

Pandemic not stopping Elgin Opera House production

By **DICK MASON**
La Grande Observer

ELGIN — Putting on a musical during the COVID-19 pandemic is a tricky and painstaking process.

Terry Hale, executive artistic director for the Elgin Opera House, knows this firsthand. Hale is directing a film version of Disney's popular "High School Musical Jr." with a 70-member cast, the vast majority of whom are high school students.

"It is one of the most challenging things I have ever done," Hale said.

It is also something he believes he had to do because of how youths have had to stay home so much during the pandemic.

"We wanted to get them out from behind their screens," said Hale of the production, which Friends of the Opera House is putting on.

People will be able to purchase tickets to watch "High School Musical Jr." online. The film will be designed to replicate the experience of watching a theater production at the Elgin Opera House.

One of the trickiest parts of the filming process involves conforming to social distancing rules. Six groups of actors are having their



Alex Wittwer/La Grande Observer

Director Terry Hale looks back through the empty audience seats on March 19, 2021, while cast members warm up on stage for a rehearsal of the Elgin Opera House's upcoming production of "High School Musical Jr." The opera house is filming the performance in segments, as opposed to performing live, due to the pandemic.

scenes recorded at the Elgin Opera House over about a two-month period. The video recordings will then be spliced together, so in many instances cast members will appear to be performing on stage together even though they were never in the same place at the same time.

"It really is a puzzle," Hale said.

"High School Musical Jr." — the movie version came

out in 2006 — is an upbeat and witty look at students dealing with issues of love, friends and family at fictitious East High School.

"I wanted to have something fun and light after the rough year we have had because of COVID-19 and the political turmoil," Hale said

The cast for the production consists of actors from Union, Wallowa, Baker and

Umatilla counties, plus Walla Walla County in Washington. Many of the actors, almost all age 18 and younger, have not been together at filming sessions because of social distancing rules.

"The cast will never be together at one time for the production," Hale said. "It is the first time I have directed a production in which the full cast can't come together."

Cast members are meet-

HOW TO WATCH

Filming of "High School Musical Jr." will continue for about another month, after which production work will be completed. The Elgin Opera House production will be shown online from April 24 to May 2.

All showings will be at 7:30 p.m. except for May 2, which will start at 4:30 p.m. Information on purchasing tickets is available at elginoperahouse.com/box-office.

Terry Hale, executive artistic director for the Elgin Opera House, said those watching should not be late because viewers will not be able to rewind or pause the show. "It will start and run just like a live show at the Opera House," he said.

ing in small groups for rehearsals before coming to the Elgin Opera House for filming sessions.

"They are all doing such a tremendous job. I am so proud of them," Hale said.

Hale also said he is receiving a big boost from his directing staff — assistant director Caitlin Marshall, choreographer Abigail Hale, music and sound director Becky Chelson, costumer Maureen O'Brien, stage manager Shelby Kealiher, cheer coach Jessica Dearinger, scene artists Beth Wasley and Tess Cahill, and Brent Clapp, who is managing the filming and editing process.

"Our staff is incredible," Hale said.

This is the first time almost all of the cast and many of the staff have been

involved in a film production. Actors moving from stage productions to film must learn that they have to be more subtle because they no longer must speak loud enough for everyone in the theater to hear them, Hale said. He noted everyone has a microphone on during the filming process, so speaking too loudly can cause recording issues.

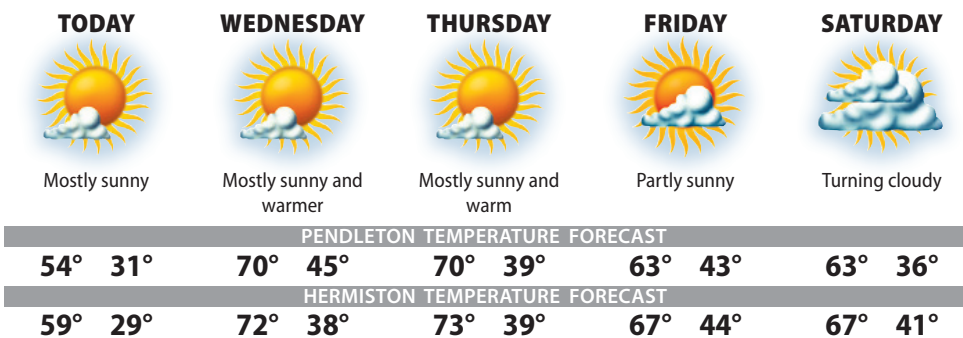
Hale said the need for perfection is greater in film productions.

"Mistakes that are not obvious in theater come through on film," the director said.

Cast member Ian Califf said he is enjoying learning about cinematic style, but he will miss performing for a live audience.

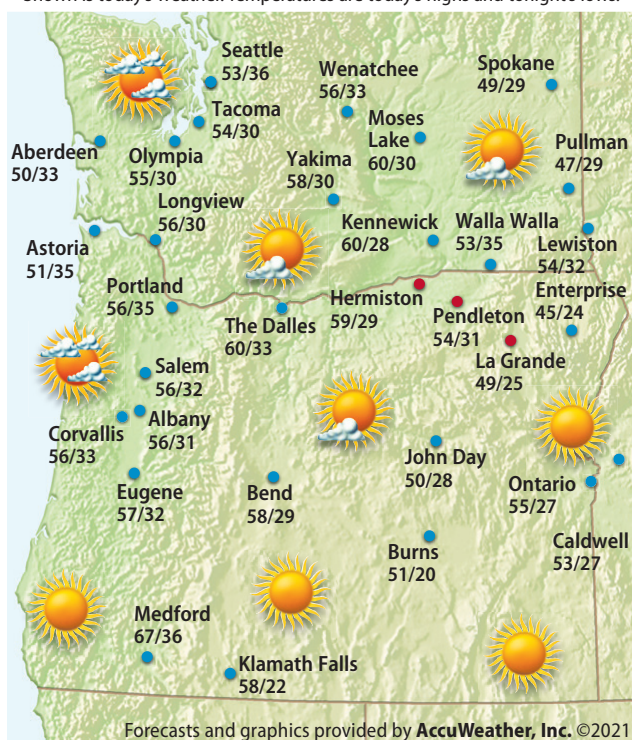
"I get a spark from the audience," Califf said.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

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



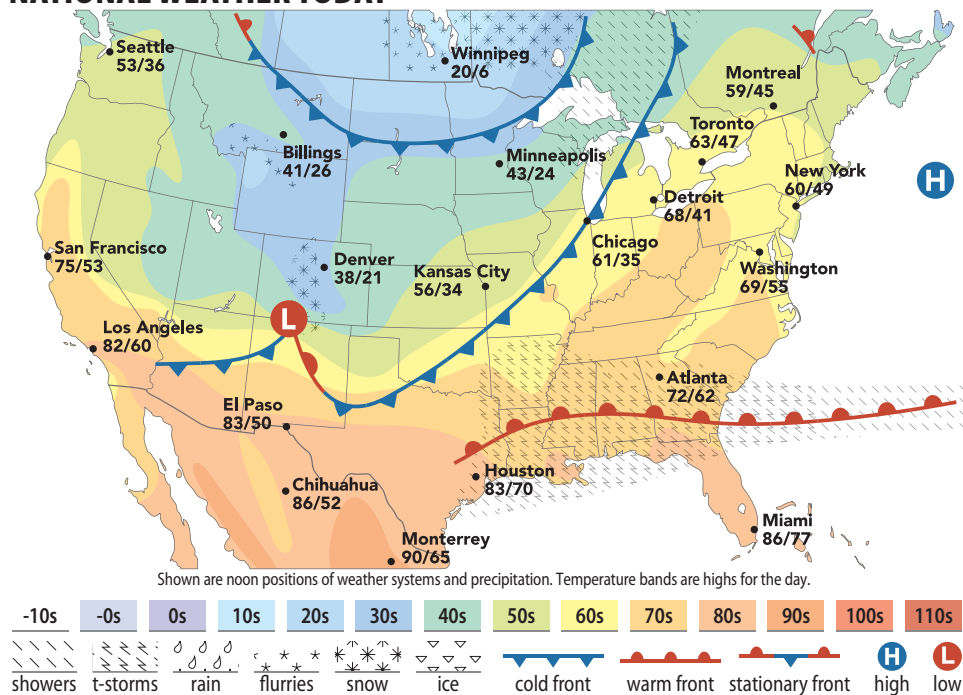
ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.				
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW		
Yesterday	49°	34°		
Normals	58°	37°		
Records	80° (2004)	18° (1954)		
PRECIPITATION				
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace			
Month to date	0.30"			
Normal month to date	1.34"			
Year to date	3.32"			
Last year to date	4.84"			
Normal year to date	3.85"			
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.				
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW		
Yesterday	51°	36°		
Normals	61°	37°		
Records	80° (1994)	12° (1954)		
PRECIPITATION				
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.01"			
Month to date	0.12"			
Normal month to date	0.83"			
Year to date	1.20"			
Last year to date	0.48"			
Normal year to date	3.07"			
WINDS (in mph)				
	Today	Wed.		
Boardman	SW 6-12	NE 3-6		
Pendleton	W 6-12	WSW 4-8		
SUN AND MOON				
Sunrise today	6:39 a.m.			
Sunset tonight	7:21 p.m.			
Moonrise today	10:14 p.m.			
Moonset today	7:56 a.m.			
Last New First Full				
	Apr 4	Apr 11	Apr 19	Apr 26

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 95° in Borrego Springs, Calif. Low 6° in Champion, Mich.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Travel Oregon providing \$2.3M in grants for projects to spur tourism

By **JAMIE GOLDBERG**
The Oregonian

SALEM — Travel Oregon, the state's tourism office, is providing \$2.3 million in grants to fund projects across the state to help spur tourism as Oregon tries to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Local governments, port districts, federally recognized tribes, nonprofits and Oregon-based tour operators and guides can apply for up to \$100,000 in funding to support projects focused on improving infrastructure to safely welcome back tourists as the pandemic continues.

The agency will fund projects that support outdoor recreation, help guides and tour companies operate, enable paid events and attractions to safely move forward, and improve business districts, including funding projects that create new outdoor spaces for visitors.

The application process will remain open until Wednesday, March 31. Projects must be completed by the end of November.

"The grants that we're providing today are going

to aid communities and aid businesses in being well-positioned to be able to offer these great Oregon experiences in a very safe way," Travel Oregon CEO Todd Davidson said. "That's what we're focused on, making sure folks know they can travel in Oregon safely."

The new initiative comes after Travel Oregon last month awarded \$913,000 to fund 34 projects across the state focused on improving visitor experiences during the pandemic. Among the recipients of that grant money was Portland's economic development agency, which received \$50,000 to improve the city's green loop.

Approximately 87% of American travelers have plans to travel in the next six months, the highest percentage since the start of the pandemic, according to a recent study by market research firm Longwoods International.

However, Oregon's tourism industry has been decimated during the pandemic and it could take years for it to fully recover.

More than 1 million people visit Oregon in a typical year, fueling a \$12.8 billion tourism

industry, according to Travel Oregon.

But visitor spending throughout the state dropped by nearly 60% last year as tourism dried up amid the pandemic, according to the agency. Tourism could be slow to rebound, especially if international travel remains limited and large events and conventions are slow to return. Oregon's leisure and hospitality industry has shed 37% of its jobs during the pandemic, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"We anticipate that we will probably not see recovery back to 2019 levels until at least 2024 and it could be 2025," Davidson said.

While certain parts of the state saw tourism rebound last summer as leisure travel picked up, hotel occupancy in Portland plummeted from nearly 75% in 2019 to 34% in 2020, worse than anywhere else in the state.

The decline in tourism across the state could have severe financial implications for cities and counties.

"The travel and tourism industry is a primary driver of Oregon's economy," Davidson said.

IN BRIEF

Proud Boys clash with anti-fascists in Salem

SALEM — A small group of Proud Boys and Trump supporters traveled to Oregon's Capitol on Sunday, March 28, where they clashed with a group of about 150 anti-fascist counterprotesters.

The group of far-right supporters published flyers in the days leading up to the rally, saying they were gathering to support "freedom."

March 28 was the first time since the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol that the two opposing groups have had a notable confrontation in Oregon. Violent protests between

the sides were common during the Trump administration, as anti-liberal groups would often travel to cities like Portland and Salem to engage in the conflicts.

The Proud Boys and similar extremists have appeared in public much less after federal law enforcement began bringing charges against hundreds of people who participated in the insurrection in Washington, D.C. At least two Oregonians were among those facing charges for Jan. 6.

At one point, a large truck quickly sped through a crowd of the anti-fascist protesters as they stood in the street. Video showed the vehicle nearly hitting one person.

— Oregon Public Broadcasting

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.

EAST OREGONIAN
— Founded Oct. 16, 1875 —
211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton 541-276-2211
333 E. Main St., Hermiston 541-567-6211
Office hours: Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed major holidays

EastOregonian.com

In the App Store:
EO **EO**
E-EDITION

East Oregonian (USPS 164-980) is published Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, by the EO Media Group, 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801. Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, OR. Postmaster: send address changes to East Oregonian, 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801.
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Circulation Dept.
For mail delivery, online access, vacation stops or delivery concerns call 800-781-3214

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Local home delivery	Savings (cover price)
EZPay	\$10.75/month	50 percent
52 weeks	\$135	42 percent
26 weeks	\$71	39 percent
13 weeks	\$37	36 percent

Single copy price:
\$1.50 Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday

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541-963-3161 • kbrogioitti@eomediagroup.com

Multimedia Consultants:

- Kelly Schwirse
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- Audra Workman
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Business Office

- Dayle Stinson
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