

## TRAIL

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“MERA was kind of limited on the number of its motorcycle trails, so I wanted to add another one to give people a little more to ride,” Frost said. “I wanted to make it easy to moderate in difficulty, something anyone could ride on but with features that others could push themselves on a little.”

With the plans ready, Frost and Barber approached Sean Chambers, Union County Parks Coordinator and land manager at MERA. Frost explained his plan to Chambers for his approval before starting the trail building.

“It needed my OK to get through the process, a kind of check and balance thing, and I offered my professional oversight for providing drainage and those things we look at for building a sustainable trail,” Chambers said. “I let him go with his ideas and just did some minor tweeking.”

The trail design was impressive to Chambers, who has worked with Eagle Scouts and other individuals in the past on similar projects. He said Frost really understood what had been built at MERA, and he designed his own piece with his own signature and in a most professional way.

“He created a stacked loop trail system,” Chambers said. “There is a long loop and his trail provides a cutoff to get to some other elevations. It provides a variety of options that we all enjoy.”

One loop gets boring, but with Frost’s new trail, a rider can mix it up in a variety of different ways and make it that much more enjoyable.



Contributed photo

Blake Frost using a tool that will cultivate the soil for the motorcycle trail.

“It’s a moderate difficulty trail, and it will be a fun trail to ride,” Barber said. “It’s got some really neat views on it, and it fits in really well with the other trail systems we got going up there.”

“I did a pre-flagging of the route I wanted to do and afterward, Mark, Sean and I went out and modified the path of my trail to make it work and add some other features to it,” Frost said. “Once Sean approved it, I could start cutting the brush on both sides of the path.”

Blazing the trail was no easy job, and it required cutting down brush and vegetation for about 2-1/2 feet on either side of

the trail path. It became a family affair of cutters, and brush removers.

“It took a couple of days to do that,” Frost said. “My brothers Wyatt and Justin and my father, Steven Frost, helped me with the trails. As I cut, they stacked up the limbs so I didn’t have to stop and do that.”

He cut the final path into the hard earth using a McLeod long-handled forest fire tool. After it was finally cut out, Barber looked it over for some additional cutting.

“It’s a pretty rough cut trail,” Frost said. “It will take a couple of years of riding to get worked in.”

Barber was quite impressed with the end

result. “Blake’s a great kid and a hard worker,” he said. “He did everything he said he was going to do and made a great trail.”

Chambers agreed.

“I can’t believe he pulled it off so well,” Chambers said. “It’s an impressive undertaking for a young man and a very well thought out and implemented trail connection. He’s an exceptional young man.”

Frost’s trail, designated Route No. 306 Dead Bull, will be ready to ride in May or as soon as the snow melts off Mt. Emily. Chambers said that motorcycle trails are increasing in popularity as MERA gets more of a trail system put together. They are getting some good miles and loop options.

The trail runs along a ridgeline and there’s a main route that was once a cow trail that riders can follow. Off to the side are rock jumps and dead logs across the path that riders can go over. Different parts of the trail have different fun features that riders can enjoy.

Frost will be coming back to the trail this spring to work on a few things, but he thinks what it really needs is some riding to smooth it out. He is confident finding riders will not be a problem as the MERA motorcycle trails are well liked for their quality, terrain and natural beauty.

“MERA is the No. 1 tourist attraction in the valley,” Frost said. “After it was done, two dirt bikers from Baker City were riding the trail for the first time, and they thought it was cool because it had some good features and fluidity that they liked.”

“Everybody really likes the feel of these trails because they are a good challenge and well thought out,” Chambers said. ■

## TRUANCY

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For example, Wistocki said, truant students may be running to a drug dealer or away from a bully at school. The best way to find out what these students are running to or from is to check their cellphones, where one can find who they have interactions with on social media.

“It is all in here. It is all recorded,” said Wistocki, pointing to a smartphone.

Wistocki said everyone should strive to have an open mind and not dismiss students who are chronically absent.

“When a student is truant, it is not enough just to say, ‘That kid is a handful and he or she does not care.’ We must show that child there is a better way. We have to show them the resources that are available to them so they can succeed in school,” he said.

He believes it is critical for students to see they have an opportunity to turn things around and also recognize that dire consequences are on the horizon if they do not.

“Once the child knows there is hope (and realizes) ‘I will end up like that felon or that heroin addict if I don’t stay in school, we are hoping (it) will curtail their

truant behavior,” Wistocki said.

He emphasized students who have already been deemed, or are a few absences away from, becoming truant can have the course of their lives corrected with the help of diversion programs. A diversion program in the criminal justice system is a form of sentence in which an offender joins a rehabilitation program in lieu of being punished. Someone in a diversion program may be assigned community service work or be required to meet daily with a law enforcement officer serving as a resource officer at their school.

Wistocki said this is beneficial because it gives young offenders a chance to make amends and gives them a second chance.

“Children need guidance,” Wistocki said. “They do not need handcuffs.”

He said the path to his philosophy of restorative justice began when he realized many of the young people he met as a police officer in Naperville, Illinois, weren’t equipped to make good choices.

“They didn’t have guidance and support to understand and identify the risks that certain behavior exposed them to,” Wistocki said.

Diversion plans, which give

young people the opportunity to learn from their mistakes, are most effective when they can be developed with the help of parents, Wistocki said. He discovered this when working as a law enforcement officer. He found the more time he spent with parents, the better job he did of connecting with their son or daughter who was in trouble.

Wistocki believes it is important to give parents a say in the development of their child’s diversion program. For the most part, parents are grateful to be involved in the process.

“They were so appreciative their child was not put into the (criminal justice) system,” he said, explaining a diversion program can give parents “the opportunity to stop their child’s pipeline to prison.”

Parents are often eager to help with the development of a diversion program because it “provides them with a sense of empowerment,” Wistocki added.

The former police officer started working with Northeast Oregon school districts earlier in 2019 and will continue to do so at least through June of 2020 as part of a pilot project. His services are available to all school districts in the InterMountain Education Service District, which encompasses

most of Union, Umatilla and Morrow counties. His expertise is also available to the Hermiston School District, which is not part of the IMESD, and school districts in Baker and Wallowa counties.

Wistocki provides information on diversion programs via JuvenileJusticeOnline.org, a website he created. He said that law enforcement, probation and school administrators are referred to as diversion agents via this program.

Wistocki was brought to Northeast Oregon as part of an effort to reduce chronic absenteeism rates. The effort is being spurred by the Oregon Department of Education, which began placing greater emphasis on reducing chronic absenteeism rates about two years ago as a way to improve graduation rates. Students who are chronically absent are less likely to earn a high school diploma.

“Our chronic absenteeism rates are below the state average, but we always want to get them lower,” said Landon Braden, the InterMountain ESD’s chronic absenteeism director. “We are truly lucky to have (Wistocki).”

Wistocki has given six presentations in Northeast Oregon and four webinars for people in the region.

Over the next year he is set to give at least seven more talks here.

He is focusing on social media issues like cyberbullying and sexting while working with Northeast Oregon educators, parents and students. He understands the perils social media pose to youths because he specialized in investigating computer crime and protecting children online during his last 22 years with the Naperville Police Department.

Wistocki, a member of the Illinois Attorney General’s Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, said the key to protecting children is getting their parents involved by taking steps like monitoring the online activity of their sons and daughters. He said he tells parents they need to keep up with what their children are doing on Snapchat and Instagram and should monitor their social media contacts.

“If you are not doing this somebody else will be,” Wistocki tells parents.

One of the best ways for parents to do this is to use monitoring devices that allow them to see their children’s smartphone activity. He recommends parents get Android phones for their sons and daughters since they are easier to monitor than iPhones. ■

## FINES

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and passed, lowering the charge to a regular traffic violation and a fine of \$500. A 2017 article in Forbes reported the texting law in Alaska was “quietly scaled back” because a smaller fee was “easier to prosecute.”

In Oregon, drivers face a charge of \$1,000 for using a cellphone while driving, which is equivalent to the pay from 5.42 days of work for the average American, according to GoCompare. The fee is twice the \$500 fine of the next highest state, which is Indiana.

According to Kelly Kapri, manager of the Oregon Department of Transportation’s Distracted Driving Program, the fee is high in Oregon for a good reason.

“We found it didn’t impact driver behavior unless the fines were high enough,” she said.

The average fee nationally for using a cellphone while driving is \$100, according to GoCompare, while the average fee for speeding is \$125.50, compared to Oregon’s \$160 average speeding ticket, making Oregon rare in that drivers can be charged much more for using a cellphone than for speeding.

The Oregon Distracted Driving Law — or cellphone law — went into effect on Oct. 1, 2017, and is part of an

effort to reduce distracted driving, which ODOT reported caused 10 percent of Oregon’s traffic fatalities in 2014.

The law makes it illegal to use a cellphone while driving, but an update to the law in January 2018 gave courts the ability to waive the fee for first-time offenders if they take a class on the dangers of distracted driving.

There are certain exceptions to the law — for example, summoning medical help is permitted, and if you are older than 18, you are also allowed to use your cellphone via a hands-free device.

A second offense can result in a fine of \$2,500, and a third offense is considered a misdemeanor and can result in a fine of \$6,250 and a year of jail time. The fines and penalties are more serious when cellphone use results in a car accident.

The Distracted Driving Task Force, a committee within an ODOT, stated in its February report, “Distraction is often described (as) regarding cellphone use but also occurs with other activities such as consuming food or beverage, performing personal grooming, reading, interacting with a permanently installed device, or interacting with other passengers and pets.” The task force was created to address the problem of distracted

driving in Oregon and continues to work on the issue through the Distracted Driving Program.

Every day, at least nine Americans die and 100 are injured in distracted driving crashes, the National Safety Council reported.

April is Distracted Driving Awareness month. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration will partner with ODOT to run a campaign in the month of April to raise awareness for the issue of distracted driving and to enforce the cellphone law.

The task force report cited a 2016 study that stated 84 percent of drivers felt uncomfortable with a driver who was distracted, yet 75 percent admitted to driving distracted when alone. Kapri said the mission of the Distracted Driving Task Force is to encourage Oregon drivers to take dangers of distracted driving more seriously.

“Distracted driving is a costly mistake to make,” she said. ■

## CENSUS

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That money is used toward Section 8 housing, child care, school lunch programs, highways and health care centers,” said Bushore, who also pointed out the people who receive the most benefits from this funding are those who generally fall in the “hard to count” category.

Some citizens are reluctant to be counted based on concerns their information will not be protected.

“All of our enumerators swear an oath of confidentiality, and that’s a lifetime oath,” she said. “There are both monetary and other penalties associated if other information is disclosed.”

More information will come out as the census planning progresses. The census count must be completed in 2020. ■

## WESCOM

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Avenue in Sonora sold recently for about \$1 million, and the proceeds were used to pay property taxes and lower the company’s outstanding debt.

The bankruptcy filing, which was initiated on Jan. 22, lists creditors both secured and unsecured. Among those owed are shareholders, officers of the company and the Internal Revenue Service.

In an effort to balance expenses with revenues earlier this year the company laid off 33 employees companywide and required 13 employees to work reduced work weeks.

The company has furloughed workers and does not offer a qualified health

insurance plan. During part of 2018, employee paychecks were delayed.

The Bulletin recently went through a redesign to reduce newsprint use while emphasizing local news coverage.

This is the second time Western Communications has filed for Chapter 11 protection. The first was in August 2011 to relieve financial pressure from a 3-year dispute with Bank of America, the company’s largest creditor at the time. Chapter 11 allows companies the time to reorganize while remaining in business.

“The family (the Chandler family and the stockholders) would like to keep The Bulletin,” Costa said. “It’s the strongest market.” ■

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