

EOU

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vancement at EOU, said the college will continue its evaluation and assessment of OPMs it could potentially partner with.

“That doesn’t mean it’s a foregone conclusion that we would utilize an OPM, but we will continue to evaluate what options we have with an online program management firm,” he said.

Seydel also echoed Insko’s statement about tuition levels.

“As we evaluated the potential OPM partnership with Pearson, we were discussing a number of different issues, but key among them would be our core commitment to providing accessible education particularly for in-state students. When we looked at where we needed to be and where Pearson needed to be (in relation to tuition), it wasn’t going to pencil out,” Seydel said.

In terms of a new timeline for deciding on an OPM partnership, Seydel said the university did not yet have one.

“There is no deadline, nor are we setting a firm time frame in place yet,” he said.

BAN

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And outside firefighting resources are not available due to the other major wild-fires in Oregon.

“Fuel moistures in the area are very low,” Wooldridge said in the press release. “The Haines Index is at medium to high levels for the foreseeable future, which can be an indicator of explosive fire growth.”

The burn ban approved by the Union County Commissioners places restrictions on all land outside of incorporated cities in the county.

At Wednesday’s meeting, County Commissioner Jack Howard expressed displeasure that the towns in Union County have not implemented their own burn bans yet, and the other commissioners agreed.

However, most of the towns automatically follow suit after the county has enacted a burn ban. And the Fire Defense Board is made up of all the fire chiefs in the county, which generally means the chiefs will recommend the same or automatically make the move for their own town.

In the City of Elgin, Ordinance Officer Alex Duffy said the city passed an ordinance that automatically enacts a burn ban when the county does.

The cities of Union, North Powder, Imbler, Summer-ville and Island City also follow the county.

The City of La Grande enacts its own burn ban and issued a press release within a couple of hours of the county’s announce-ment.

“The City of La Grande in conjunction with Union

WALDEN

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Assistance Program benefits.

Currently, people who are ages 18-49, not disabled and without children must work 20 hours a week to qualify for SNAP benefits. The House bill extends the age limit to 59 and requires parents of children older than 6 to work at least 20 hours a week or participate in job training.

Walden said it’s important to get more people into the workforce.

“In a time where there are more job openings than there are people to work, we need to help people to get out of poverty and incentivize them to do so,” he said.

All in all, Walden is confident the Farm Bill will get passed before the Sept. 30 deadline.

“I think there’s a lot of desire to get it done. I want to get it done,” Walden said. “It’s a really important safety net for agri-culture.”

Merrigan said Walden’s visit was the first time a U.S. congressman had visited Blue Mountain Seeds. Walden noted that he had never seen how grass seed is processed and was impressed by the sophisticated system.

TOBACCO

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tobacco retailers in Oregon still sells to people under the legal age,” said Tom Jeanne, deputy state health officer at the Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division. “Tobacco remains the number one preventable cause of death and disability and kills nearly 8,000 people in Oregon each year.”

In inspections conducted by the OHA earlier this year, nearly one in three randomly selected tobacco retailers in Union County were caught selling tobacco to people younger than 21. Out of 10 total inspections, a total of three sales were made in Elgin, Island City and Union for either ciga-rettes or cigarillos, according to OHA’s data.

In OHA inspections state-wide, retailers sold 18.3 per-cent of the time. Compared to similar inspections last year, when the minimum age was still 18, violations were at 16 percent, based on OHA data. Oregon results also included e-cigarette at-tempts, while Union County numbers did not; chewing tobacco also wasn’t included in sale attempts county and statewide.

State law requires retailers post signs stating customers younger than 21 cannot purchase tobacco, according to OHA, and those that are caught selling tobacco face a fine of up to \$500 for the first and second violations and up to \$1,000 for the third and subsequent violations.

Attempts to curb this issue have taken place in Union County since the mid-1990s in the form of the Union County Safe Commu-nities Coalition, a commu-nity effort made up of individ-uals and local organizations to reduce and prevent youth substance use. Through a Drug-Free Communities grant, of which UCSCC is in year seven of a 10-year cycle of funding, the coalition is able to focus its efforts on three substances: alcohol, marijuana and tobacco.

“A lot of different organi-zations are involved in the coalition. It’s kind of exciting to see them all come to-gether to work for a common goal,” said coalition coordinator Robin Wortman. “No one wants to see kids using substances we know impacts (them negatively). We know it impacts their brain development. Any usage can make it so that

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— Robin Wortman, UCSCC coordinator

they’re more susceptible to addiction, (and they are) more likely to become ad-dicted if they start using young. That’s one of the main reasons we work on prevention.”

One of UCSCC’s preven-tion efforts includes keeping tobacco retailers in check through the Reward and Reminder program. Imple-mented by the organiza-tion’s youth council, which is composed of local high school students, the program conducts its own inspections at least six times a year, eventually hitting all 26 to-bacco retailers in the county.

“It’s another opportunity to remind tobacco retailers to check ID,” Wortman said. “Our youth council mem-bers go in and request some sort of tobacco product they believe is commonly used by their peers, just to see if the clerk checks for ID.”

The process seems simple and straightforward enough: if customers look underage, check their ID. However, Wortman said that process isn’t consistently done.

“Clerks change frequently in convenience stores. You may have somebody who doesn’t know they should check IDs, or somebody who’s just not a good judge of (age), or who just doesn’t care,” she said. “It can be any of those things.”

Clerks may also check but still offer to sell, Wortman said. However, as long as clerks ask for ID before the actual transaction occurs they haven’t violated the law.

“At the beginning of the year, right after the age moved (from 18) to 21, I thought we would see less people not checking IDs, but that wasn’t the case,” she said. “I don’t believe store owners want their clerks to sell. It comes down to re-minding people (they) need to check. We’re wanting to help businesses do a better job.”

In UCSCC’s Reward and Reminder inspections, im-mediately after the youth are either sold or denied tobacco they notify the clerk of the inspection, and the UCSCC subsequently sends the store manager or owner a letter notifying them of the check, the date it occurred and whether they passed or failed, with the clerk in question remaining anony-mous. The program data from 2018 cited eight out of 26 retailers either didn’t check ID or checked ID and sold anyway.

Based on data collected through the Oregon Student Wellness survey by OHA, youth tobacco use in Union County has been on the decline since 2010.

Reported cigarette use in the eighth grade dropped from 10.7 percent in 2010 to 2.3 percent in 2016, and from 15.9 percent to 10.6 percent in the 11th grade.

However, data has largely yet to account for the in-creasing trend and usage of e-cigarettes/vapes/juuling among youth. While not all e-products have nicotine, they can be used to smoke other substances, and the monitoring of e-cigarette usage didn’t begin until around 2014, according to the Centers for Disease Con-trol and Prevention website.

“Youth are) more likely, now, to try e-cigarettes and that’s a nationwide prob-lem we’re seeing increase,” Wortman said. “Kids don’t think they’re as harmful (because) they’ve been ad-vertised as being less harm-ful, and we really don’t have a lot of research yet to prove one way or the other.”

Wortman remains hope-ful of the future, though.

“We’ve made some great strides (over the years),” she said. “I think we’ll continue to move forward, and I’m hoping that we’ll continue to see a drop in the rates of substance and tobacco use in Union County.”

UNION

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Cascade being the primary source of the company’s income, it started in the log hauling industry and will continue to do so in its new location.

BAR Trucking plans to ex-pand its business by having a screen plant that separates wood and rock material, according to the description. The company also may sell wholesale wood products in bulk to landscaping compa-nies as well as firewood from the new location.

The second business, Romans’ Precision Irriga-tion, purchased just short of four acres of property. The purchased lot is next to the highway and passersby can view what they have to offer. The business has a local office in Island City and another location in Vale, Burgess said. The irrigation company specializes in sales of irrigation products, design, fabrication, installation and maintenance of Valley products.

Union County Commis-sioner Jack Howard said Romans’ Precision Irrigation is a company that has ex-panded into different towns in Northeast Oregon and is an “aggressively growing company.”

Burgess said this busi-ness expansion will create four family-wage positions. The company purchased the four acres for \$78,207.

Commissioners Howard and Steve McClure com-mended Commissioner Donna Beverage who has taken on the responsibility of bringing businesses to the industrial park.

During Beverage’s campaign for her seat as commissioner, she said she wanted to help existing

businesses expand and new ones move to Union County. In a recent interview, she told The Observer she loves that her commitment to the industrial park is seeing results.

Also during Wednesday’s meeting, the commis-sioners approved a new paving project that will take place at the Baum Industrial Park to make the property even more enticing to businesses looking to locate there.

The Oregon Department of Transportation granted money to help support eco-nomic development through the construction of streets and roads.

Industrial Lane, Com-merce Road, Landmark Lane and Anderson Road, named after the late Steve Anderson, all roads at the in-dustrial park will be paved. For the businesses currently located there, this will be a welcome change from the dirt roads that have been there for nearly 30 years, according to McClure.

Beverage previously told The Observer the road kick-ing up dust was especially a nuisance for a business in the industrial park that paints farming equipment.

Finally, Sean Chambers,

Mt. Emily Recreation Area director, presented to the commissioners a proposal to swap 34 acres of MERA land with the same amount of acreage with landowners Milo and Kathleen Hibbert. The Hibberts live near For-est Service Road 3120 near the Fox Hill Road at MERA and regularly experience illegal shooting on their property.

Chambers said 34 acres west of the Forest Service Road will be acquired by the Hibberts and Union County would acquire 34 acres northeast of Fox Hill Road.

Milo Hibbert, who was with Chambers at the meet-ing, said he, his children and his grandchildren have been outside on his property and heard gunshots. He said with people shoot-ing too close for comfort to his property, he is worried something may happen.

Chambers agreed if the Hibberts took ownership of the property, which has “little to no recreational value to MERA as it is situated across the road and is a limited area for trail development,” the family can fence in the land and protect themselves from those trespassers.

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