



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Kyle Smith will graduate with the Falls City High School Class of 2016 on Thursday.

Falls City helps grad heal, grow

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

FALLS CITY — Kyle Smith was just 9 years old when his life changed.

His mom had died, and his father decided to move Kyle and his younger brother to Falls City to start life in a new community.

Soon, Smith discovered Falls City was a place he could heal — and grow.

At first Smith, now 17, thought he would struggle making new friends. That wasn't something that came easy for him anyway, he said.

Those fears evaporated as people in Falls City took an interest in getting to know him.

"People were just opening up to me, asking me a bunch of questions, really allowed me to not be so introverted and come out of the little shell I had built for myself," Smith said. "That's probably

the best thing, how accepting people are here and how willing they are to try find out who you are as a person."

Thursday evening, Smith will graduate from Falls City High School, whose community taught him so much more than what it takes to earn a diploma.

"Kyle is really conscientious of trying to do the right thing all the time, and he puts other people's feelings before his own," said Falls City teacher Micke Kidd, who has had Smith in a class every year since he was in fifth grade. "He's one of those kids who is going to be a lifelong learner."

That is Smith's objective.

Next fall, Smith will begin studying in Oregon State University and Linn-Benton Community College's degree partnership program to become a zoologist.

"I want to be a zoologist

Pomp and circumstance

What: Falls City High School graduation
Where: Falls City High School, 111 N. Main St.
When: Thursday, 7 p.m.

so I can study animals and help preserve wildlife," Smith said. "I like to be outside. That's the main reason I want to be a zoologist, to be able to adventure and explore. And get to see a bunch of wildlife, which is what I like to do in my spare time."

Smith also wants to share what he discovers about endangered animals with others.

"Once they are gone, they can't come back," he said. "That's not something that most people appreciate, but I think it would be impor-

tant to do something to help people understand."

Teaching is something Smith has begun while at Falls City.

Smith is one of four "student teachers" in Family Academic Community and Enrichment for Success (Faces) program's "Roller Coaster physics" class. He's taken it all five years it's been offered, so the material is familiar.

Kidd teaches that class and decided to add an extra level of difficulty for a handful of his veteran physics students.

He's having them create lessons and lead the class under his supervision. For Smith, that meant the introvert had to become the instructor.

"I still have a hard time talking in front of people," he said. "This has been a good challenge for me."

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This has only been a test

By Jolene Guzman
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POLK COUNTY — State, county, and city government agencies in a three-state region, along with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, will conduct the first major test of emergency plans in preparation for the predicted a 9.0 Cascadia subduction zone earthquake.

The exercise, called "Cascadia Rising," will begin on Tuesday and end June 10 and includes agencies in Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

In Polk County, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde is one of the exercise partners. It will be conducting a major causality scenario on Thursday. Members of Polk County (CERT) will assist with that exercise.

Polk CERT's coordinator Kimber Townsend will observe Cascadia Rising from the state's emergency operational center in at OEM in Salem.

Townsend suspects because this is the first test of this size, agencies will find there's plenty that could be tweaked and improved

upon in the systems that are in place.

"I think it's going to have huge ramifications, a steep learning curve," she said. "Until you test it, you don't know how good it is."

Polk County is not formally participating in the exercise. Dean Bender, Polk County's emergency manager, said agencies were asked to confirm whether they would participate when Polk County Sheriff's Office was in the midst of layoffs.

Bender said county will use the Cascadia Rising exercise dates to test some of its own procedures, including having employees practice "drop, cover and hold" protocol and evacuation processes.

Communication systems will be tested between the county "emergency operations center" (EOC) and Dallas' EOC and Salem Health West Valley. This will be the first time those connections will be tested since they were set up.

Strengthening emergency communications systems has been a focus for Polk County.

For more: polkio.com.

Get emergency your kit started:

The American Red Cross has designed a 24-week calendar to build a two-week home disaster kit. The following is the first week. The I-O will occasionally supplement the checklist with tips from local experts.

Week 1

- Two gallons of water.*
- One jar of peanut butter.
- Three cans of meat.*
- One hand operated can opener.
- Permanent marking pen.

Additional items, if needed:

- Pet food, diapers and baby food.

Action steps:

- Put dates on perishable foods.
- Decide who should be your out-of-area contact who can coordinate information between family members in different locations.

* per person

— Source: The American Red Cross.



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