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HOLLYWOOD COMES TO GRANT COUNTY

“Napoleon and Samantha,” Disney feature filmed here, marks its 50th anniversary

By BENNETT HALL
Blue Mountain Eagle

In the summer of 1972, U.S. newspaper headlines were dominated by the Watergate burglary and the growing political scandal that would ultimately end the presidency of Richard M. Nixon.

But the June 29 edition of the Blue Mountain Eagle devoted a full quarter of its front page to telling readers about a new movie that would soon be showing at the local drive-in: “Napoleon and Samantha,” a Disney production that was filmed the summer before right here in Grant County.

The movie — a wildly improbable tale of two young runaways who survive a perilous trek through the Oregon wilds protected by a pet lion and an idealistic college student — was released 50 years ago next month, on July 5, 1972.

Half a century later, “Napoleon and Samantha” still conjures fond memories for some local residents.

The making of ...

Filming began on June 21, 1971, and continued for about four weeks, with a production company of 65 people — 15 cast and 50 crew members — in town for the duration. As might be expected, the local newspaper chronicled the proceedings extensively.

“Interest in the film has been keen locally,” the Blue Mountain Eagle reported, noting that Walt Disney Productions planned to hire roughly 50 locals to serve as extras and stand-ins.

Some two dozen locations around Grant County were used in the filming, including the county courthouse, the state welfare office and the fraternal hall in Canyon City (which was renamed “Grantville” in the movie). The old Damon’s Mercantile in Mt. Vernon was prominently featured, and other scenes showed Campbell’s Texaco and other downtown businesses along Main Street in John Day. Several scenes were shot at the Gerald and Jessie Lewis home in Canyon City and the Tom and Jerry Mosgrove home in John Day. Other shooting locations included the Oxbow Ranch near Prairie City and the Williams Ranch on the East Fork of Canyon Creek. And the Grant Union High School gymnasium was transformed into a soundstage, where interior scenes were filmed.

At the time, Oregon was enjoying a bit of a Hollywood moment. Several major motion pictures had been shot in the state in the previous few years, including “Paint Your Wagon” with Clint Eastwood and Lee Marvin, filmed near Baker City; Paul Newman’s “Sometimes a Great Notion,” shot in the Newport area; and “The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid,” filmed around Jacksonville with Cliff Robertson and Robert Duvall.

Those films had pumped an estimated \$5 million into the state’s economy, the Eagle reported, and “Napoleon and Samantha,” with a budget of around \$1 million or so, was having a positive effect on Grant County businesses.

The biggest name on the cast list may have been Johnny Whitaker, the 11-year-old child actor who played Napoleon and was then riding the crest of his fame as Brian Keith’s son in the hit TV sitcom “Family Affair.”

Samantha was played by Jodie Foster, who would go on to win a pair of Best Actress Oscars for “The Accused” and “The Silence of the Lambs” but was then a relative unknown. Just 8 years old at the time, she was performing in her first movie role.

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Bennett Hall
Blue Mountain Eagle
The former Mosgrove house on Hillcrest Road in John Day was used as Samantha’s grandmother’s house in “Napoleon and Samantha.” The home now belongs to Rod Carpenter.



Handout Photo
The promotional poster for “Napoleon and Samantha.” Filmed in Grant County, the Disney movie was released 50 years ago next month.

Location, location, location

Top 10 movies filmed in and around John Day, as ranked by imdb.com.

1. “Even Cowgirls Get the Blues” (1993)
Sissy Hankshaw (Uma Thurman) and Bonanza Jellybean (Rain Phoenix) lead a cowgirl uprising at a California beauty ranch.
2. “Napoleon and Samantha” (1972)
A young boy (Johnny Whitaker) and girl (Jodie Foster) survive a harrowing trip through the wilds of Oregon with the help of a guardian lion and a misunderstood grad student (Michael Douglas).
3. “The Body Human: Facts for Boys” (1980)
Half-hour documentary made for television.
4. “The Old Oregon Trail” (1928)
Three cowboys save a band of settlers from horse thieves and rebellious farmworkers.
5. “Wood” (2007)
This 22-minute documentary follows the journey of timber from the forest to the sawmill.
6. “Layers of Life: Stories of Ancient Oregon” (2020)
A 21-minute documentary filmed at the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument.
7. “A Window Into the Past” (2021)
Written and directed by Jeff Boedecker, this TV movie may or may not have a John Day connection. If you’ve seen it, maybe you can tell us.
8. “Eden” (2012)
This short film stars Rafael Untalan as Adam and Kacy Owens as Eve.
9. “Blowing Up the John Day Rapids” (2012)
A short film that documents the U.S. government’s use of dynamite to tame a stretch of the John Day River.
10. “World’s Toughest Fixes: Columbia River Dam” (2009)
An episode of the reality show hosted by Sean Riley that focuses on the John Day Dam.
Source: imdb.com

Department heads speak out on budget cuts

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

CANYON CITY — Grant County department heads are voicing their displeasure with funding cuts in the county’s \$94.7 million budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which County Court members voted to adopt on Friday, June 24.

The cutbacks affect all county departments except for the fairgrounds, Sheriff’s Office, airport and Road Department. All county offices in the Grant County Courthouse will be closed on Fridays beginning July 1. Grant County Circuit Court, which is funded by the state, will remain open on Fridays.

The Budget Committee passed the budget on the 4-2 vote, with all three citizen members voting to approve the budget. Grant County Judge Scott Myers broke with the court’s two commissioners to end the budget standoff.

With a looming deadline to submit a balanced budget by June 30 to head off a county-wide shutdown, county officials were forced to grapple with potential cuts in the wake of an \$800,000 “miscalculation” discovered amid deliberations on the 2022-23 budget.

County Treasurer Julie Ellison presented multiple options for attempting to rebalance the budget.

One option, Ellison said, would be to cut all general fund and elected county employees to 36 hours a week. The savings, she said, would work out to roughly \$145,000 a year. If the county were to cut those positions to 32 hours a week, the savings would increase to just over \$258,000.

Cuts to county services

Some department heads are saying that staffing cuts will necessitate cuts to the services their offices provide.

In a June 14 press release, Grant County District Attorney Jim Carpenter said his office would no longer handle property tax foreclosure proceedings, monitor bench probation or enforce child support in the county.

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Golf tourney raises money for grief center

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Nearly 25 teams competed in the Thadd’s Place Golf Tournament on Saturday, June 25, at the John Day Golf Club, raising thousands of dollars for a local nonprofit for a third year.

Named in honor of Thaddeus Cowan Thompson, who died of cancer in 2019 at the age of 39, Thadd’s Place is a grieving center at 635 W. Main St. in John Day, a few doors down from Chester’s Thriftway. It’s modeled on the Dougy Center in Portland, the only other such facility in the state.

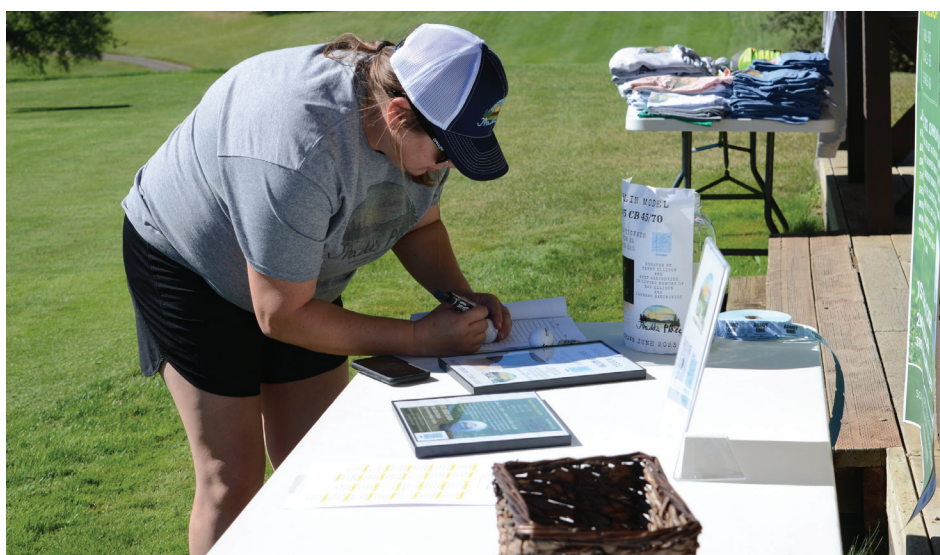
The four-person scram-

ble-style golf tournament collected roughly \$35,000 for the growing center, said Tirza Shaffer, Thadd’s Place president and sister of Thaddeus Cowan Thompson.

Thadd’s Place, established just over two years ago, offers a variety of grief counseling services. There is no charge for the center’s services.

Michelle Gibson, a licensed clinical social worker with Thadd’s Place, told the newspaper during the center’s June 24 open house that her individual grief counseling sessions have grown over the last year and that she sees people of all ages.

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Justin Davis/Blue Mountain Eagle

Tirza Shaffer is the president of Thadd’s Place and sister of Thaddeus Cowan Thompson, who the grief center is named after.

