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Five-year-old Graham of Grant County, left, and his family received a painting through Portrait Connection at an art show Sept. 6 at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande. Elaine Eisenbraun, Portrait Connection executive director, holds the painting created by her daughter Kristen Eisenbraun of South Carolina.

Portrait Connection touches two local children and their families

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

The nonprofit Portrait Connection, founded by Elaine Eisenbraun of Long Creek, has warmed many hearts with a unique mission, and now two Grant County families have also been touched.

Artists are paired through the nonprofit with children between the ages of 1 and 18 who are enduring serious health challenges. The portraits are shared with the youths' families during an art show, unveiling paintings the families can take home after a few weeks on display.

Eleven Eastern Oregon families, along with friends and artists, attended an art unveiling Sept. 6 at Houk Hall at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande.

The meeting included a young girl and boy from Grant County who were given portraits.

Five-year-old Julia received a portrait painted by Kim Randleas of John Day.

Julia attended the meeting with her parents Ethan and Cammie Haney.

Cammie said she was "completely speechless" during the unveiling.

"The whole room was reduced to tears," she said.

Randleas painted an endearing expression of Julia, capturing a mischievous smile.

The 5-year-old blew her portrait a kiss.

It was the "No. 1 best reaction to a painting ... ever," Randleas said.

Five-year-old Graham, also a Grant County resident, had his portrait painted by Kristen Eisenbraun of South Carolina, who is a former Long Creek resident and a found-

ing member of the nonprofit with her mom, Elaine. Mt. Vernon artist Patricia Ross painted a girl named Jasmine of Baker County.

There were about 70 people attending to support the families.

"Each family had a different reaction to seeing the unveiling," Elaine said. "Some people cried, some gasped in joyous surprise."

One highlight included a young girl who raised her hands overhead and screamed with delight.

"She was like a teen at a Beatles concert," Elaine said. "As she was wheeled away in her wheelchair she called out, 'I'm the winner, I'm the winner!' with a giant smile on her face. Truly, her portrait helped her to feel special. Her family, too, was in awe at their gift."

Since Elaine started the nonprofit in 2017, a total of 60 portraits have been completed by several different artists who work from photographs of the children.

It was some of the "finest art" they've presented to date, Elaine said.

"All the families were thrilled with their portraits," she said. "The families have both been through harrowing journeys and both (Grant County) children have faced imminently life-threatening situations."

She added, "I think the portraits will offer a calm, warm and healing environment in both homes."

So far, Portrait Connection has held art shows in Bend, Arizona, New York and South Carolina.

Elaine said their next unveiling will be in October in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

For more information on the nonprofit, visit portraitconnection.org.



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Cammie and Ethan Haney of John Day and their daughter Julia enjoy the portrait that local artist Kim Randleas painted for them through the nonprofit Portrait Connection. An art show was held Sept. 6 at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande where portraits were unveiled for 11 Eastern Oregon families.



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Workers from Hicks Brothers Wood Floors pull up damaged areas of the Grant Union Junior-Senior High School gym. Repairs were expected to be completed by Sept. 27, and ready for the Grant Union Dig Pink Rally volleyball matches Oct. 5 after a week of curing time.

Grant Union gym floor replacement underway

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

Flooring replacement work at Grant Union Junior-Senior High School gym in John Day is just about complete.

The entire floor was damaged when a rain storm came through last summer while seismic upgrade work was underway on the gym and other areas of the building.

A declaration of an emergency for the Grant Union gym floor was on the Sept. 18 Grant School District 3 school board meeting agenda.

Grant Union Principal Ryan Gerry said the declaration was made to expedite the bidding process.

Workers from Hicks Brothers Wood Floors of Meridian, Idaho, replaced the damaged areas and, last week, were painting the lines and adding a new finish.

"We anticipate the repairs

to be done by Friday, Sept. 27," Superintendent Bret Uptmor said last week. "The finish will need to cure for a week."

He said they'll be "working with insurance to determine the next step."

Gerry said they look forward to having their gym back in use.

"We are excited that our floor will be ready for play for the remainder of the volleyball season," he said.

The first official contest in the gym will be the Grant Union volleyball Dig Pink Rally on Saturday, Oct. 5, to raise breast cancer awareness and benefit Blue Mountain Hospital District's mammogram program.

The Grant Union Prospectors host the Enterprise Outlaws and Pilot Rock Rockets for the matches starting at 2 p.m. that day, including junior varsity and varsity games.



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Hicks Brothers Wood Floors of Meridian, Idaho, work on replacing the Grant Union gym floor. Photo provided by Grant School District 3 Superintendent Bret Uptmor.

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