FIRE: Highway open

Continued from Page A1

The fire is burning in tall grass, brush, slash and heavy timber. Approximately 37 residences and 95 minor structures as well as fish habitat and livestock are threat-

Union County Officials issued a Level 1 evacuation notice for about 50 residents west of Elgin on Aug. 3. Level 1 indicates residents should

be ready to immediately evac-

wallowa.com

Cause of the fire is under

LODGE: Group to keep building in local hands

Continued from Page A1

"We had a couple of weeks to realize we could do this and a couple of weeks to convince the owners we could do it and basically 72 hours to come up with more than a quarter of a million in cash for the deposit — and the people got it done just like that.'

Owners Marc and Nancy Zwerling were impressed by the speed with which Monteith's group organized and found early investors, and by the comments of locals. The Zwerlings, who own the property along with and the estate of Steve Larson, visited the county just two weeks

On that recent visit, Marc Zwerling said, the couple stopped in to see friends in the area.

'Wow," he said. "A lot of people knew about James (Monteith) and his group and were excited. While we were there, we stopped to see Duane and Jane Wiggins, who used to own the entire south side of the lake and the lodge. They'd heard about the group and they were very excited about the possibility of (the lodge) staving local."

Lake Wallowa Lodge, LLC now begins a whirlwind capital campaign to raise the remaining 90 percent of the purchase price. It's a daunting goal, but Monteith is

heartened by early response. "This may be one of the largest community efforts in the western United States to purchase this type of historic legacy property," said Monteith. "Our community has a remarkable opportunity to keep the lodge running in local hands, and also protect the open ground around the lodge and lakefront as important habitat for people, fish and wildlife at the head of the lake."

The community has been reaching out for that opportunity, Monteith said.

We've had a lot of people offering to volunteer to help us to raise funds," he said. "One guy even called me up and was mad I hadn't called him. I'd never met him and didn't know who he was. He said, 'Well, you ought to know me because I care

That love of the lodge seems to be far-reaching, Monteith said. People who have visited the lodge, even once, seem to cherish their memories there and want to be part of this new effort to keep the lodge in the hands of locals dedicated to preservuate their homes upon notice.

Highway 204 remains open although officials urged driver caution of fire agency vehicles traversing the route. The U.S. Forest Service cited weather concerns that high winds and thunderstorms over the next several days could adversely affect firefighting efforts.

investigation.

ing it. So far, Monteith said,

when he has asked these vari-

ous individuals if they would

like to buy into the LLC "no

one has said no," he said. "They've all said 'I'll find

a way. I want to be part of

this.' That's one of the things

that are so exciting — I can't

believe how this place has

come from very diverse

backgrounds and political

stances that one would not

expect to mix well. Which

may go to show that it just

takes the right idea to bring

suggested. Monteith com-

pared the incongruous part-

nerships to what happens

at Chief Joseph Days every

year. "Everyone wears the

Chief Joseph Days T-shirt no

matter their background," he

said. "They're all volunteer-

ing side-by-side. The lodge

may be one of those places

where diverse values merge.

A common theme I've no-

ticed when talking to people

about the lodge was that it

was something they could al-

ways count on. It was always

there. It allows people to see

the different kinds of values

ing for investors and volun-

teers was been scheduled for

dle the closing of the sale.

Pendleton attorney Steve Co-

rey assisted Monteith in the

preparation of the purchase

offer and the establishment of

or to volunteer to assist in

fundraising, call James Mon-

teith at 541-432-3044.

To inquire about investing

Lake Wallowa Lodge, LLC.

An organizational meet-

Wallowa Title will han-

in a single place."

together, Monteith

Those lovers of the lodge

touched people so deeply.'

ings," Fergison said. Fergison was born in Seattle but raised in Portland. Other than a couple of years in the Army and occasional travel, he remained in Portland, where he worked in the business world before moving to the Wallowa Valley in 1989. "I came here because I wanted to quit drinking and had pretty much succeeded, but I felt a change of scenery

Continued from Page A1

Those events featured Fer-

gison's cooking as well

as his art — a combi-

nation which hurt sales.

"We didn't sell any paintings!

People were too busy eating

and drinking. I cooked roast

beef, made my own baguettes

and Biscotti. I was more inter-

ested in getting rave reviews

on my pâté than on my paint-

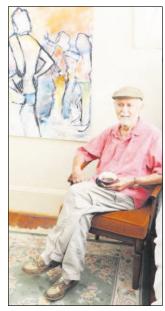
couldn't hurt," Fergison said. Although encouraged by his father to become an artist, Fergison went to both Reed and Lewis and Clark colleges and obtained a literature degree. He eventually entered the business world, building a career as an executive in the saw chain and metals industries "The saw chain company was very interesting work. My area was marketing/planning and training," Fergison

After souring on the business world, he attended cooking school in Portland, which he called a huge mistake, although he loves to cook. "I associated fine dining with being a diner, not a chef," Fergison said.

Shortly after cooking school, Fergison made his way to the Wallowa Valley, where he arrived soaking wet on a Memorial Day weekend in 1989 with \$40 and a bicycle. He pedaled the bicycle to Wallowa Lake, where he spent the summer as a chef before returning to Portland — but not for long. "I looked around and realized, 'There's nothing for me,' and I came back up here. Over time, good things happened, and some really wonderful women were part of my life here. Strong, intelligent and edu-

cated women," Fergison said. He did not resume his career as a chef or in business, as he desired more structure in his life. He went to work for Parks Foundry in Enterprise making slurry, which he called the best job he's ever

At the foundry, Fergison enjoyed interacting with a different class of people. "I



Steve Tool/Chieftain always-relaxed Fergison discusses concept of art while sipping coffee in his bedroom, also filled with art.

learned that guys with no advantages would sweat blood over their jobs, doing it right - it impressed me," he said.

Although the business advertising world allowed Fergison to dabble in art, he did not embrace becoming an artist until the mid-1990s. Starting out with landscapes, Fergison eventually graduated to female nudes before branching off into boxing and horses. Boxing, because of the synergy of more than one person being depicted as well as the energy of the sport. The horses honor his father, a devotee of legendary western artist Charlie Russell. Fergison names artists Cy Twobly, Mark Rothko and Max Beckmann as major influences on his own work.

Depending on his mood, Fergison uses models and does preliminary sketches for his highly original paintings. Spontaneity is also a factor. "I don't compose paintings, I just start. A lot of the creativity occurs on the canvas," he said.

Fergison enjoys experimenting with his art. "I like using a four-inch house painter's brush. You can really model with a big brush

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like that, then you can come back with details and lines,' Fergison said. He also prefers using the canvas as his palette and paints with a variety of implements including brushes, cloth, knives and even a dog's hair brush.

FERGISON: Artist enjoys experimenting

Borrowing a figure from a completed painting and transplanting it to another painting is another Fergison trick. "Don't be surprised if a figure looks familiar from another painting," he said with a laugh.

Hardly the tortured artist, Fergison enjoys interacting with the community and even headed the Wallowa Valley Arts Council for a time and was awarded "Leader in the Arts" award by the Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce in 2005, an experience he relished. "Because of that, I was able to deliver a speech to over 200 people who were stuffed to the gills with prime rib. I got to say all the things I wanted to say, and I consider it a very successful speech,'

A quick look at Fergison's book cases will show he appreciates other forms of art including literature and music, but he said it doesn't influence his visual art. "I watch a lot of C-Span when I'm painting. A lot of my best work is the result of my being angry at some politician,"

Fergison said. A dedicated partier, Fergison threw legendary parties, including one at his previous apartment that drew over 100 people. "I'm a good cook, and I like to do that, but I'm suffering from fatigue these days," he said.

Because of ill health, including two cancers and eye problems that have nearly rendered him blind, Fergison hasn't painted in six months. "I can't do pen and ink life drawing anymore, but I have a number of paintings I can finish, even with my poor eyesight," he said.

True to his innate good nature, Fergison isn't bitter about his health and would like to inspire others. "I'd love to do some testifying and tell people about my experience. I don't want my obit to say I struggled or fought against cancer. I own my cancer — it's part of me. I'd just like to be remembered as someone who could relax and have fun with art,



M. CROW LOSTINE, OR

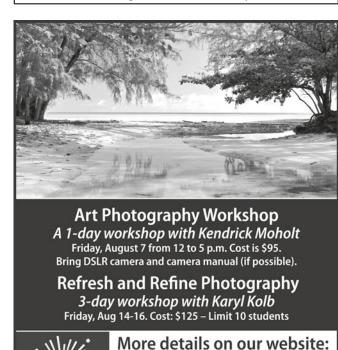
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