



STUDENT FROM JORDAN STRIVES
TO DISPEL STEREOTYPES - page A2



Enterprise, Oregon

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April 8, 2015 \$1

Police chief will lead review

By Rob Ruth
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Mayor Steve Lear says a forthcoming review of the Enterprise Police Department will be led by a police chief from Pendleton. Acting on a referral through the Oregon Association Chiefs of Police, Lear says, the City of Enterprise contacted Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts, who will head a team of two or more people evaluating internal functioning of the EPD. On March 17, the Enterprise City Council held a special meeting to accept the resignation of police chief Wes Kilgore, who had held the post since March 2002.

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No health insurance? Fines loom

By Rocky Wilson
Wallowa County Chieftain

The approaching April 15 tax filing deadline carries with it a penalty for selective non-compliance never previously seen. Persons who earned more than minimum incomes in 2014 and have no health insurance will have penalties assessed from their tax returns in accordance with the Affordable Care Act, aka Obamacare.



Johnson

And those minimum income levels are low; \$11,150 for single persons and \$13,050 for two-person families. Still, Cathy Johnson, owner of Silver Creek Financial Services, in Lostine — who employs five persons to prepare tax forms and three more as support staff — says among her clients only 5 percent to 10 percent are being “docked” for not having health insurance.

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WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN
Wallowa County's
Newspaper Since 1884
Volume 132 Issue No. 51
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A property in rural Enterprise. Activity in Wallowa County's real estate market has been heating up.

By Rocky Wilson
Wallowa County Chieftain

Home/property sales in Wallowa County continued to rebound in 2014 when the total number of such sales, including 10 “unusable” sales between relatives, eclipsed comparable sales made throughout 2013 by 31 percent.

Wallowa County Appraiser II Randy Wortman says 189 “usable” sales were culminated in the county during 2014, the last full year from which data is available, compared to a total of 136 sales the previous year.

The usable/unusable distinction applies within the context of ratio studies that county assessors periodically conduct to update real market values. Figures from unusable sales, which include not only sales between relatives but also other sales that aren’t open-market transactions, aren’t used in the ratio studies.

Wallowa Mountain Properties Principal Broker Anette Christoffersen says the upswing in real estate within Wallowa County has con-

tinued through the first quarter of 2015 and expects that trend will not stop. “We are coming out of the hole we were in,” says Christoffersen, adding, “I think we are going to have a really good year.”

Although Christoffersen’s numbers, those of one broker, only offer a snapshot of overall real estate sales locally, she says her 2014 sales more than doubled her 2013 sales total and that the same trend has held true through the first quarter of 2015.

Christoffersen, who has been selling real estate for 10 years, also notes that prices of properties she has sold in the past three months are up an average of 9.2 percent over sale prices during the same three months a year ago.

Although only midway in the process of determining, for taxation purposes, differences between property values in county records and sales



Wortman

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Anette Christoffersen,
Wallowa Mountain Properties Principal Broker

prices for the 199 transactions completed in 2014, Wortman does say that the highest percentage of sales last year was in residential housing.

The locations where overall sales of properties in Wallowa County were made in 2014, in descending order by number of sales, according to Wortman, were Enterprise, Joseph, Wallowa, and then Lostine. “There were very few sales made around Wallowa Lake,” adds Wortman, who has been appraising property in Wallowa County for about 20 years. “The lake area has high property values and people don’t want to live there year around.”

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Employment office closure continues to rankle

By S.F. Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — The Prairie Creek Center still experiences the daily hustle and bustle of clients for its Department of Human Services offices, but the hope of getting in-person assistance in one’s search for gainful employment is no more. The Oregon Department of Employment closed its office a year ago, citing cost-cutting purposes.

Not everyone in the Wallowa Valley is convinced the benefit to the state outweighs what the community has lost. Executive director of the Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce, Vicky Searles, is one of those people. “We’re so far out here, and we’re such a limited area for services, we need the employment office here,” Searles said.

The chamber director also said that because much of the



Rob Ruth/Chieftain

The Worksource Oregon office on Adams Avenue in La Grande is now the closest location for Wallowa County residents to access Oregon Employment Department services in person.

work force is seasonal, the loss of the employment office corresponds with a loss of expediency in the hiring process.

Regarding local employer complaints, Searles said, “The tramway is a good example. They need to find the right people to work in their business, but don’t always have a lot of time (to screen candidates).” Searles also mentioned several other businesses — some in Joseph,

some at Wallowa Lake — that she said were feeling the employment pinch.

Searles said that rumors (not from the employment department) indicate at least the possibility of a partial reopening. “When that happens, we’ll need to be more vocal and fighting to keep the office open,” Searles said.

Searles said that the La Grande office and the employment department’s online site handle most of the local

employment issues, which the state uses as justification for closing the Wallowa County office. “That may be good to a point, but many people find it’s a challenge to do business with them online. It’s not the same,” Searles said.

Oregon’s Training and Employment Consortium (TEC), a state entity closely allied with the employment department, also shared the office (Prairie Creek Center) and provided job training.

TEC is now limited to one day a week in a smaller office which is staffed by a member of their La Grande office.

It is possible for job-seekers or businesses to make appointments to meet with employment department personnel at the Prairie Creek Center, but employment department officials say those opportunities aren’t regularly scheduled.

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Annual tab for office: \$58K

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

By closing its office in Enterprise, a step finalized by the middle of last year, Worksource Oregon appears to have shed around \$58,000 of annual expense for the staffed facility. It’s not clear how much the state is spending for the sharply reduced in-person services now provided at the site.

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