

Animal shelter shake up in La Grande

New manager to reestablish a governing body

By **SABRINA THOMPSON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Blue Mountain Humane Association in La Grande is reorganizing after the director and several other members of the board resigned recently.

The nonprofit’s animal shelter has a new manager, Erin Davis, and its board has a new president, Beverly Beach. And the organization is working to reestablish its governing body.

“We want to present a clean and organized shelter to the public,” Beach said.

Beyond that, Davis, Beach and the other eight people serving on the board for the Blue Mountain Humane Association would not discuss the changes or other matters about the organization.

The local humane association has had a contentious board for the last several years, according to meeting minutes that date back to 2016. Some of the issues came from the shelter’s prior director, John Brinlee,

who lived at the shelter, and the matter of his salary.

Minutes from April 2019 reveal the board discussed paying Brinlee \$32,000, which included the amount spent on providing room and board at the shelter. The option of being paid at an hourly rate of \$12 for 30 hours a week would have meant Brinlee no longer could live at the shelter.

“The salary was never meant to be one designed as a sole source of income for the director, and that’s just the way it has to be, because the Board cannot afford to pay what the director thinks he’s worth,” the minutes stated.

Finances were another issue. In the span of three years the board went through three treasurers. Former treasurer Rae Trachel, who joined the board in 2018, said it was difficult to organize the books and balance the budget during the time she was the treasurer.

“The board was asking for a balance of where we spent money,” Trachel said. “It was frustrating. There weren’t receipts or statements showing where money was used, or when they did come in, they were old. They never came in when they needed to be in.”



EO Media Group Photo/Sabrina Thompson
The Blue Mountain Humane Association in La Grande is reorganizing after the recent resignation of its director and several other members of the board.

Brinlee was the only one who had access to the shelter’s checkbook and debit card. The funds were meant to be used strictly on shelter business, Trachel said, but during her time Brinlee spent shelter money on personal items.

“John had a good heart, he just didn’t know what he was doing,” Trachel said. “He shouldn’t have had access to the checkbook.”

Trachel in June 2019 moved to Idaho while the association and Brinlee were renegotiating a

contract.

“If I hadn’t moved I would probably still be working at the shelter,” she said.

The rewriting of Brinlee’s contract was the board’s attempt to address certain issues, according to minutes from the June 2019 meeting.

“The contract has been seen as a way of legally codifying expectations so that we have grounds for dismissal if John fails to do what is required of him,” the minutes stated.

Brinlee in January resigned as the shelter’s director. At the time he was living at the shelter and housing his own dogs there. Brinlee also used the association’s van for all of his transportation during his time there, Trachel said.

The board in January discussed changing the locks and the transition to new leadership, the minutes stated.

In addition to Beach, the association’s new board members are Bob Rynearson, Bri Troutman, Terri

Bradley, Mary Horn, Lani Jones, Rebecca Lord, Shawn Mangum and Mary Peterson. Rynearson serves as vice president, Troutman as secretary and Bradley as treasurer.

The Observer attempted to contact board members, and most did not return messages. Horn said, “At this point we are in transition, and I do not have any comment.”

The association’s official name is the Animal Rescue and Adoption Center of Eastern Oregon, according to its 990 tax forms, which are public documents. The forms indicate the association has struggled with finances for several years.

The organization’s 2015 taxes show it ended the year more than \$114,000 in the hole. The next year that improved to a loss of almost \$35,000. And for 2017, the most recent year available, the association again reported a deficit of \$56,345.

The association plans to repair relationships with Union County, according to the most recent board meeting minutes, from Jan. 29. The county has a contract to pay the association \$50,000 a year to go toward the cost of housing and taking care of animals the sheriff’s office brings to the shelter.

Forecast for Pendleton Area

TODAY

Cooler with a shower or two

SUNDAY

Plenty of sunshine

MONDAY

Breezy with periods of sun

TUESDAY

Variable clouds; winds subsiding

WEDNESDAY

Breezy in the morning; cloudy

PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST									
51°	28°	48°	32°	53°	41°	59°	40°	55°	36°
HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST									
56°	28°	54°	36°	57°	44°	62°	42°	60°	37°

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Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.

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ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	62°	38°
Normals	51°	32°
Records	74° (1902)	3° (1911)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"
Month to date	2.04"
Normal month to date	1.13"
Year to date	4.06"
Last year to date	4.85"
Normal year to date	2.51"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	52°	28°
Normals	52°	31°
Records	74° (1972)	4° (2019)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"
Month to date	0.12"
Normal month to date	0.96"
Year to date	0.36"
Last year to date	3.39"
Normal year to date	2.24"

WINDS (in mph)

	Today	Sun.
Boardman	WSW 8-16	WSW 4-8
Pendleton	W 10-20	W 6-12

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	6:35 a.m.
Sunset tonight	5:41 p.m.
Moonrise today	9:26 a.m.
Moonset today	11:53 p.m.

First

Full

Last

New

Mar 2

Mar 9

Mar 16

Mar 24

Washington officials hopeful for next phase of highway expansion

By **VICKI HILLHOUSE**
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — Plans for the next phase of U.S. Highway 12 may proceed in March after all.

Budgets released this week by the House and Senate showed plans to move money from various accounts and projects to fill a hole in the transportation budget created when voters approved Initiative 976.

Gov. Jay Inslee said this week during a visit to Walla Walla that he is “reasonably optimistic” the expansion of 11 more miles of Highway 12 between Frenchtown and Nine Mile Hill can get going soon.

That phase of construction, along with numerous other road and multi-modal transportation projects, has been on hold while elected officials work on funding

solutions with the loss of fees and taxes from vehicle licensing tabs.

Port of Walla Walla Executive Director Patrick Reay was in Olympia on Wednesday working to get the project on track, he said.

Bids on the project opened Wednesday, but contracts can’t be approved until the hold is lifted. That will not happen without a legislative agreement on a spending plan and approval from Inslee, reports say.

“We are optimistic that by the close of session March 12 that this project hold status will be removed and allowed for a contract to be entered into with the apparent low bidder,” Reay said.

He said that amount is around \$114 million.

The project was part of the 2015 Connecting Washington funding package, a

program funded primarily by a gas-tax increase fully phased-in July 2, 2016, according to WSDOT.

Although I-976 rolled back license tab fees, the initiative has been challenged in court. Consequently, residents continue to pay the higher prices when they renew their tabs. The difference is being held for refunds if the initiative ultimately stands.

Walla Walla’s project was among nearly 100 put on hold until June 30. The pause was intended to give the state time to find a strategy for dealing with the loss. But it also has had communities concerned that it will lead to a larger delay in project constructions with rebidding and cost volatility.

Vicki Hillhouse can be reached at vickihillhouse@wwwub.com or 509-526-8321.

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 88° in Fullerton, Calif. Low -24° in Crane Lake, Minn.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

-10s

-0s

0s

10s

20s

30s

40s

50s

60s

70s

80s

90s

100s

110s

showers

t-storms

rain

flurries

snow

ice

cold front

warm front

stationary front

high

low

Motorcycle accident injures Spokane driver and passenger near Dayton

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — Two people were injured north of Dayton on U.S. Highway 12 after they were thrown from a motorcycle in a crash on Wednesday.

Chancey Laughlin, 41, of Spokane, was driving the Harley Davidson FLHX east on the highway near milepost 386, about 20 miles outside of Dayton, according to a Washington State Patrol release.

The motorcycle drifted off the roadway to the right and overturned, ejecting both riders at 4:57 p.m., according to WSP.

Laughlin and his passenger, 46-year-old Tonya Mortimer of Spokane, were taken to St. Joseph’s Regional Medical Center in Lewiston. Medical center staff would not release the status of either patient.

The cause of the accident was under investigation. Both were wearing helmets, and drugs or alcohol were involved, according to WSP.

Salem man sentenced for sexually abusing child

SALEM — A Salem man was sentenced to 30 years and 10 months in prison this week for sexually abusing — and recording the abuse of — a girl under the age 12.

Joseph Dean Ohrmund, 34, pleaded guilty to sodomy and using a child in a display of sexually explicit conduct, the *Statesman Journal* reported.

Ohrmund was arrested in 2018 by Salem police on two counts of first-degree rape, two counts of first-degree sodomy and using a child in a display of sexually explicit conduct. All the charges were connected to a single victim known to Ohrmund.

The abuse occurred between January 2018 and September 2018.

Under Oregon law, Ohrmund will not be eligible for early release or work release for the entirety of his sentence.

— Walla Walla Union-Bulletin and Associated Press

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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