



Daylight Saving Time ends on Sunday at 2 a.m. when clocks are turned backward one hour to 1 a.m. Sunrise and sunset will be earlier, which means more light in the morning.

The Blue Mountain EAGLE



Grant County's newspaper since 1868



Wednesday, November 2, 2022

154th Year • No. 44 • 16 Pages • \$1.50

MyEagleNews.com

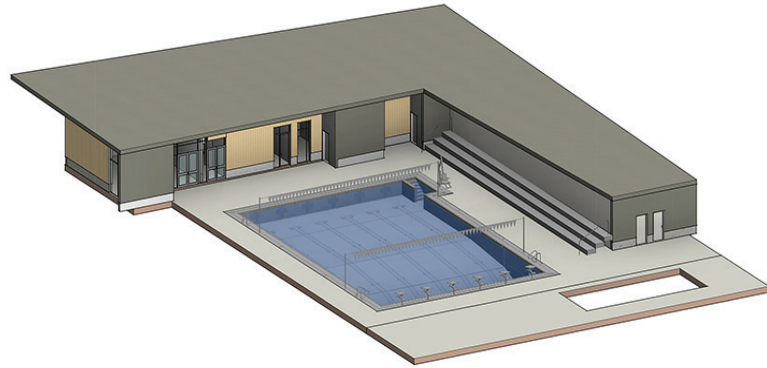
Ketchum: \$2M grant at risk if bond fails

By JUSTIN DAVIS
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — The city of John Day will likely lose the \$2 million in lottery grant funding that would go toward the construction of a new community pool if the \$4 million bond on the Nov. 8 ballot doesn't pass.

Interim John Day City Manager Corum Ketchum provided an update on the grant's status during a meeting of the John Day City Council on Tuesday, Oct. 25. The update had been requested by members of the council.

The city received a \$2 million state lottery grant to go toward the cost of building a pool, but that money came with an expiration date. If the city



Opsis Architecture/Contributed Photo

This revised conceptual drawing shows an updated image of what the proposed aquatic center in John Day might look like.

does not sign the final grant agreement by Jan. 15, 2023, the funds will be withdrawn, Ketchum said.

The bond failed once already after voters deadlocked in an 802-802 tie in the May election. If the mea-

sure fails again this time, Ketchum said, the city may have to return the money.

"We need to have a project selected that we can viably spend money on," Ketchum said in an interview after the meeting. "In this case, it's the pool project that we have been working on for the last five years."

Ketchum added that if the bond passes, the city and the John Day/Canyon City Parks and Recreation District will be able to use some of the grant money to pay back expenses that have already been incurred for preliminary design work on the pool project.

Ketchum also cleared up confusion about an additional \$1 million in funding that has been characterized

as a recent loan to cover cost overruns, stating that it is part of the same financing package that was previously approved for the project.

"Back in February of this year, council approved \$3 million in interim financing, with \$2 million that would be the lottery money and an additional \$1 million to be the last dollars spent on the project," Ketchum said.

Ketchum added that the \$1 million line of credit was taken out in hopes that the money would not be needed to construct the pool but would be available in case of overruns.

"I think it was wise of council at the time to say, 'Well, construction costs might be going up,' Ketchum

See Bond, Page A16

I AIN'T AFRAID OF NO GHOSTS



Tony Chiotti/Blue Mountain Eagle

Venkman and Stanz battle to save the Prairie City home of Shawna and Jamey Clark on Halloween night, 2022.

By TONY CHIOTTI
Blue Mountain Eagle

FOR MORE PHOTOS, SEE THE ONLINE VERSION OF THIS STORY AT MYEAGLENEWS.COM.

If you mention "the Halloween house" in Prairie City, locals will know which one you mean. Up Main Street, just off Front, Shawna and Jamey Clark have gone all out for the past 20 years, the last 10 of which have involved full-scale themes such as The Giant Pumpkin, Beetle-

juice, Ichabod Crane and a pirate ship. This year they went with "Ghostbusters," including a custom-built Slimer and life-size Venkman and Stanz firing proton blasters into an animated ectoplasm portal.

Spengler and Zeddemore were less cooperative, their mannequins refusing to stand up. So they ended up on the porch, one seated and one prone, covered in "marshmallow goo," which on inspection proved to be a mixture of spray foam insulation and shaving cream. Shawna Clark says they usually start on the next year's plan right after Halloween. "It's all her ideas," said Jamey Clark. "I just do it."

Tyler Smith trial gets underway

By TONY CHIOTTI
Blue Mountain Eagle

CANYON CITY — Opening arguments in the Tyler Smith trial were made on Wednesday, Oct. 26, at the Grant County Courthouse, with Judge Dan Bunch of Klamath Falls presiding.

Smith stands accused of three felony counts: attempted rape, attempted sex abuse and fourth-degree assault, all pertaining to events alleged to have occurred on Aug. 31, 2018. He has pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The trial began in earnest following a lengthy jury selection that involved the court sending the sheriff out into the community to hand out summonses to residents. After the 12 jurors and two alternates had been seated and prepared via instructions and clarifications on their role from Judge Bunch, opening arguments began.

Oregon Senior Assistant Attorney General Jayme Kimberly made opening statements for the prosecution. She was joined in court by Wheeler County District Attorney Gretchen Ladd. Andrea Coit, joined in court by co-counsel and husband Andrew Coit, made the opening statement for the defense.

Both attorneys outlined the roadmap



Smith

See Smith, Page A16

Giant pumpkin breeding makes enormous progress

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Despite their grotesquely bloated appearance — or perhaps because of it — giant pumpkins are known to evoke a curious reaction: love at first sight.

Growers of the oversize gourds commonly recall feel-

ing a relentless, magnetic fascination upon discovering them at an autumn fair or festival.

"I was just captivated by these giant pumpkins. I made a note that if I ever had a property with enough space, I'd try to grow them," said Brian Williams, treasurer of the Pacific Giant Vegetable Growers nonprofit.

"It was just the enormity of them," he explained.

A decade ago, Williams tore out a paved sports court at his home in Lake Oswego to make room for the garden where he now grows enormous vegetables.

He's since been amending the "terrible" soil with organic matter, and while he still cultivates giant pumpkins, Williams now specializes in long gourds that top 10 feet in length.

Competition is stiff among the 120 members of the organization, who strive to produce the heaviest or longest specimen in eight crop categories, but it's surpassed by the spirit of camaraderie.

"We're all a bit dorky and I think we take comfort that we can dork out with other dorks of the same variety," said Williams, who works as a consultant on occupational safety and health regulations.



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Kendall Spielman, president of the Pacific Giant Vegetable Growers nonprofit, examines one of the giant pumpkins growing on his property near Brooks.

Though giant pumpkin growers tend not to take themselves too seriously, they've nonetheless performed astounding feats of agronomic and genetic improvement in recent decades.

Good breeding

At more than 2,500 pounds, the world's heaviest pumpkin weighs twice as much as the record-holder 20 years ago and three times as much as the standard-bearer 30 years ago.

"As a group, we understand so much more about the science

and what you need to let them grow big," said Russ Pugh, chair of PGVG's seed committee in Eugene, and an events promoter.

Selective breeding has propelled this massive progress, with enthusiasts planting seeds from past champions and fertilizing the flowers of those plants with pollen from other promising offspring.

These lineages are tracked as earnestly by giant pumpkin breeders as those of thoroughbred horses or champion livestock.



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Gary Kristensen of Happy Valley doesn't have enough room to compete at the highest level in giant pumpkin growing weigh-offs, so he instead breeds with an eye for optimal color.

"There are family trees that go back for generations," Pugh said. "Serious growers won't grow them unless the genetics are known."

What makes these accomplishments all the more impressive is that most giant pumpkin breeders aren't professional farmers, but come from a variety of professional backgrounds, said Brett Cooper, a founding member of PGVG who grew giant pumpkin seeds commercially for about two decades.

The 'obsession'

Since the 1980s, the market for giant pumpkin seeds has grown from several hundred people to tens of thousands around the world, said Cooper, who lives near Forest Grove.

For growers, the "obsession" is driven partly by the plant's unbelievable growth during the height of summer — in the time it takes to eat a sandwich, it's possible to measure minute changes in size, he said.

"When I started growing, you wanted a pumpkin that grows 15-20 pounds a day," he said. "Now they can grow 50-60 pounds every single day."

From the perspective of breeding, however, it's not enough to select for pumpkins that rapidly get heavy.

In the past, pumpkins that simply packed on pounds without greater durability were easily damaged, often disqualifying them from competition.

"They'd collapse under their own weight," Pugh said.

Traits that confer thick walls and flexibility are critical, so the fruit — yes, a pumpkin is a fruit — can withstand its own weight and environmental stressors.

See Pumpkins, Page A16

