

Children’s theater keeps local tradition alive

By Jennifer Halley
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH — “Ready! And act — hold on.” Rob Harriman bolts off stage and grabs a chair from somewhere behind it, yanking it onto the otherwise empty platform.

By now, kids are piling onto the stage.

Harriman’s voice bellows out commands and suggestions, his deep tone a stark contrast to the soft voices of children.



Apple Box Children’s Theater participants rehearse a scene. Children will perform Thursday through Saturday.

summer plays put on by Western Oregon University, then known as Western Oregon College, Barbara said. Professor Don Weiss was in charge of the company.

“When he passed away seven years ago, we had a memorial for him,” Barbara said.

She added that the seed money from the memorial

helped to start Apple Box Children’s Theater, a company currently in its sixth production.

Outdoor theater is not as common as it used to be, and the Harrimans said they are happy to bring it back.

Funding for each production — one each summer — is provided for by Polk County Cultural Coalition. A

budget of \$2,500 sounds impressive, but after costumes, stage props, lighting, sound systems, and everything else that consists of making a successful production, there is not a lot of wiggle room.

“None of us are paid,” Barbara said. “It’s all volunteer.”

Parents of the children acting in the plays are the

most helpful, she added. They help paint the props, make costumes, set up sound systems and overall work to create a fun environment for the theater company.

The children acting in Jolly Roger and the Pirate King range from second to eighth grade.

Henry Doellinger, a soon-

to-be fifth grader at Monmouth Elementary School, says he has worked with Apple Box Children’s Theater before, and that he enjoys being in plays. His younger sister, Olive, is also in this summer’s production. Both children play pirates.

Sarah Wabra, also a soon-to-be fifth grader, says she gets “really nervous” during the plays.

“I think, ‘oh man, what if I mess up?’ But at the end (of the play), I’m like, ‘oh that was a piece of cake,’” she said.

Savannah Smith, a 12-year-old going into the seventh grade, said that memorizing lines could be difficult. “But once you do it for the thousandth time, it gets easier,” she added with a laugh.

Jolly Roger and the Pirate Queen, a play of love and swashbuckling pirates, of swords and treasure, with children bringing it to life, opens Thursday through Saturday, 7:30 to 8 p.m.

“Bring a picnic basket,” Barbara said, and enjoy.

Paul Doellinger, grandfather of Henry and Olive, was there supporting his grandchildren, watching from a chair on the grass.

“Rob gives this a lot of time and energy,” he said.

Falls City School District has ‘painless’ budget

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

FALLS CITY — Creating a budget for a school district wouldn’t ever be considered easy, but for this year’s plan, Falls City Superintendent Jack Thompson characterized it as “painless.”

That is in no small part due to Falls City School District officials having the opportunity to add staff and programs, rather than cutting them.

Falls City Elementary School is adding a teacher to separate the growing seventh-eighth grade classroom into single grades. The

school’s reading specialist will be moving to full-time, which means another teacher will need to be hired to take over her third-fourth grade class.

“The elementary school is going to look a little different next year,” Thompson said.

Falls City High School will have a new face as well, a part-time careers class and electives teacher.

Thompson said having the additional position will allow more class variety in the schedule.

“We are really limited on electives,” he said.

The district and employee

unions also agreed to a 6 percent boost to what the district is paying for staff insurance costs, the same increase as the last two years.

Next year’s total budget is \$7.3 million, but it includes \$4 million proceeds from a facilities bond and state grant to build a new gym/multipurpose room at the elementary school.

A vote in May failed to pass the bond by votes and the district lost the grant, but the Falls City School Board voted to put the bond on the ballot again in November.

The bond amount will be the same as in the spring campaign,

\$1.30 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

“We have the same need,” Thompson said. “We were being honest the last time.”

Thompson said the move is contingent on the state approving the district for the \$2 million grant. Falls City was high on the list in the last grant cycle based on the need for a new facility, and Thompson said that situation hasn’t changed.

“We are hopeful that we will get it again,” Thompson said.

The district should know within a few weeks whether the state will approve its application. If not, the board will not proceed

with the bond.

In a departure from past practice, the district passed a one-year budget instead of a two-year plan.

Thompson said the schedule the district was on didn’t follow the biennium budget the state uses, meaning the exact amount of funding for the second year is uncertain when the budget is adopted. That, plus bringing in a new business manager compelled the district to switch to passing a one-year budget instead.

Whether the change is permanent is yet to be decided, Thompson said.





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