

Local & Region

North Powder School chief Lance Dixon receives award

By Dick Mason
The (La Grande) Observer

North Powder School District Superintendent Lance Dixon asked himself a question several years ago that forced him to make a U-turn in a real and figurative sense. Dixon, who had been North Powder's superintendent for several years, was driving to Baker City to apply for a position with the Baker School District when he realized just how deeply he loved his job, school district and community.

"I said to myself, 'What the heck are you doing?' Then I turned around in Haines (and came back to North Powder)," Dixon said.

Years have passed since that day and the North Powder School District is now in perhaps the best position in its history.

And the education world is taking notice.

Dixon recently was presented with the Inter-Mountain Education Service District's prestigious Doug Flatt Memorial Award. The honor is given annually to one education administrator in the IMESD's service area, which primarily encompasses Union, Umatilla and Morrow counties.

The award recognizes a number of successful projects Dixon has led in the North Powder School District including the construction of a \$6 million high school classroom building and gym, a structure now virtually completed. The high school and gym were built with money from a state grant and a \$3 million bond voters approved in 2017.

"Lance is the only person I know who could pull this

"While I will always treasure this award, I know that only with the effort of many staff, board members and community support have I been able to accomplish most of the things for which I have received recognition."

— **Lance Dixon, superintendent, North Powder School District**



off (get a large bond passed) because of the trust he has built in the community," said IMESD Superintendent Mark Mulvihill.

The new high school will replace the present classroom building, which was constructed more than 100 years ago. It has not been determined what will be done with the old school building once the new one opens in August.

The construction of the high school and gym are among many capital projects Dixon has helped lead and oversee in the North Powder School District. They include the construction of a cafeteria at North Powder Elementary School, which is used by the entire district, the addition of at least three classrooms in the elementary school and a new high school career technical education lab now being completed.

In addition, Powder Valley High School has annual graduation rates of at least 90 percent and the school district's students are turning in solid performances on state assessment tests.

Dixon emphasized that what has been accomplished in the North Powder School District is an indication of what many people beyond himself have done.

"While I will always treasure this award, I know

as principal, was delighted when he heard that someone he had mentored was receiving the Doug Flatt Memorial Award.

"I darn near cried when I heard he had won it. He truly deserved it," said Hopkins, who is now retired and lives in Summerville.

Mulvihill said it is unusual for a superintendent to serve as long in a school district as Dixon has. He explained that in many cases superintendents may find themselves at odds with some people in a community after several years because of controversial decisions they have had to make.

Mulvihill said Dixon has maintained excellent community ties because of how effectively he has built relationships and trust. He explained that, as a result, if Dixon makes a decision some people don't agree with, they are less likely to take it personally.

The ESD superintendent credits Dixon with being someone who directs by making personal connections and being passionate.

"He is a relationship-based leader who leads from the heart," Mulvihill said, adding that Dixon is an effective leader because he "is very humble and open to other ways of doing things."

The Doug Flatt award is sponsored by Mid-Columbia Bus Company and the IMESD. The purpose of the award is to recognize a school administrator who exemplifies the same qualities for which Doug Flatt was known, according to the IMESD. Flatt, who died in 2003, was the chief executive officer of Mid-Columbia Bus Company.

— THE WEST IN BRIEF —

Vandals damage American Legion post in Eugene just before Memorial Day

EUGENE (AP) — Vandals damaged an American Legion post in Oregon two days before Memorial Day.

The Eugene Register-Guard reports vandals tore down entrance handrails and a portion of brick walls that support them at the home of Eugene's American Legion Post 83.

The vandals also left a large gash in the post's flagpole.

The damage was discovered Saturday. Post commander John Hampton estimates damage at \$5,000.

The building was constructed in 1918 and is known as the Jamieson House. It was listed as city landmark in 2000.

The house has been Eugene's American Legion headquarters since 1977.

Hampton says the damage occurred hours before the post held a chicken feed fundraiser to raise money for scholarships and to feed and clothe veterans in need.

The vandalism did not disrupt the fundraiser.

747 jumbo jet converted to fighting wildfires ready for upcoming season

TUCSON, Ariz. (AP) — The Global SuperTanker, the world's largest firefighting aircraft, is ready for the upcoming wildfire season.

The Arizona Republic reports that the Boeing 747-400 series passenger jet converted for firefighting recently underwent maintenance at Pinal Airpark outside Tucson. The retrofitted aircraft has been used to fight wildfires in California, Chile, Israel and elsewhere.

The plane can dump up to 19,200 gallons of water or retardant in just six seconds and fly as low as 200 feet above the ground to do its work. It can be refilled in just 13 minutes.

The SuperTanker proved indispensable in 2018 helping battle some of the most devastating wildfires in California history.

"It's a force multiplier," chief pilot Cliff Hale said. "When you need to build containment lines fast, having that very large capacity can really help the guys out on the ground."

Hale was a captain with now defunct Evergreen Airlines when he came up with the idea to turn a 747 into a tanker. An early version of the SuperTanker was first used during a 2009 fire in Alaska that burned more than 500,000 acres.

That first SuperTanker was destroyed for salvage after Evergreen went bankrupt. Scott Olson, now vice president of maintenance for Global SuperTanker, later found a new plane.

Olson and his team added four outlets to the belly of the plane that could dump 9,200 gallons of liquid, along with a sprayer tank system.

The SuperTanker was deployed in Israel in 2016 and in Chile in 2017. It currently has contracts in California, Oregon and Colorado. Costs can run as much as \$250,000 a day.

Coastal ranchers blame bald eagles for lamb deaths

ASTORIA (AP) — Residents of Oregon's Clatsop County can remember when it was rare to see a bald eagle.

The raptors are now being blamed for killing lambs on northern ranches, The Daily Astorian reported.

Brownsmead rancher Ben Parker has lost four lambs and suspects the same eagle is responsible. She has flown so low he has felt the wind from its wings.

"She comes right down overhead," he said.

The raptors were once on the brink of extinction but they recovered enough by 2007 to be removed from the federal endangered species list in

Oregon. Now they're found in nearly every county.

"It's basically almost an explosion," said Neal Maine, a wildlife photographer based in Gearhart.

State and federal reports say predation of livestock by eagles is rare on the North Coast. Many people don't report it or are not sure it's a bald eagle that did the killing.

"It gets a little murky," said Russell Hunter, a veterinarian who practices in Knappa and investigates livestock deaths. "The predation is real and it's emotional and it's a little bit hard to determine how much of it is going on."

An animal may die in a field from

other causes but be found with an eagle or coyote eating it.

Bald eagles remain a protected species. Eagles can be hazed with if a rancher obtains a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service permit. None have been issued to ranchers, but the agency has received inquiries.

"(Bald eagles) are demonstrating increasing tolerance for human activity in parts of Washington and Oregon as their increasing numbers — and increasing human populations — create more overlap between human-occupied and eagle habitats," said Jason Holm, an agency spokesman.

Parker is keeping his sheep inside

the barn for now. He is experimenting with scarecrows and flags. He has retained the carcass of a gutted 2 1/2-month-old lamb that he spotted with an eagle on top of it. Federal biologists will determine if the eagle killed it.

Neighbor Ed Johnson has lost three lambs this spring. Johnson uses guard dogs to protect sheep from coyotes and roaming domestic dogs.

Multiple people have spoken to Dirk Rohne, a Brownsmead dairy farmer and Port of Astoria commissioner, about eagle predation.

"The bald eagles impacting live-

stock is a new one," he said. "I can't say anyone was talking about that until this year."

On a positive note, he said, eagles appear to have taken a major bite out of Brownsmead's invasive nutria population.

Johnson says issues with eagles come in cycles.

When runs of smelt runs are strong in the Columbia River, he doesn't see as many eagles. When runs of the forage fish are low, more eagles appear, he said.

"It kind of depends what's around to eat and unfortunately, sometimes it's lambs," he said.

Governor renews call to hire additional state troopers

By Sarah Zimmerman
Associated Press

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown renewed her call to better fund the Oregon State Police Thursday, after a state trooper who was shot 12 times was awarded the national medal of valor.

Nic Cederberg was awarded the nation's highest police honor at the White House last

week for being the sole state trooper to pursue a man who had shot and killed his wife in 2016. Cederberg was left in critical condition after the shooter opened fire.

But the governor said that Cederberg wouldn't have been alone that night if the legislature properly funded the Oregon State Police, which has nation's second lowest

number of state troopers per capita behind Florida.

"I do think it points out the need for more troopers on the road," she told reporters. "We have half the number of troopers we did in 1980, despite the fact the Oregon population has almost doubled."

Decades of cuts have left Oregon with only 380 troopers to patrol more than 6,400 miles

of highways. State troopers operate on shoestring budgets and don't have the funds to operate on a 24/7 schedule.

Troopers patrol highways and can be the first to respond to crashes and emergencies. Lack of staffing means it takes longer to respond to deadly emergencies where every second counts. But it also exposes troopers to increased risk, said

Capt. Tim Fox, a spokesperson for the Oregon State Police.

"Like in the case of Trooper Cederberg, many troopers are sent out alone, often in rural areas," said Fox. "It can take hours to send backup because lack of funding has left us with so few troopers."

Brown proposed a \$146 million investment through 2030 to double the number of

state police officers. Despite drawing bipartisan support, the plan remains locked in committee though Fox remains "hopeful" about its passage.

Budgeters have asked for a 5% cut across nearly all state agencies, though the governor asked for a significant funding increase in her proposed budget late last year.

Deschutes County officials note rising number of infant deaths

By Kyle Spurr
WesCom News Service

BEND — The number of infants dying while sleeping is on the rise in Deschutes County and causing health care providers to increase awareness about the troubling trend.

Between 2012 and 2017, 14 Deschutes County infants died by suffocation or strangulation while sleeping,

according to statewide health statistics. Five of those deaths happened in 2016, compared to one death in 2012.

The Deschutes County Child Fatality Review — a team of multidisciplinary community agencies that convenes twice a year to identify trends and possible interventions — is partnering with other health care agencies to raise awareness of

the importance of safe sleep practices.

The collaborative effort is focused on proactively sharing information about the issue on social media and in clinics through June.

Central Oregon Pediatric Associates, Summit Medical Group Oregon, Mosaic Medical and public health departments in Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson counties are

participating along with the KIDS Center and St. Charles Health System.

Logan Thomas Clausen, chief medical officer at Central Oregon Pediatric Associates, said the more people who are aware of the problem, the more likely it is to be reduced.

"We don't know the exact reason for the increased trend, but our thought is

lately there has been less of a push for awareness about the risk factors," Clausen said.

The most common risk factors for babies are sleeping on a soft surface, sleeping on their stomachs and exposure to parents smoking. Premature babies, low birth-weight babies and babies who sleep in the same bed as their parents have an especially higher risk.

The safest way for babies to sleep is on their backs, on a firm mattress and without crib bumpers, stuffed animals, thick blankets or pillows in their sleeping area, Clausen said.

Babies can sleep with their parents, but the babies must sleep in a space separated from the parents.

"There are ways to do it safely," Clausen said.