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Siuslaw News

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SERVING WESTERN LANE COUNTY SINCE 1890

FLORENCE, OREGON

Mapleton resident earns diploma decades later

Leona May Walton receives her Mapleton High School diploma on her 92nd birthday

BY JARED ANDERSON
Siuslaw News

It was the history class that broke the camel's back. "I despised history," Leona May Walton said as she celebrated her 92nd birthday. "Why do we have to learn all about this stuff way, way back?" she asked. That's partly why Walton didn't graduate from high school in

1944. It just so happens she was also too busy making history to finish up that last course. It was a warm and sunny day on the riverbank in Mapleton Saturday. Walton was celebrating a family reunion with her children, her grandchildren and her great-grandchildren. Several members of the family have birthdays in August — Walton was born on Aug. 25, 1925 — so they celebrate everyone in one

fell swoop. This party was different, however, with a special surprise for Walton: A high school diploma. It was all planned by Connie Walton, Leona's daughter-in-law. Knowing that Leona had never graduated, she went to Mapleton High School and asked them to issue a diploma. Instead of history, her last credit would be "life experience of history." Connie started the graduation

ceremony speaking about her mother-in-law. When Leona was a freshmen in high school, she fell in love with Dwight Walton.

See **GRADUATE 7A**

JARED ANDERSON /SIUSLAW NEWS

Leona May Walton receives her diploma from Mapleton High School on July 29 at the age of 92.



HIGH HEAT ALERT

Fire threat level rises to 'extreme'

High temps, unstable weather conditions lead to 'Red Flag Warning' for Lane County

BY MARK BRENNAN
Siuslaw News

On July 31, Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue (SVFR) responded to a brushfire that spread quickly, due to the dangerous conditions created by high winds and heat, and posing a much more difficult situation for firefighters.

This set of factors is precisely the reason the National Weather Service (NWS) has recently issued two important warnings to the public.

The first is an Excessive Heat Warning, which alerts the public to the possibility of dangerously high temperatures.

The Excessive Heat warning took effect at 2 p.m. on Tuesday and extends through 11 p.m. on Friday, Aug. 5.

The second warning is a Red Flag Warning, issued to alert first responders and citizens to the unique challenges presented when dealing with a fire under "unstable" conditions that combine high winds and high heat.

This was the situation that first responders faced Monday evening, according to SVFR Fire Marshal Sean Barrett.

"The weather was a critical factor of the fire start and spread. The warm dry weather with the north wind caused the fire to burn intensely and move quickly," Barrett said.

He added, "We are going to an extreme fire danger level this week and several restrictions will be in place."

NWS predicts western Lane County will reach highs in the triple digits this week, with many areas experiencing potentially record setting high temperatures.

The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) also warned the public of significantly unstable

See **HEAT 5A**

Bringing art to the streets of Florence

Public Art Committee seeks to establish art experiences, increase community engagement

Members of the Florence Public Art Committee (PAC) want to bring the "wow factor" to Florence through increased visibility of murals, sculptures and other artwork.

PAC, made up of seven members and two city ex-officio members, has been working since July 2015 to bring art to the streets and create a cohesive public art plan for the City of Florence.

The committee's tagline is, "Experience Florence — where every day is a celebration of the arts."

"Most cities in Oregon already have public art and a public art committee," said PAC Chairman Harlen Springer. "A lot of cities do this, and do it very successfully. We're kind of late to the game."

Since PAC is funded through the Florence Urban Renewal Area, which budgeted \$250,000 for PAC, most of its efforts are centered around Historic Old Town Florence, though members hope additional funding sources will allow for public art to spread throughout the area.

"We want Florence to be known for more than sand dunes," Springer said. "We need to expand the economy here to the arts and for people to interact with the arts."

Florence City Recorder Kelli Weese said the



COURTESY PHOTO

"Totem Pole" was made by Steve Benson and donated to the City of Florence Public Art Committee by Gerald Curran. It is now located in Gallagher Park on Highway 126.

arts are very much a part of the city's fabric. "It ties into the city's objectives of livability and quality of life and economic development," she said. "It's one of the reasons people to want

to stay in a community. Recreation, parks, arts — all those things some people consider 'fluffy' are a big part of what makes people want to stay and move here."

PAC Vice Chair Susan Tive agreed. "We want arts to have an impact on everyone who lives in Florence and the community. It's as essential as the roads being safe and the water being good to drink. We want people to know it's for them," she said. "Public art is for Florence, not just the people who are visiting."

PAC volunteers have spent the past two years gathering data from successful art destination cities in Oregon, researching mural codes and creating five action items.

"All of us love the arts, we love our community and we want the City of Florence and our area to prosper," said Committee Member Jo Beaudreau. "The main projects we have picked will make a nice groundwork for future projects and future generations."

The first project has already been partially rolled out: Creating art from the utilities on Bay Street.

In May, PAC members Jennifer French and Ron Hildenbrand coordinated with the art programs in Siuslaw School District to invite youth to paint the covers of 15 trash receptacles. Plaques showing the students' names and the titles are now included.

See **PUBLIC ART 7A**

TEXAS MAN DROWNS WHILE KAYAKING ON CLEAWOX LAKE

Body of Nicholas Wayne Lewoczko recovered Sunday after a multi-agency search

BY NED HICKSON
Siuslaw News

The body of a 31-year-old Houston, Texas, man who went missing last Friday evening on Cleawox Lake was discovered by Lane County Sheriffs Sunday afternoon.

Nicholas Wayne Lewoczko was camping at Honeyman State Park over the weekend when his older brother, Matthew, left the campground to pick up dinner for the two of them in Florence.

Nicholas, who stayed behind to go fishing on the lake in a kayak, told his brother he would be back

by dusk.

When Nicholas hadn't returned by nightfall, Matthew went looking for his brother before calling 911 just before 9:30 p.m.

Lane County Sheriffs were notified, along with personnel from Oregon State Parks, Oregon State Police, Siuslaw Valley Fire and

Rescue and Lane County Sheriff's Search and Rescue, all of which responded.

At approximately 1:25 a.m. on Saturday, Lewoczko's kayak was discovered mostly submerged and floating in the lake, with

See **SEARCH 7A**

COOL PLACES TO VISIT THIS SUMMER

SPECIAL FEATURE: This summer we are highlighting unique spots that make the central Oregon coast one of the coolest places to live and play. New locations will be featured each month.

Torex ATV Rentals

83960 Highway 101, Florence | 541-997-5363

AT A GLANCE: Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area is a treasure meant to be experienced, not just seen. Torex ATV Rentals, located on the same property as Sand Dunes Frontier, allows riders to drive directly onto the dunes and get the full picture: sand, sun and wind.

The rental company features individual quads, multi-rider ATVs and even youth-size models. All safety equipment is included.

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COURTESY PHOTO

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