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## AFFORDING RETIREMENT

PERS rate increases impact school and government budgets

By Rylan Boggs  
Blue Mountain Eagle

In order to keep the Public Employee Retirement System afloat and satisfy the \$21 billion in unfunded liability, PERS contributions are climbing for schools, cities and counties across Oregon.

Rates for 2017-19 were recently released, leaving some in a position that requires cutting budget items to feed PERS.

The increase in their required contributions depends on a variety of factors — such as how many of their employees are on the more gen-

erous Tier 1 benefits earned by those hired before 2003 — but the average increase is about 3.62 percent.

The need for higher contributions from employers comes from a combination of factors. About 70 percent of the system's revenue comes from investment earnings, which have been falling below the assumed 7.75 percent. Retirees are also living longer than expected, and the Oregon Supreme Court struck down reforms that lowered costs in 2015-2017, ruling them an unconstitutional breach of contract with public employees.

Although the new rates do not take effect until July, agencies must

soon begin preparing upcoming budgets, and the increases will impact each differently.

### Schools

Grant School District No. 3's Tier 1 and Tier 2 rates will increase from 8.77 percent in 2015-2017 to 14.18 percent in 2017-2019.

Superintendent Curt Shelley said in an email, "The recent release of PERS effective July 1, 2017, will increase our district (expense) approximately 5.41 percent, which, based on actual payroll of 2015-2016, will

See PERS, Page A18



Eagle file photo

Sophie Cosgrove, named Oregon Small Schools Teacher of the Year in 2014, reads to a few of her fourth-grade students: Shyanne Smarr, left, James Allison, Sebastian Hodge, Tucker Carpenter and Meika Pereira. Public Employee Retirement System rate increases for 2017-19 will significantly impact most local school districts.



Contributed photo

Queen Jessica Carter and Princess Trinity Hutchison are selling tickets to the Grant County Fair and Rodeo Court Cowboy Christmas Coronation Dinner and Auction.

### Cowboy Christmas-themed coronation celebrates queen and princess

By Angel Carpenter  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grand plans are in the works for this year's Grant County Fair and Rodeo Court Cowboy Christmas Coronation Dinner and Auction.

The event, which begins at 5 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 20, will be held at the Grant County Fairgrounds pavilion in John Day.

The community is invited to attend and see fair and rodeo Queen Jessica Carter of Seneca and Princess Trinity Hutchison of John Day as they are crowned. Former fair and rodeo Queen Reitta Wyllie will pass the crown on to Carter.

Tickets are \$15 a person or \$25 for a couple. The dinner includes tri-tip with all the fixings catered by Kris and Kjer Kizer and a no-host bar by Snaffle Bit Dinner House.

Crowning a fair and rodeo court has been a long-held tradition in Grant County, but this year's court advisor Nicole Israel said the program has waned in recent years. She would like to see the program re-ignite.

"We're really trying to regrow the program and educate the public that they're not just a pretty face," Israel said. "They are out working for the county, promoting it and trying to get more people to our fair, rodeo and community."

Proceeds from the event will support the court's travel expenses and wardrobe for themselves and the horses they ride.

See COURT, Page A18



Eagle photos/Rylan Boggs

Sharon Livingston leans on a fence post on her property near Long Creek on Monday, Nov. 14.

# Fighting for agriculture

"Sharon Livingston is one of the reasons Grant County will always be strong."

## Livingston named Agriculturist of the Year

By Rylan Boggs  
Blue Mountain Eagle

It rained last night, and Sharon Livingston couldn't be happier about it.

Recently named Agriculturist of the Year, the welfare of her ranch is never far from her mind.

Born and raised in Long Creek, Livingston, now 77, still works the ranch she grew up on. She leases her Angus and Angus-cross cattle to a local rancher, Jim Jacobs, and helps when she can.

Livingston works seven days a week and doesn't take vacations outside of work. She's deeply involved in Oregon agriculture and is the former president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association and a member on both the Oregon Board of Agriculture and the Oregon Beef Council.

In recognition, Livingston has been named the 2016 Agriculturalist of the Year by Oregon Aglink. She will receive the award at the

annual Denim & Diamonds Dinner and Auction in Portland Friday, Nov. 18.

Livingston is one of only two women who have been president of the cattlemen's association.

"I taught school for years with men, and if we went through the lunch line and they let me go in front, I would say, 'Thank you.' I'm appreciative," she said.

"However, if you choose not to, it's OK. We're all working here together."

Grant County Commissioner Boyd Britton has known Livingston for roughly two decades and spoke very highly of her.

"Sharon Livingston

is one of the reasons Grant County will always be strong," Britton said. "She loves the land, and she stands up for the rights of the agricultural community."

The award is presented by Oregon Aglink, a marketing and public relations association for the agricultural industry founded in 1966. The organization's goal is to educate urban Oregonians on where their food comes from and how farmers produce it, according to Aglink Executive Director Geoff Horning.

Agriculturist of the Year is "the most prestigious award" in the agriculture industry, he said.

"It's something that has to really be a career achievement," Horning said. "It's really more of an award to present someone who has gone above and beyond over a long period of time."

It's for this dedication that Livingston is being honored.

"Sharon has been an extraordinary advocate for Oregon agriculture on so many fronts for her

See AWARD, Page A18

## Judge explains decision to nullify Public Forest Commission measure

Cramer rules voters intended to assume management of lands

By Sean Hart  
Blue Mountain Eagle

The judge who nullified the measure creating the Grant County Public Forest Commission said in his recently released full opinion it was clear the petitioner and voters intended to assume management of public lands, which conflicted with paramount laws.

Grant County Circuit Court Judge William D. Cramer Jr. informed the Grant County clerk of his intention to nullify the citizen initiative in September to prevent Public Forest Commission candidates from appearing on the November ballot and said in the abbreviated opinion he would later submit a full opinion, which he issued Nov. 8.

In the full opinion, Cramer said the county was free to pass a measure to

Chief petitioner Traylor and the voters, even if they read only the summary, were without doubt voting to manage public lands."

Grant County Circuit Court Judge William D. Cramer Jr.

establish a forest commission to develop plans to manage public lands if and when the lands were owned by the county, or to consult the county about management practices, as long as the measure clearly stated the commission's limits, met procedural requirements and did not violate other "superior or paramount laws."

"As I understand how this commission actually functioned a proper measure could be developed and passed," Cramer said in the opinion. "The fact

that an unconstitutional or otherwise invalid law is not enforced as written does not mean it should remain as part of the county code when its invalidity has been properly raised."

Former county judge Mark Webb brought the matter before the court when he filed a petition for judicial review in March of this year of Measure 12-39, a citizen initiative submitted by chief petitioner Dave Traylor and approved by Grant County voters in 2002 to create the Public Forest Commission.

In his petition, Webb argued procedural errors were committed in the adoption of the measure and that it conflicted with paramount state law and the United States Constitution.

Grant County's attorney, Ron Yockim, argued voters did not intend to unilaterally assume control of public lands, such as those managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, and instead only intended to create a commission to manage land that had been conveyed to the county.

Cramer said concerns about procedural errors required "fact finding" and could not appropriately be addressed in a summary judgment, which was requested by both Webb and Yockim. He said, however, he could address whether the measure conflicted with paramount law and that it clearly did so.

See JUDGE, Page A18

