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WEATHER

Rain with a high of 56 and a low tonight of 42
Full forecast on A5

COLUMNIST

Mary Ellen
Pet Tips 'n' Tales
A5

SPORTS & REC

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DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL



COURTESY OF GREG LEE

Spooky fun kicks off inaugural 'Halloween Hootinanny'



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By event organizer estimates, at least 3,500 costumed trick-or-treaters turned out for the inaugural "Halloween Hootinanny" in Bohemia Park on Oct. 29. Thousands of pieces of candy were distributed from at least 60 businesses and nonprofits participating in the event, which was sponsored by the Cottage Grove Chamber of Commerce, the City of Cottage Grove and nonprofit Downtown Cottage Grove. The three-hour celebration directed families through a winding gauntlet of Halloween-inspired tents and a seemingly endless supply of candy. Organizers are already planning to institute the event as an annual Cottage Grove feature. "We haven't had a single negative response," said Events Coordinator Shane May. "It was 1,000 percent a success. It was so cool to see our community and businesses come together. Everybody wants us to redo it." Local restaurant Jack Sprats (center) was voted "Coolest Overall" for its "Candyland" tent decoration.

SLSD staff, students navigate 2021 challenges

BY DAMIEN SHERWOOD
DSHERWOOD
@CGSENTINEL.COM

With the Oct. 18 vaccine deadline for school district staff in the rearview mirror, South Lane School District (SLSD) is still finding its center of gravity amid a staffing crisis and a challenging environment for mental wellness for both students and staff.

In August, Governor Kate Brown announced that all adults in K-12 school campus communities and all healthcare workers must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by Oct. 18, though religious and medical exceptions could be granted.

Despite retaining most of its workforce after the deadline, SLSD is not out of the woods on the staffing issue yet.

"We're still dealing with it," said SLSD Superintendent Yvonne Curtis, adding that, though a challenge, the situation looks manageable as solutions are being implemented.

SLSD was able to keep much of its staff largely due to allowing religious and medical exceptions to the vaccine mandate — a leniency not all districts have been willing to grant.

Still, other hurdles have impeded a smooth transition into the year.

Through the school year, there have been sporadic

positive COVID cases causing absences. Near the end of October, the district reported at that point in time some 14 positive cases in the schools, though it has not released specifics on whether they were staff or students.

"I know people have been frustrated about, you know, 'Why are you not showing transparency,' but we have FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) requirements and we have to make sure that the data doesn't reveal staff or students who are out and reveal that they have COVID," said Curtis.

With flu season in full swing as well, staff numbers have seen period-

ic dips. These dips have had impact in some areas where there are already lower numbers of staff, such as in Dorena Elementary School.

"When you're in a small school, if you're missing a teacher and two educational assistants, you're pretty handicapped," said Curtis, adding that staff have been exhausted trying to fill others' spots. "We're trying to make sure people have breaks and lunches and duties are covered and all of that, so it has been challenging."

Transportation, too, as a high-turnover department, has been a struggle to fill. The district started

See **SCHOOL A8**

Community health center receives PacificSource grant

BY DAMIEN SHERWOOD
DSHERWOOD
@CGSENTINEL.COM

Last week, the PacificSource Foundation for Health Improvement, PacificSource, and Pacific Health Associates collectively approved a joint grant funding request totaling \$275,000 to help support the opening of the much-anticipated community health center on the Cottage Grove Lane Community Col-

See **GRANT A10**

Season begins for Community Sharing Warming Shelter

Activation temperature may rise to 32 F this winter

DAMIEN SHERWOOD
DSHERWOOD
@CGSENTINEL.COM

On Nov. 1, the Community Sharing Warming Shelter season officially began

its winter run, which will end March 31.

The warming shelter is operated through a partnership with the City of Cottage Grove and non-profit Community Sharing.

"We weren't sure if we were going to end up operating or not again," said Community Sharing Executive Director Mike Fleck.

Community Sharing assumed responsibility for

the project last fall when local shelter provider Beds for Freezing Nights stated it would be unable to provide its services for the season. Beds for Freezing Nights has, however, remained a

supporting entity for the current program.

This year, though, Beds for Freezing Nights has again faced challenges with

See **SHELTER A9**

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