

VSO

Continued from Page A1

him and his family come to the community.”

After graduating from Grant Union, Wilcox enlisted in the Army as an infantryman. After basic training at Fort Benning, he was deployed to the Middle East.

Following a two-year enlistment, Wilcox worked on a fire crew and then attended Clackamas Community College, where he studied elementary education.

He then reenlisted with the Army and was assigned to the 24th Infantry. During his three-year enlistment, he attended Army Sniper School and competed in the International Army Sniper Competition.

“I loved it,” Wilcox said of

his decision to reenlist, “just the curse of the old green machine.”

After his discharge, he worked in the Grant County Sheriff’s Office and as a rappeller for the Malheur National Forest.

He then joined the National Guard as an active-duty soldier and served for 15 years while based in Redmond. He retired in March 2015.

Since then, he has been traveling and working as a catastrophic insurance adjuster for State Farm. While doing this, he met his fiancée, April Petty, who was also working as an insurance adjuster.

Wilcox was selected for the job from five applicants. Grant County Human Resources Manager Laurie Wright, who was on the selection committee, had noth-

ing but praise for Wilcox.

“We were impressed with his enthusiasm and how he wanted to serve the veterans in our community,” Wright said.

Wilcox knew he wanted to return to Grant County, and he said the job opening was the perfect fit for him.

“Being around veterans is something that gets under your skin, and you really enjoy it. I do personally,” he said.

He decided to serve veterans following the suicides of two men he knew from the Oregon National Guard in the summer of 2016.

“We’ve had too many suicides lately, and I know that a lot of guys struggle, especially in rural areas like this,” Wilcox said. “Grant County and other places often get overlooked when it comes to any sort of services available for veterans or anyone else.”

His job will entail helping veterans navigate state and federal benefit systems, a process Wilcox has gone through himself.

“Without help from groups like the VFW and American Legion, I don’t know how I would have been able to file for veterans disability,” he said.

Wilcox described Desert Storm as an “incredibly hard weekend,” but said he can’t fathom what veterans have faced in the Middle East in recent years. He gave the example of a veteran who served seven tours and won a Bronze Medal for Valor and a Purple Heart.

“It’s guys like that I want to help,” Wilcox said.

BOARD

Continued from Page A1

Discussion of rural air service is planned at the next board meeting scheduled Thursday, Jan. 19.

Ferguson said he hopes a plan can be developed to provide more services in Eastern Oregon. He said Grant County has no flight instructor or aviation mechanic, which makes hobby flying more difficult.

Flying his 1959 model Cessna 182 to backcountry airstrips is what Ferguson loves. He and his wife, Charlene, loaded into the 1,000-pound craft that travels about 150 mph in October to meet other backcountry enthusiasts who flew in to the Owyhee Reservoir state landing strip in Malheur County



The Eagle/Sean Hart

Local pilot Doug Ferguson with his 1959 model Cessna 182 at the Grant County Regional Airport in John Day. Ferguson was appointed to the Oregon State Aviation Board in July, representing Eastern Oregon.

to rehabilitate the deteriorating dirt and grass runway.

Ferguson said he has more than 30 years of backcountry flying experience. After obtaining his pilot’s license in 1972, Ferguson worked as a charter pilot in John Day, flew on game counts for the Oregon Department of Fish and

Wildlife and was a fire spotter for the Forest Service and Oregon Department of Forestry. After a 15-year hiatus, Ferguson recently decided to return to the air and was soon selected to serve on the aviation board.

“I’m just trying to give back to something I love,” he said.

RAIN

Continued from Page A1

river flooding is forecast at this time, this is an evolving forecast and should be monitored regularly for updates.”

Flooding has become a prominent concern for Canyon City and John Day residents following the Canyon Creek Complex fire in 2015.

A lack of vegetation in the burned area allows rain and snow-melt to quickly descend into populated areas. The burn zone was taken into consideration as part of the outlook, though weather service representatives speculated current snow-pack levels may absorb some of the precipitation in the area.

Grant County officials prepared heavily for the potential of flooding last year and continue to monitor for the possibility.

“Anytime we have snow-pack above Canyon City, John Day or Prairie City and there’s a possibility of runoff, there’s always cause for concern,” Grant County Judge Scott Myers said.

He said he was not extremely concerned with the warm weather forecast this week because the temperature isn’t predicted to get over 50 degrees.

“If we get 55-degree rain and some 50-degree evenings I think we might be in trouble,” Myers said.

Both the Inland Drive bridge and the Nugget Lane

bridge are of concern because they’re so close to the water level.

There are still a number of flood mitigation measures leftover from last spring, including retaining walls and sandbags, Myers said.

The county has looked into excavating a portion of the creek behind Grant Union Junior-Senior High School to help protect against flooding.

“That creek flattens so much right there that it almost has a negative flow,” Myers said.

The county is still working with FEMA and other agencies to see if the plan is a viable option. Myers said another potential defense available to the county involves purchasing a property behind the bus barn to erect a retaining wall.


the corner's
HOT SHOT
OF THE WEEK



LEVI BURKE
School: Prairie City
Grade: 10
Parent: John and Terri Burke
Sport: Basketball
Position: Forward

What I like best about my sport: “I like the atmosphere and having fun with my friends. I want to thank my parents and family and friends for their support.”

Coach’s Comment: “We knew going into the season he would be one of the better players. He has a lot of talent, but he wants to see other players succeed — that is a rare talent and shows a lot about his character. He is one of the most coachable kids. I think the sky is the limit for this kid. He’s just at the tip of the iceberg.”
-Coach Jonathan Gill



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