Lathrop, who had seen an article about Wreaths Across America, suggested the idea to Kubishta. He ran with it. That first year, the students raised enough money for 64 wreaths. This year, sponsors paid for 300 wreaths. Kubishta dreams of one year raising enough to lay wreaths on the graves of all 1,000 veterans buried at Olney.

The ceremony included an invocation, the posting of colors, a reading and playing of “Taps.” Freshman Gabby Simpson sang “I’ll be Home for Christmas,” a song written from the viewpoint of a World War II soldier far from his loved ones.

“I’ll be home for Christmas,” Simpson sang, “if only in my dreams.”

Kubishta told those gathered of Pearl Harbor survivor Lauren Bruner, the second-to-last man to escape the USS Arizona on Dec. 7, 1941. After his death at age



Wreaths lay at the foot of graves in the American Legion section of Olney Cemetery, placed there by Griswold High School students.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

98, Bruner was interred Friday in the ship’s wreckage.

“The Arizona is the final resting place for over 900 men who were on the ship that day,” Kubishta said. “Mr. Bruner became the 44th person to be interred on the USS Arizona. He’ll be the last.”

Three remaining survivors have chosen to be buried

in cemeteries.

“When someone asked Mr. Bruner why he wanted (to be interred on the Arizona) as opposed to being buried in a cemetery near his family, he said ... it seems like after a while, no one pays attention anymore,” Kubishta said.

He waved his arm around

at the graves on Olney’s grassy hills.

“We’re here to pay attention to them and make sure that we know we haven’t forgotten them,” he said. “We’re here to pay attention to all these soldiers who have served our country.”

He turned the teens loose to lay wreaths.



Teacher Lorin Kubishta talks about the importance of remembering veterans during Sunday’s Wreaths for Remembrance event.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

They started in the American Legion section of the cemetery, then wandered around searching for crosses etched into the grave markers indicating the person was a veteran. Some students did the job quickly, while others took more time. Fourteen-year-old Zoe Johnson knelt and whispered each veteran’s name.

“For me this has a pretty big impact,” Johnson said. “A lot of my family members fought in wars. My brothers

just joined the Air Force.”

Kubishta kept a close eye as he brushed leaves from graves. His three sons roamed the cemetery placing wreaths. The oldest, Daniel Kubishta, 26, was among the students who started the tradition 10 years ago. He said the ritual means more to him the older he gets.

“You get smarter as you get older,” he said, grinning. “You put things in perspective. You realize as they say that freedom isn’t free.”



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Justin Pratt, a developer from Richland, Wash., is planning to purchase the former U.S. Forest Service building with the intention of restoring the building and converting it into apartments. Plans call for 33 predominately two-bedroom apartments with several one- and three-bedroom options.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

The expansion to the Gilbert Auto location would offer more space than the current Tum-A-Lum Lumber store at 432 S.E. Dorion Ave. and include expanded retail space as well as a possible garden center.

Developments: Tum-A-Lum plans to remodel Gilbert Auto into a storefront

Continued from Page A1

Lumber liked the property’s visibility on a busy street and extra space it could afford the business.

Tum-A-Lum is applying for conditional use approval from the planning commission to turn the former dealership into a building materials retail store.

Dana Cowart, Tum-A-Lum vice president of regional general manager, said the business has occupied its 432 S.E. Dorion Ave. for nearly a century, but the new property would allow it to expand its services.

The Court property has about 3 acres of developable land, more than double the amount available at Tum-A-

Lum’s current site.

Under Tum-A-Lum’s plans, the company would remodel the large retail building into a building materials store and another building into a sales floor and offices.

Cowart said the new layout would allow Tum-A-Lum to make a greater focus on retail. The business is

also considering turning another unoccupied building into a garden center, but Cowart said that plan isn’t as definitive.

“It’s something we’re interested in if the stars align,” he said.

Cowart said the sale of the property to Tum-A-Lum is contingent on planning commission approval, and

if it gets the nod on Thursday, the company plans to move to the new site over the summer.

Gilbert Auto bought four Pendleton car dealerships in 2007 and 2008 and consolidated its operations at the Court Avenue property. Before shutting its doors in 2013, Gilbert was investigated by the Oregon Depart-

ment of Motor Vehicles for not following title and registration rules, and was sued by the Washington Attorney General’s Office for allegedly failing to make payments on trade-in cars.

The commission will meet on Thursday at 7 p.m. in the council chambers at Pendleton City Hall, 500 S.W. Dorion Ave.