

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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Griswold head volleyball coach Chelsa Hopper poses on Oct. 15, 2021, with her varsity team in an Oregon Army National Guard helicopter that landed on the school field. Hopper is a member of the unit based out of Pendleton.



ONE COOL JOB

Griswold volleyball coach works with helicopters in Army National Guard

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

HELIX — The whole “my job is cooler than your job” ends with Griswold High School volleyball coach Chelsa Hopper.

The 2013 Pendleton High School graduate is in her second year of coaching the Grizzlies, but her day job for the past eight years has been with the U.S. Army National Guard.

Sgt. Hopper, 27, is a flight operations specialist — FOS — with a helicopter crew based out of Pendleton. She helps with mission planning and giving coordinates when the helicopter is in the air.

“I wish my job was on the helicopter,” Hopper said. “I joined with the intent on being a pilot.”

After filling out reams of paperwork, Hopper and a flight crew on Oct. 15 flew a CH-47F Chinook helicopter to Helix for the entire school and community to enjoy. The volleyball team also had team pictures taken with the helicopter, which has a special connection to the community.

The flight from Pendleton to Helix is just under 10 minutes.

Staff Sgt. James McKnight, a flight engineer, is a 2006 Griswold graduate. He has the option of giving the helicopter a special flair, which he did with the school’s mascot on the front of the helicopter, and the word Grizzly with two bears paws on the back ramp.

Also from Helix is Chief Warrant Officer 3 Ray Talkington, an instructor pilot and a 1999 graduate.

“We talked about getting it here last year, but it didn’t work out,” Hopper said of the Chinook, which can seat 33 people with seat belts. “Then we decided to bring it here and let everyone enjoy it. It’s pretty cool to have your team mascot on the side of a helicopter.”

School students from kindergarten through high school were



Photos by Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Griswold High School volleyball coach Chelsa Hopper poses in front of the Chinook helicopter she supports as a member of the Oregon Army National Guard unit based out of Pendleton. Hopper and the helicopter crew visited Helix on Oct. 15, 2021.

able to get a close up view of the Chinook, and take a tour inside. They also got Army stickers and lanyards.

Residents of the small farming community also took in the sights. When a town of 184 people gets a Chinook helicopter land at the school, it’s a community event.

“She was a student when I worked in Pendleton,” Helix Superintendent/Principal Brad Bixler said. “It’s so exciting to see her working with kids. With her guard experience and coaching, she is giving back to her community. My dad was a pilot in the Air Force and I always enjoyed being at the field. She put in a lot of paperwork to get this here.”

Military in her veins

Hopper’s dad, 1st Sgt. Richard Shaver with the Army National Guard, was in the Guard when she was growing up.

“I was always interested when I was younger,” Hopper said. “My junior and senior year in high school, I was a little more invested. They let me hang out

and go inside the Chinook. I was hooked.”

Hopper joined the National Guard her senior year in high school, and participated in the Recruit Sustainment Program one weekend a month. The program introduces new recruits to the fundamentals of the U.S. Army before they leave for basic training.

Right out of high school, Hopper went to basic training at Fort Jackson in Columbia, South Carolina. From there, she did her military occupational specialties training at Fort Rucker in Alabama.

Hopper was deployed to Kuwait and Iraq in 2015-16, and spent 9 months in country.

“It was definitely hot there,” she said. “It got up to 130 (degrees) on a couple of occasions. You sweat so much.”

Since she’s been back, she’s had her sights set on becoming a helicopter pilot.

“I have been dragging my feet,” Hopper said. “I have been studying. The school to fly Chinooks is

a year and a half in Alabama. It’s a lot of work to get there, but that is my goal.”

Her husband, Darren Pahl, who is an accountant, has mixed feelings on the pilot program.

“We have talked about it a lot,” Hopper said. “He hasn’t lived anywhere but Oregon. He doesn’t want to move to Alabama, but he wants me to achieve my goals.”

There aren’t very many female pilots in the military, regardless of the branch, but that doesn’t deter Hopper.

“I have been the only female at schools I have been to,” she said. “It’s not anything new. There are more FOS than mechanics. We just don’t have very many females in the military.”

For now, Hopper gets her fix when the helicopter is going to Salem to pick something up or on a training flight.

“There is a jump seat between the pilots, but I like sitting in the back end and dangling my feet as we fly,” she said. “That is my favorite place.”

Mountaineers look to end losing streak in matchup with MSU-Northern

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Things have taken a rough turn for the Eastern Oregon University football team, but this could be a bounce-back week for the Mountaineers.

Coming off a bye week, Eastern will be looking for a win against an 0-7 MSU-Northern team on the road. While the Mountaineers have struggled offensively this year and stand at 3-3, the team will have a great opportunity to get back in rhythm in a matchup with the Lights on Saturday, Oct. 23.

“The bye week was exactly what the doctor ordered, getting some guys healthy and getting back to basics,” head coach Tim Camp said. “We got work done and worked on getting back to fundamental football.”

Eastern has floundered in its last three matches, dropping games to the College of Idaho, Southern Oregon and Rocky Mountain. The team’s last win came on Sept. 18 against Carroll College in a low-scoring 10-7 victory.

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ON THE SLATE

Saturday, Oct. 23

College football
Eastern Oregon at MSU-Northern, noon

Prep volleyball
Echo vs. Ione at Big Sky League tournament, 10 a.m.

Hermiston at Walla Walla, 3 p.m.
BMC District tournament: Heppner at Weston-McEwen, 4 p.m.

Prep girls soccer
Stanfield/Echo at Nyssa, 11 a.m.
Umatilla at Four Rivers, 11 a.m.

Prep boys soccer
Umatilla at Four Rivers, 1 p.m.
Prep slowpitch softball
Hermiston at University, 11 a.m.

College volleyball
Multnomah at Eastern Oregon, 5 p.m.

Sunday, Oct. 24

College men’s soccer
Walla Walla at Eastern Oregon, 4 p.m.
Monday, Oct. 25

Prep volleyball
Kamiakin at Hermiston, 7 p.m.
La Grande at Pendleton, 6:30 p.m.

Tuesday, Oct. 26

Prep volleyball
Walla Walla Valley Academy at McLoughlin, 7 p.m.

Prep girls soccer
Irrigon at Stanfield/Echo, 4 p.m.
Hood River Valley at Pendleton, 4:30 p.m.

McLoughlin at Baker, 5 p.m.
MCC/GSL District Tournament:
Hermiston at Mead, 7 p.m.

Prep boys soccer
Irrigon at Ukiah/Long Creek, 4 p.m.
Pendleton at Hood River Valley, 4:30 p.m.

Wednesday, Oct. 27

Boys prep soccer
Baker at McLoughlin, 5 p.m.

Thursday, Oct. 28

Prep volleyball
Hermiston at Richland, 5:30 p.m.

Prep girls soccer
Riverside at Umatilla, 4 p.m.

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