

Umatilla bond seeks to repair aging school infrastructure

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
Staff Writer

Umatilla School District Superintendent Heidi Sipe has a great deal of affection for Clara Brownell Middle School.

Not just for its students and staff, but the actual facility itself, having started her teaching career in the building.

Sipe has a fondness for the way the ceilings of the gym and cafeteria resemble the bottom of a Viking ship — she didn't know whether the designers intended it to be a reference to the school's mascot or if it was just a coincidence. The building's sturdy structure built in 1947 by the Army

Corps of Engineers while they were constructing McNary Dam.

The \$10.5 million bond the Umatilla School District is seeking in November is less about redefining the characteristics of Umatilla's schools and more about modernizing their aging infrastructure, especially at the nearly 70-year-old Clara Brownell.

Sipe gave potential voters a tour of the middle school and explained many of facility's worst traits, which clash with its charms.

Central to its deficiencies is its heating and cooling system.

Sipe explained that

Clara Brownell's original single-paned windows are still in use, causing classrooms to get either terribly hot or cold depending on the season.

School staff can use a wall-mounted air conditioner or the school's antiquated heating system, but both options are noisy and distracting.

The heating system is linked to a boiler, which is contained in a room with equipment original to the school's opening where asbestos is covered only by thin plastic sheets.

Sipe said only maintenance worker Ron West knows how to fix the boiler. If he leaves the district, the

knowledge of how to maintain the school's heating system goes with him.

Plumbing is also a major issue at Clara Brownell, requiring the district to direct water only to the kitchen and bathrooms.

The district has sometimes had to cancel school when its heating or plumbing doesn't work.

The Wenaha Group evaluated Umatilla's three school facilities — Clara Brownell, McNary Heights Elementary School and Umatilla High School — and gave the middle school a 38 out of 100, the lowest grade between the three of them.

But the bond would also

be used for projects at the other locations, including a new roof and expanded cafeteria at McNary Heights and HVAC upgrades at Umatilla High School.

All three schools will also get new security systems, like one-touch lock-down and an indoor entrance that will require visitors to check in with the office before proceeding into the school.

As a member of the Umatilla School Board, Jon Lorence has been tasked with selling the bond to the community.

Lorence said one of his main challenges is quelling concerns that the bond would increase their tax bills.

Rather than add on additional costs, the bond proposal would extend the \$3.13 per assessed \$1,000 rate established under a previous bond from 2023 to 2035.

"It's not like we're going to cause a big ol' shock to the tax bill," he said.

With the bond slated to pay for new windows and the replacement of rotting wood along the border of the roof, and the district budgeting money for a new coat of paint, Clara Brownell has a shot at looking better than the building the Army erected in 1947.

Contact Antonio Sierra at 541-966-0836.

Rowan gains endorsement from department's bargaining unit

By **ERICK PALMER**
Guest Comment

The Umatilla County Law Enforcement Association (UCLEA), the collective bargaining unit for the employees of the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office and Umatilla County Community Corrections, proudly endorses Terry L. Rowan for re-election to the Office of Sheriff of Umatilla County.

In the past four years as Sheriff, Terry Rowan has protected our communities by substantially increasing the number of patrol deputies within the Sheriff's Office, allowing for better response times to calls for service and more thorough investigations. This has also increased the presence of the Sheriff's Office across Umatilla County, which has aided in crime prevention and higher arrest rates for people responsible for criminal activity. This is a feat that very few leaders from other agencies have been able to accomplish in such a short time frame.

Sheriff Rowan has also provided new equipment and training to the staff at the Sheriff's Office, which has been sorely needed for a number of years. This has provided for a more professional look and has given the employees the tools and skills they need to do their jobs more efficiently and more safely. Sheriff Rowan has increased the number of offenders being held in the Umatilla County Jail and holds them for as long as legally possible. This has helped all other police agencies in the area, and without a doubt, makes the entire criminal justice system work better. It also ensures

that the largest number of offenders are held accountable for crimes they commit within Umatilla County. This makes our county a safer place to live, work, and raise a family.

Sheriff Rowan has also tasked members of the staff with helping our partner agencies whenever possible and becoming more involved in our communities and schools. We assist others agencies in criminal investigations and evidence collection, and participate in programs involving crime prevention, traffic safety, animal care and safety, school safety and education, advanced medical care, alcohol and drug treatment, Veteran's services, mental health counseling and Crisis Intervention Training for people who are in a mental health crisis, and others.

As soon as Terry took over as Sheriff, he started making positive changes and improvements to the entire organization and continues to do so. Because of this, employee morale within the Sheriff's Office has never been higher. The agency has improved exponentially under Sheriff Rowan's leadership and he has proven to be a tremendous leader in our office and in the communities we serve. We know this because we work with him every day. As members of this county, we owe Sheriff Rowan our support in his bid for re-election.

"The men and women working in each of the divisions of the Sheriff's Office work hard and put their lives on the line to keep our families and communities safe," said Sheriff Rowan, "I am truly honored and hum-

bled to have received their endorsement and remain committed to shaping and gathering resources to meet the public safety demands of Umatilla County."

Erik Palmer is vice president of Umatilla County Law Enforcement Association and a resident of Athena.

Crash on Highway 207 kills one

A 63-year-old Heppner man died in a head-on crash Friday morning after a potato truck crossed in front of his vehicle on Highway 207.

Mervin Grubaugh was driving north on the highway in a 1996 Subaru Legacy about nine miles south of Hermiston and Maria Bautista Lucas, 60, from Yakima was heading south in a 1996 Mack

truck.

Lucas turned left at the Echo Highway turnoff, according to Oregon State Police, crashing nearly head-on into the Subaru at highway speeds. Grubaugh died at the scene and Lucas was taken to Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston where she was treated and released.

The crash took place

near the intersection at mile marker 27B at about 7:45 a.m. and the highway was closed for about five hours while investigators reconstructed the crash scene.

OSP was assisted by Hermiston Fire and Ambulance, Echo Fire and Oregon Department of Transportation. The investigation is ongoing, according to OSP.



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STUDENT OF THE WEEK

Christina "Tina" Combs
UKIAH HIGH SCHOOL

Ukiah School District recognizes Christina "Tina" Combs as Student of the Week! We enjoy Tina's enthusiastic approach to any class assignment or extracurricular opportunity. Tina is a senior, involved in Volleyball, Student Technology Association, Robotics, and 4-H, as well as helping her family on their farm. Tina's hobbies include riding horses, drawing, riding dirt bikes, and hunting. Her latest adventure was attending fire camp with the United States Forest Service. After graduation, Tina plans to attend Blue Mountain Community College for Veterinary Technician study, and perhaps transfer to Oregon State University, majoring in Veterinary Science. Congratulations, Tina! Thanks for being a great all-around student and human being!

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