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LA GRANDE

Miller's ready for new home

■ Business moves to new facility in La Grande

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

A business that has been around La Grande for decades has moved to a new location. Miller's Home Center is almost finished with its move into its new home. The address is 3109 May Lane but access to the new facility is off Island Avenue. Take a turn opposite of Walton Road at the intersection near Walmart and you will see the business' much larger store and warehouses open for business starting Tuesday.

"We have had the dream (of a bigger store) for a long time," Steve Colkitt, CEO and president, said. "The main thing is to service customers better, service employees better and to have less waste."

The new store will house more product than ever before, selling everything from cleaning supplies and household tools to commercial grade building materials in bulk. Jeff Patterson, one of Miller's managers, said the hope is that the store will become a one-stop shop for everything a person may need for home repairs and larger construction projects.

"It's about being able to offer our community more than we ever have before," Patterson said. "We want to serve the contractors, we want to serve the homeowners, we want to serve everyone with that one-stop approach."

Before the move to the larger space, which consolidates the company's products and services, customers had to go to different buildings across the railroad tracks to get lumber or tools. Now all of the materials a person might need are in one location, keeping store employees ready and available to help.

"For employees and for customers, it's better product and better service," Colkitt

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Strike averted at Oregon universities

■ Walkout avoided as tentative agreement reached with state's universities, workers



Dick Mason/Observer file photo

Members of the Eastern Oregon University chapter of SEIU Local 503, the union representing classified staff workers, participate in an on-campus rally Aug. 5.

By Dick Mason, The Observer

Eastern Oregon University officials and the school's classified staff workers can breathe a sigh of relief, for it appears a strike has been narrowly averted.

Bargaining teams from Oregon's seven public universities and the SEIU-represented classified employees union reached a tentative agreement on a two-year labor contract Saturday. Had a settlement not been reached over the weekend, the state's 4,500 classified staff employees, including about 130 at Eastern, would have gone on strike today.

The workers had voted on Sept. 17 to go on strike Sept. 30 if an agreement on a new contract had not been reached. The contract, if ratified by a vote of classified staff employees, will provide a total of 5.1% in cost of living increases over the next year. Employees will receive a 3% cost of living increase retroactive to July 1 of this year and a 2.1% cost of living increase effective July 1, 2020, according to information provided by a spokesperson for the Oregon's public universities.

Classified staff employees will also receive full step wage increases of 4.75% in each year of the contract. This applies to the more than 70% of classified employees who are not already at the top step of their wage scale, which takes 10 years to reach. Employees receive step increases each year for satisfactory or better performance.

A longevity premium of 2.5% will be given yearly to classified employees who have "topped out" and no longer qualify for step wage increases, if they have been at the university at least five years and have been at the top of their salary schedule for at least a year.

Health care, pension, holidays, vacations, sick leave, personal leave and bereavement benefits would remain as they are in 2017-19 contract for classified staff.



Dick Mason/Observer file photo

Classified staff at EOU and at Oregon's six other public universities will vote on ratification of a new two-year contract in October. Members of EOU's classified staff are shown here at a Aug. 5 rally.

Classified staff are student services employees, such as custodians, carpenters, plumbers, office specialists, information technology specialists and heating, air conditioning and ventilation specialists.

Tim Seydel, EOU's vice president for university advancement, said he and many others are very encouraged that there is a tentative agreement.

"Everyone at EOU is very happy and relieved that a

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CLIMATE CHANGE

Lecture paints an alarming picture

By Dick Mason
The Observer

Climate change is doing more than raise ocean levels and global temperatures — it is also playing cruel tricks on Mother Nature.

David Mildrexler, a systems ecologist for Eastern Oregon Legacy Lands, made this and many other often alarming points Thursday during his presentation, "Future Trends in Climates and Ecosystems in the Pacific Northwest" at La Grande's Cook Memorial Library.

A portion of Mildrexler's presentation addressed the impact of global warming and included recent photos of snowshoe hares whose coats change from white to rusty brown during the year to help them blend in with their surroundings. The pictures are disturbing for they show snowshoe hares with white fur against a background of dark vegetation and soil and barren of snow.

"It does not blend in with the surroundings anymore (in late winter and early spring)," Mildrexler said of the snowshoe hare. "It is more vulnerable now."

This is an indication of how snow is disappearing in many locations earlier each year because of global warming.

"Snow is declining everywhere. It is very concerning," Mildrexler said.

Those who are being impacted in a big way by climate change include people living in coastal areas. Mildrexler said rising sea levels caused by glaciers melting due to warmer weather are putting towns near oceans at risk.

"Coastal areas are very vulnerable," Mildrexler said.

This means natural events like full moons that raise ocean levels may make communities in areas near

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Mildrexler

Marijuana vape sales lag as illnesses rise

■ Lung disease related to vaping products has sickened more than 800 individuals

By Gillian Flaccus
and Jennifer Peltx
The Associated Press

PORTLAND — Vaping products, one of the fastest-growing segments of the legal marijuana industry, have taken a hit from consumers as public health experts scramble to determine

what's causing a mysterious and sometimes fatal lung disease among people who use e-cigarettes.

The ailment has sickened at least 805 people and killed 13. Some vaped nicotine, but many reported using oil containing THC, marijuana's high-inducing ingredient,

and said they bought products from pop-up shops and other illegal sellers.

The only death linked to THC vapes bought at legal shops occurred in Oregon, where health officials on Thursday announced a second fatality and urged people to stop vaping.

Amid the health scare, the amount of the legal pot industry's revenue that comes from vape products has

dropped by 15% nationwide, with some states seeing decreases of more than 60%.

Vaping THC is popular for those desiring a quick high without the smoke that comes from lighting up joints. Marijuana companies are trying to boost the public's confidence by promoting that their vaping products are tested by the government, demanding ingredient lists from their vendors and

in some cases pulling items from shelves. Some also are scrambling to get liability insurance.

Still, many have seen notable declines in sales since the health scare emerged on a national scale last month.

"It's having an impact on how consumers are behaving," said David Alport, owner of Bridge City Collective in Portland, which in

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