

Holcomb

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Duggan had requested the designation of a section of Highway 86, which runs through Holcomb's hometown of Richland, as a Fallen Hero Memorial Highway, Bates wrote in his email.

The first step in that process is having the Oregon Legislature pass a concurrent resolution honoring the person for whom the highway section would be dedicated.

Owens introduced that resolution, which was scheduled for a reading in the House on Monday, Feb. 21.

Owens said he was pleased to introduce the resolution and to support Duggan's proposal to honor Holcomb.

Bates also testified in favor of the resolution on Feb. 15 during a meeting of the House Rules Committee.

Holcomb is one of just 13 Oregonians bestowed with the Medal of Honor.

That medal, and Holcomb's other military medals, are displayed at the Baker County Courthouse, 1995 Third St. Holcomb's family offered the items to the county for public display in 2014.

Holcomb Park, the county park on Brownlee Reservoir near Richland, was named for John Holcomb and dedicated on July 4, 1993.

Holcomb, who was born on June 11, 1946, in Baker City, graduated from Eagle Valley High School at Richland in 1964.

President Richard Nixon awarded Holcomb's Medal of Honor to his parents, George and Wadean Holcomb, in 1971 in Washington, D.C.

Holcomb was killed during a firefight in which, according to the citation that accompanied his Medal of Honor, he demonstrated "indomitable will and courage after his unit was attacked from three sides."

When the machine-gunner in Holcomb's squad was hurt, Holcomb "seized the weapon, ran to a forward edge of the position, and placed withering fire on the enemy. His gallant actions caused the enemy to withdraw."

After the first attack, Holcomb carried several of his wounded comrades to a safer spot.

Holcomb manned the machine gun again and repulsed a second enemy attack, but a rocket exploded near his position, destroying the machine gun and wounding Holcomb. The enemy artillery also ignited a grass fire.

Even after he was wounded, Holcomb "crawled through a grass fire and exploding mortar and rocket rounds to move the members of his squad, every one



John Noble Holcomb's Medal of Honor.

of whom had been wounded, to more secure positions."

Then Holcomb crawled to a radio and reported the attack. His report allowed other units to pinpoint fire on the area and defeat the third and final attack.

On the occasion of Holcomb Park's dedication, Baker City Realtor Mike Nelson described Holcomb as "a man who exemplified the ultimate plateau of human behavior."

Prior to Veterans Day 2019, Jimmy Robbins, a Florida soldier who served in the same unit with Holcomb in Vietnam — D Company of the 2nd battalion, 7th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division — said in an interview with the Baker City Herald that Holcomb's heroism quite likely saved Robbins' life among many others that December day.

A total of 23 American soldiers were killed in the firefight, and 53 — Robbins among them — were wounded.

Robbins, who lives in Alabama, said that although he wasn't a close friend with Holcomb, he enjoyed spending time with the Oregon soldier.

"You could tell how he cared about people," Robbins said.

He remembers in particular that Holcomb once shared with him and other soldiers the homemade jerky and elderberry wine that his grandfather had sent from Baker County.

Baker County's other Fallen Hero Memorial Highway

In 2015 the Oregon Legislature designated a section of Oregon Highway 7 near Baker City as "Mabry Anders Memorial Highway" in honor of the Baker City soldier who was killed in Afghanistan on Aug. 27, 2012, at age 21.

The bill designates Milepost 36, near Phillips Reservoir, in honor of Anders.

Kostol

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The cemetery was nothing but dirt and sagebrush until 1987 when numerous volunteers from throughout Baker County began work to recognize the site.

The cemetery was dedicated in 1992.

Virginia Kostol passed away in December 2020 at the age of 94. Her passion for family, friends and community service is well-known by those who knew her, and her generosity will be felt by many in Baker County for generations to come.

"We are so grateful to Virginia and the Kostol family for a wonderful gift of historical preservation," Savage said. "We look forward to honoring Virginia and her commitment to this important chapter in Baker County's history."

The Chinese Cemetery is owned by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Society of Portland. The Baker County Historical Society is charged with its care and community education efforts.

To date, thousands of local volunteer hours have been dedicated to preservation of this heritage cemetery.

New At The Library

Patrons can reserve materials in advance online or by calling 541-523-6419. In the past two weeks, Baker County Library has added 33 new best-sellers, 11 movies, 22 audiobooks, 13 children's books, and 130 other new books, including 112 that are available online with the Libby App.

See everything new to Baker County Library District at wovbrary.org. Materials featured, and in library collection, does not indicate endorsement or approval of contents by the library. Selections are based on factors such as demand, public interest, diversity of viewpoint, community relevance, and others.

FICTION

- "Armageddon 2419 A.D. and The Air-lords of Han," Philip Francis Nowlan
- "A Heart Adrift," Laura Frantz
- "I Must Betray You," Ruta Sepetys
- "Quicksilver," Dean Koontz
- "Violeta," Isabel Allende

NONFICTION

- "The Fat Chance Cookbook: More Than 100 Recipes Ready in Under 30 Minutes to Help You Lose the Sugar and the Weight," Robert H. Lustig
- "I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist," Norman L. Geisler
- "Miss Independent: A Simple 12-Step Plan to Start Investing and Grow Your Own Wealth," Nicole Lapin
- "Please Don't Sit on My Bed in Your Outside Clothes: Essays," Phoebe Robinson
- "Read Until You Understand: The Profound Wisdom of Black Life and Literature," Farah Jasmine Griffin

DVDs

- "Danger Close" (Action)
- "Here Today" (Comedy)
- "Lovecraft Country" (Drama)
- "The Plot Against America" (Drama)
- "Zappa" (Documentary)

Returning to the stage — finally

Regional theaters begin recovering after pandemic cancellations

BY JENNIFER COLTON

For EO Media Group
PENDLETON — When "The Sound of Music" closed on March 1, 2020, Pendleton's College Community Theater expected to open its next production in six weeks. Instead, rehearsals at the Bob Clapp Theatre would be canceled for two years.

"Little Women: The Broadway Musical," the first Pendleton-based theater production since the coronavirus pandemic, runs the next two weekends, Feb. 24-26 and March 3-5, in the theater on the campus of Blue Mountain Community College.

"When COVID hit, it was really scary because nobody knew what to expect," said Margaret Mayer, president of the CCT board of directors. "We had no idea it would be two years, no one knew. Here we are."

Almost exactly two years later ("Sound of Music" opened Feb. 20, 2020; "Little Women" opens Feb. 24, 2022), Mayer was back in the theater as music director for "Little Women." Caitlin Marshall is directing.

"The last two years have been really stressful. People need something that can take their minds off everything," Marshall said. "I really just feel it's important to keep some kind of normalcy with all the chaos going on."

That idea of normalcy has prompted shows to come back this month in Hermiston and La Grande, even with COVID-19 impacts. At Hermiston High School, Jordan Bemrose brought together 70 students for performances of "Beauty and the Beast."

"The biggest reason we wanted to jump back into live theater is mostly to give these fantastic students something exciting to look forward to," she said.

Bemrose added the performing arts students are talented and hardworking and need opportunities to shine.

"With online school, we missed out on so many performance opportunities that now, being back in person, we wanted to make up for that loss of time," she said. "For many students, singing, acting and playing their musical instruments is their whole life and inspiration and what they aspire to do as careers after high school."

With the lingering impacts of COVID-19, the Hermiston production required masks to rehearse on stage and careful tracking to



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

Eastern Oregon University students rehearse "We've Got Your Number" on Jan. 26, 2022. After a delay due to COVID-19 cases among the cast, performances are set for Feb. 25 and 26 at McKenzie Theatre in La Grande.

avoid quarantine that could cancel rehearsals — or performances. That same fear became a reality this month for Eastern Oregon University's "We've Got Your Number," a choreographed choral performance. Several students tested positive for COVID-19, and the show was postponed two weeks to Feb. 25 and 26. That delay pushed "A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder," a stage musical planned to open March 10, into EOU's fall term.

"It's exciting to be back and yet it's frustrating at the same time. The biggest problem with bringing the theater back is COVID is still doing everything it can to prevent it from coming back," said Ken Wheeler, associate professor of theater at EOU. "As much as things are getting better and we're seeing the sun at the end of the storm, it's still affecting it."

For tickets to "We've Got Your Number," visit www.eou.edu/music.

Returning to the stage during a pandemic requires flexibility and creativity.

When the pandemic hit, the Elgin Opera House's spring 2020 production of "Matilda" was only weeks away from opening. Instead of opening that March, the show was postponed for a year and a half.

In between, the Opera House tried outdoor productions as well as a fully recorded production of "High School Musical Jr." During this musical, rehearsed in the winter of 2021, actors

were split into cohort groups that rehearsed and recorded on different days with no live audience.

"When we announced we were recording 'High School Musical,' we thought we'd get just a few people audition," said Terry Hale, Elgin Opera House executive artistic director. "We had 70 or 80 kids from five different counties. That's how important this is."

Hermiston High School also saw large participation numbers with "Beauty and the Beast," a show they've been rehearsing since the middle of November.

"(I wish people knew) how hard these students work and how much time, effort and talent are needed to put a full show together," Bemrose said. "It takes weeks to learn lines, music, choreography, organize props and set, and get all of the moving pieces together, including the orchestra, who rehearse separately and join us during our dress rehearsal week. We rehearse at least two hours after school during our production months, and dress rehearsal week we rehearse after school four to five hours finalizing everything."

Those hundreds of hours do not include the extra pandemic struggle of rehearsing with masks or returning to the stage after a two-year hiatus.

"Everyone is out of practice with the process, but we'll work at overcoming those hand-icaps just so we can put the show on," Wheeler said. "There's nothing that beats a live shared

experience in a darkened theater. That communication between the actors and the audience, there's nothing that compares to that. We're striving to get back to that as soon as possible even if we have to take strange precautions to be able to do it. It's worth it."

In Baker City, Eastern Oregon Regional Theatre has presented a few shows — the children's theater presented "Jungle Book" in the fall of 2021, and "Pride@Prejudice" wrapped up a two-weekend run Feb. 20.

"Because theater is known as collaborative art, it was one of the few art forms almost totally shut down during the pandemic," said Abby Dennis, EORT artistic director. "Since our art form requires being around others, theater people were completely cut off from being able to work through the overwhelming emotions from the past two years."

Bemrose said seeing a show come together is the greatest reward of theater, along with how accomplished the cast and crew feel. Hale said it is the way the performing arts bring joy and life to those on and off the stage.

"As a society, we focused so much on being afraid of death (in the pandemic) that we stopped doing the things that brought us joy, the things that made us alive," Hale said. "One of the best ways to celebrate life is through the arts. If people keep coming out, we'll keep doing it."

Dennis said returning to the stage is "bittersweet."

"I love being able to entertain my community, but it hurts to think of everything we've lost over the past two years," she said.

EORT's 2022 schedule includes "Women Playing Hamlet," "God of Carnage," and the children's theater will present "The Enchanted Bookshop" and "Macbeth."

In Pendleton, tickets are still available for "Little Women" for both weekends, Feb. 24-26 and March 3-5. For information, go to www.elginoperahouse.com.

"It's going to be an amazing show," Marshall said. "Come fall in love with these sisters and have a great night of theater again — finally."

Lisa Britton of the Baker City Herald contributed to this story.

Schools

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staff generally preferred to lose two days of winter break rather than two days of summer break, to accommodate the later start to the school year, according to the district press release.

For the 2022-23 school year, the last day of school for students at the Baker Early Learning Center, Haines Elementary, and South Baker Intermediate will be June 6, 2023, while the last day of school for students at the other district schools will be June 8, 2023.

All schools will begin the 2023-24 school year on Sept. 5, 2023, and end on June 6, 2024. Winter break will begin for everyone on Dec. 20, 2023, two days later than usual.

The district added the \$4 million from the bond measure — the first district voters had approved

since 1948 — with a \$4 million state grant and \$4 million from the district's capital budget.

The district will use the money to build an estimated 5,000-square-foot cafeteria/kitchen/multi-purpose building on the Baker Middle School campus, and replace the leak-prone roof at South Baker.

A public open house to review the proposed design for the BMS building is set for Tuesday, Feb. 22, at 5:30 p.m. at the school, Fourth Street and Washington Avenue. COVID protocols, including face coverings, will be followed.

Other projects include:

- Replacing heating, cooling and ventilation systems in all district schools — Baker High School (main gym, small gym and auditorium), Baker Middle School, South Baker, Brooklyn, Haines, Keating

and Baker Early Learning Center (formerly North Baker).

• Upgrading security and access control at all schools, including improved security cameras, fire alarms and public address systems, as well as key card systems and door sensors to control access. The district will also create secure entry vestibules at Brooklyn and South Baker.

More information about the bond projects is available at www.bakersdbond.org/.

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