

Hamlin students get to learn about science at UO

By **CRAIG MURPHY**
Springfield Times Editor

Hamlin Middle School students will be going to a different school on no-school Fridays this year.

Starting Oct. 14 and going through the rest of the school year – 11 Fridays in all – seventh- and eighth-grade students at Hamlin will take part in a pilot program involving science professors and graduate students at the University of Oregon.

“We’re calling it Mad Duck Science Days for now,” said Rachael Koller from the Brat-tain House, who is coordinating the program. “It was named by me but we will take a little poll and have students come up with a name. They know what they like.”

Michelle Jensen, afterschool program coordinator for Springfield Public Schools, has high hopes for the program.

“The goal is for kids to see themselves as scientists and college students,” said Jensen, who secured a grant for the program. “We will take them to the UO so that they’re doing science with professors and graduate students. When families see kids in that sort of environment, it’s a light bulb moment. It’s all about education.”

Jensen said Tuesday the Lane Transit District is providing round-trip bus passes so students can make it to the UO campus in Eugene.

Ben Muir, seventh-grade science teacher at Hamlin, has been helping coordinate things at the school level. As of earlier this week, he had signed up about 45 students for the program. There will be approximately 15 students each week of the program. “I think it’s going to be a great opportunity,” Muir said. “I’m super excited about it. I’m introducing microscopes here at Hamlin. There, they will use a scanning microscope only found on college campuses. It’s a great opportunity for our students. We could never give them something like that in our classroom.”

To Muir, the program jives with his educational philosophy.

“I specifically chose to teach middle school because it’s when most students decide if they’re interested in science or not,” he said. “When you get to high school, it’s too late. One of my main focuses is to get them interested in science and excited about what they are doing. This program is right in line with that. Working with grad students and professors, I hope it will make them more enthusiastic about science.”

Shannon Boettcher, assistant professor of Chemistry at the UO, is one of the professors looking forward to the new program.

“It’s very clear when you’re in

science the need for more science education, especially among children,” he said. “There’s been a really big push from the National Science Foundation. The research you do should be great, but you also have to think about how to improve education and reach out to the community.”

“This is a huge opportunity to do things for afterschool programs and now on furlough days to have extended activities,” Boettcher added. “Graduate students are also taking a large role. A lot of them are excited about education. A lot of them may end up as teachers themselves.”

Koller credited Muir with get-

ting students interested at Hamlin. Every student that wants to participate will be allowed to go before students can sign up for a second session.

“Hopefully there’s enough interest to expand the program,” Koller said. “Word of mouth is the best advertisement. If the kids come back and say it’s awesome, that would be the most exciting part of recruitment. They’ve been pretty excited so far. A lot of them are interested in the experience and using a high power microscope. We want them to be interested. We also want them to be passionate about science.”

feel privileged and blessed as a mom to be able to give him that experience. It’s important to learn about other cultures.

“It also opened his eyes to how good he has it here,” Jensen added. “I wanted him to see how fortunate we are here. Kids in other places don’t have what we have here. It helped him grow as a human being. It helped him be more aware of things. When I saw him for the first time since he came back, there was a depth to him. He left as a boy and came back as a man.”

Going on the trip was a big commitment for both Jensen and the school district, since her work still had to be done. Rhonda Griffiths was hired to oversee the afterschool program in Jensen’s absence.

“Our school board is really supportive of staff living up to their potential,” said Jensen,

who spoke with the Springfield School Board last September about her trip. “I sensed they were excited for me.”

Jensen was highly impressed by the job Griffiths did.

“It was a huge peace of mind,” Jensen said. “Rhonda did a

stellar job. We nicate and mak It really felt like continuity. The ally supportive in on an interim really importan

The Garden Bug

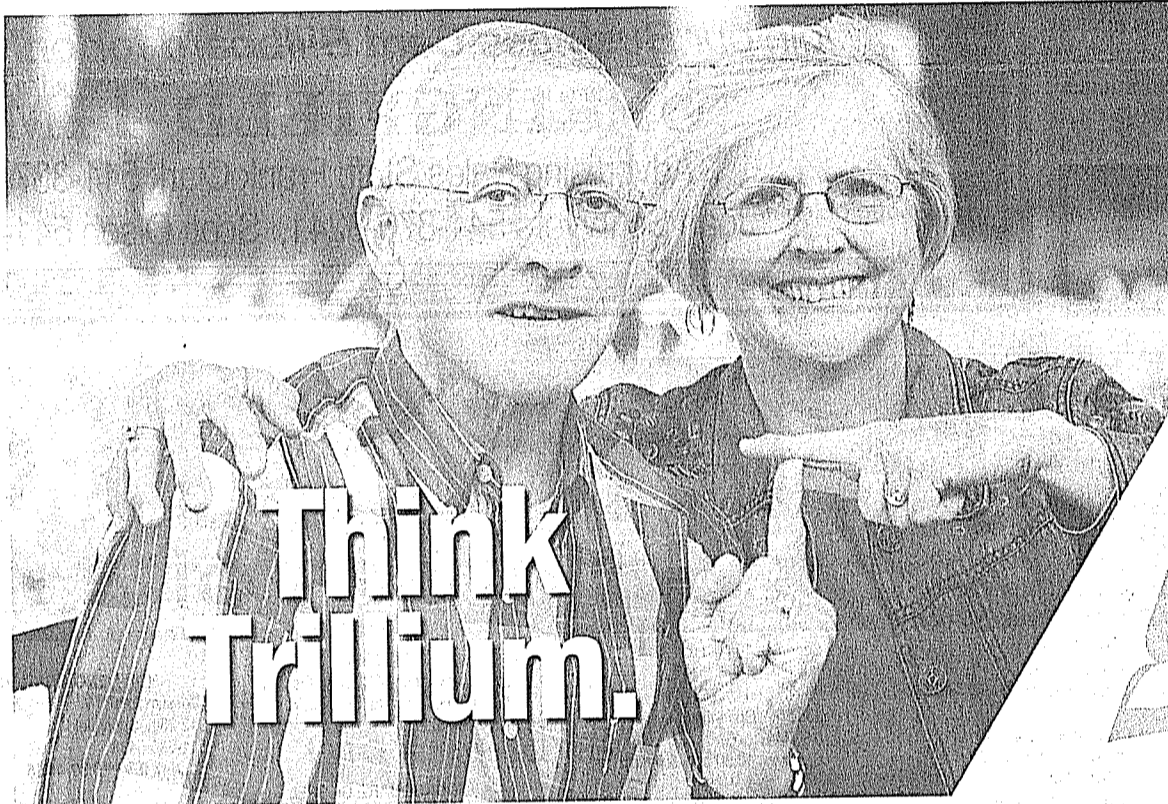
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October 19 • 2:00 PM
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