



Passing tests

Lions already showing improvement in 7-on-7 action
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Cottage Grove Sentinel

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Carousel conversation

Local service clubs hear pitch for attraction, page 3A



'Proof'

Cottage Theatre dwells on relationships, page 12A

FATHER AND SON



photo by Jon Stinnett

Michael Hibbetts leads his son, Christopher Keith, around the ring atop Willow at Misfit Toy Ranch, which offers free lessons for combat veterans and their families.

HORSES HELP HEAL AT LOCAL RANCH

BY JON STINNETT
 The Cottage Grove Sentinel

On an idyllic property outside London, horse and rider size each other up as they circle the ring. "I'm not crying!" exclaims five-year old Christopher Keith "CK" Hibbetts, as Willow, a massive white Percheron draft horse, plods patiently along. "I'm not screaming either!" Just outside the ring, CK's father, Michael

Hibbetts, watches approvingly, a smile on his face. A week ago, the younger Hibbetts' lesson consisted of failed attempts to muster the courage to ride. Now, he circles the ring with ease, riding first one horse, then another, clicking his heels with confidence to set the animals in motion. Formerly from Las Vegas, Michael Hibbetts and wife Kimberly came to Cottage Grove nine

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Council hears proposal on utility rate increases

Plan calls for combined rate increase of 26.5 percent for water, sewer and storm drainage by 2022

BY MATT HOLLANDER
 The Cottage Grove Sentinel

While an unscheduled argument about social media stole the headlines of the June 8 City Council meeting, it was another item on the agenda that could have the most tangible impact on the people of Cottage Grove.

The City is facing major capital improvement projects to its water, wastewater and storm drainage systems, and current rate structures do not support those projects, according to John Ghilarducci, Principal of FCS Group, a consulting firm hired by the City to help create a five-year utility financial plan.

The City would need to issue \$8.63 million of debt to complete all of the recommended projects. In order to service that debt and account for annual cost escalations, the utility financial plan calls for annual rate increases of 1.8 percent, 3.1 percent and 7.9 percent for water, wastewater and storm drainage, respectively, through 2022. Over that time span, the combined monthly utility bill for a single-family residence would rise from \$103.16 to \$130.59 — a cumulative increase of 26.5 percent.

Cottage Grove already has the seventh-highest combined

utility rate in the state for water, wastewater and storm drainage, and with the recommended rate increases the city would climb to number three, according to a rate comparison compiled by FCS. Because Cottage Grove offers these services independently, the rates are much higher than for larger communities that benefit from an economies of scale. However, the City does offer a decreased rate for low-income households.

Should the City choose to forgo the recommended projects, Ghilarducci said that the City could encounter major problems that would require rapid rate increases of 40-50 percent for costlier projects. Although the City deferred many projects during the recession years, the utility lines were often held together with short-term repairs, according to city engineer Ron Bradby. Much of the City's infrastructure is over 50 years old and is outdated by contemporary standards.

"The fiscal side of me understands why we need to do this, but the non-profit side of me thinks it will break the backs of the low-income folks in this community," said Councilor Mike Fleck, who is also the executive director of Community Sharing, which offers utility assistance, among other services. Fleck said that utility assistance is one of the organization's most highly sought services, and they can only afford to help three to five clients per month.

The five-year utility financial plan was only a discussion item at the June 8 meeting, and the City Council will be asked to consider it for adoption at a later meeting.

House Rep. Hayden talks health care bills

BY JON STINNETT
 The Cottage Grove Sentinel

As a dentist by trade, it's probably not surprising that Cedric Hayden, the Republican who represents Oregon's House District 7 in Salem, found himself serving as vice-chair of the House's health care committee. Hayden is just a freshman in the state Congress, having assumed the seat held by longtime Representative Bruce Hanna. On Wednesday, June 10, Hayden came to the Brewstation in Cottage Grove at the behest of the Blackberry Pie Society, which has moved its speakers' series to public gathering spaces and private homes recently to attract a broader audience, according to the Society's Leslie Rubinstein.

It's also not surprising that Hayden spent the lion's share of Wednesday's discussion talking about bills he's written dealing with health care and specifically dental health initiatives. Hayden said the difficulties he and his brothers encountered while attempting to organize an oral health network throughout Oregon have prompted him to work to create a "safety net" for the thousands of Oregonians living without proper dental care. Hayden also shared that he commutes 160 miles per day to Salem.

"I'd rather get home to see my kids," he said.

The Representative spoke of a pilot project he's championing to bring oral health instruction to schools with a high poverty rate. A companion bill to that effort, he said, would allow for 15 minutes of teacher instruction on oral health during the school



photo by Jon Stinnett

Oregon House District 7 Representative Cedric Hayden spoke with a large crowd at the Brewstation on Wednesday, June 10.

lunch hour.

Hayden said he's also written a bill to expand the wellness screenings conducted before a child enters school to include oral health.

"We'll also be trying to use the information to see how many people truly have access to dental care," he said.

Another bill Hayden is working on concerns the methods many oral health providers use to sedate their patients, a bill that aims to update practices that he said some-

times haven't been revamped in 20 years.

When asked about various bills that would mandate paid sick leave for Oregon workers, Hayden said he would prefer a system where employers provide paid time off that could be used for sick leave instead of mandating the amount of sick leave that should be offered.

"I think employers ought to have the flexibility to create a compensation package that's in the best interest of their employees," he said.

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WEATHER



HIGH 80
 LOW 50

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