



Photo by Jessica Pollard/EO Media Group

Members of BMCC Hermiston Center’s new club, Unidxs, post for a photo Wednesday at the college. The club met to discuss a recent fundraiser.

New Hermiston BMCC club is taking off

By Jessica Pollard
EO Media Group

HERMISTON — For the first time in years, the Blue Mountain Community College Hermiston Center has a new Latino club focused on leadership. It’s called “Unidxs.”

“The Spanish language is very gendered,” said Nayali Contreras, one of the club’s advisors. “Unidos, masculine, and unidas, feminine, both translate to ‘united.’ The ‘X’ in unidxs’ is to make it gender inclusive. This is a way for people not to have to choose between masculine and feminine.”

A year ago, campus life at the Hermiston Blue Mountain Community College Center was scant.

“Last year,” said student Zayra Preciado, who is in charge of marketing for the new group, “I didn’t see much student life.”

According to Contreras, who also is coordinator for

the Precision Irrigated Agriculture Facility at BMCC Hermiston and an advisor for the group, there aren’t any clubs this year besides Unidxs.

“The center has felt more alive this year,” she said.

The idea for the club started growing last year, according to Contreras. Back then, she served as the school’s student success coach and said there was a want to create more space in the community for the Hermiston Center’s 46% Latino population.

“We wanted to add a Latinx liaison title to the student success coach position,” she said.

At a recent BMCC board meeting this month, members approved Selene Torres-Madrano’s contract for that dual position. Torres-Madrano also advises Unidxs.

Contreras also dreamed of organizing a special

graduation celebration for the school, which would provide a more personal cultural space in addition to the BMCC graduation commencement each year. The first annual iteration of the Latinx Graduation Celebration is set to take place at the end of this school year.

“I was also trying to think of something not just driven by me,” she said. “As staff, I might not be here in a few years.”

Enter, the Unidxs club. The club is comprised of six organizers and five members so far this year. The organizers are all planning on moving on to four-year universities after getting their two-year transfer degrees at BMCC and are interested in everything from journalism to kinesiology.

“It’s nice to have a space to be around people who go through the same struggles

as you,” said the group’s treasurer, Brenda Mendoza.

Elias Esquivel, the club’s president, puts it plainly. “I had no friends here before this club,” he said. “I think its growth will continue.”

Their first order of business is organizing fundraisers in hopes of attending the U.S. Hispanic Leadership Institute conference in Chicago, Illinois, this February.

This month, they sold 134 dozen tamales and raised more than \$1,000 toward that goal.

Contreras said that many schools on the west side of the state, including Oregon State University, send swaths of students to the national event each year. The institute’s website describes the event as a good opportunity for young people to network with policy makers and prospective employers.

“I’m not sure if people here don’t know about it,”

she said. “But no one on this side of Oregon has made attending the conference a priority.”

Esquivel said now that the initial fundraiser is over, the group is kicking back and planning more team-oriented events as well, such as bowling. But they’ve also been honing their networking skills.

Recently, club members met with Hermiston-based Latino organization Raices to learn how they might help out with the organization’s events in the future.

“Part of our mission is to be involved with the community,” Mendoza said.

Contreras hopes as the club gains momentum, its student members will develop leadership skills that they can take with them to their next college experience.

“I really want this club to be a leadership development experience,” Contreras said.

Baxter tapped as Baker County district attorney

EO Media Group staff

SALEM — Governor Kate Brown last week announced that she will appoint Greg M. Baxter to be district attorney of Baker County, effective immediately. He fills a vacancy created by Gov. Brown’s recent appointment of previous District Attorney Matthew B. Shirtcliff to the Baker County Circuit Court.

Baxter’s father, also named Greg, is a previous district attorney for Baker County who recently retired as Baker County Circuit Court judge. The elder Baxter’s retirement created the vacancy that Shirtcliff was appointed to fill.

“Greg Baxter has earned the trust of residents, law enforcement, and community partners in Eastern Oregon,” Brown said. “His experience as a prosecutor and his deep ties to the community will serve him well as he assumes his role as Baker County’s district attorney.”

Baxter grew up in Baker City, and is a graduate of Baker High School. He earned his undergraduate degree from Brigham Young University – Idaho, and received his law degree from Florida Coastal School of Law. He serves as the chief deputy district attorney in the Union County District Attorney’s Office, where he has worked since 2014. Baxter previously served in the Wallowa County District Attorney’s Office.

In addition to his experience as a prosecutor, Baxter is involved in his community and the local bar. He serves as a board member for Domestic Violence Shelter from the Storm, participates in Rotary Club, and is a member of Union County’s Treatment Court, Multi-Disciplinary Child Abuse Team, Sexual Assault Response Team, and Domestic Violence Team. He also volunteers for the Union County Victim’s Impact Panel, and has volunteered as a judge of high school mock trial competitions.

Intrepretive Center admission free in December

EO Media Group staff

BAKER CITY — Admission will be free for all visitors to the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center during December.

The Center, operated by the Bureau of Land Management, is about five miles east of Baker City off Highway 86.

The Center will shift to its winter

schedule, open Thursday through Sunday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., starting Monday.

A ranger-led tour will be offered at 2 p.m. daily to give additional insight into the lives of people who traveled on the Oregon Trail.

Pioneer skills will be demonstrated at 11 a.m. on Fridays and Sundays, including candle-dipping, rag doll

tying and other pioneer crafts.

At any time, youngsters and the young at heart who fulfill the Junior Ranger challenge by completing fun activities while exploring the exhibits can take the Wagon Master’s Pledge at the end and receive a prize.

Only a few weeks are left to explore “Uncanny Tales along the Or-

egon Trail” in the Flagstaff Gallery, highlighting the folklore that sprung up around the pioneer experience, and the role these tales play in the history of the Oregon Trail. This exhibit will close Dec. 20.

For a complete schedule of events and activities at the center, call 541-523-1843 or go to oregontrail.blm.gov.

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“It’s just such a special thing to have that opportunity to play in the state championship. Being involved as a grandfather makes it a lot more emotional,” Neil Cooper said. “You’re much more involved in a different way. You know what it takes to get there, and it takes a lot of work.”

The 1974 team rode a stout defense to the state championship when it defeated Corvallis, 26-7, and the 2019 version of the Tigers did the same thing. In seven games between the two teams, they surrendered just 29 points.

Defense ruled the day early Saturday, and Rick Simonis, a linebacker and captain on the 1974 team, likened the early game to a different sport.

“It started out like a couple boxers, feeling each other out. I think Banks was

conditioned well enough to stay with us,” Simonis said. “Their front defensive line was like a brick wall.”

He believed, however, that it was the La Grande team’s level of fitness that helped it pull away in the second half.

“It was obvious (the Tigers) were more conditioned,” he said.

The Tigers also seemed to be better prepared to handle the cold, as they seemed minimally impacted by the game-time temperatures in the low 20s.

“I think last night the cold affected Banks a little bit,” Cooper said on Sunday.

The chill, however, did not dampen the enthusiasm of the multitude of fans who made the trip to Hermiston to watch the game, including Robby Shells, father of lineman Anthony Chavez, who said witnessing the victory was exciting.

“It was cold, but it was worth it,” he said.

Many of the players from the ’74 team, including

Mark Goss, said watching the Tigers win brought back a wave of memories.

“It’s something that will stay with them forever,” he said. “The biggest deal is the camaraderie between the teammates. You’ll always have that connection.”

The former defensive back was able to appreciate the efforts of the La Grande secondary as it — and the rest of the Tiger defense — shut down Banks’ potent passing offense.

“Going into this game I knew the defense was going to play a big role. I didn’t think Banks had faced a defense like ours,” Goss said. “Obviously they didn’t perform too well with our defense.”

Corky Hunt, the defensive back and quarterback’s coach on the 1974 team, also was impressed with La Grande’s defense Saturday, which held Banks to 167 yards.

“I thought particularly in the second half that La

Grande was so quick to the ball,” he said. “When there was an opening we converged so quickly. The defense was outstanding. They were strong, but most of all I was impressed with their quickness and speed. They converged on every play with three, four, sometimes five tacklers.”

The victory set off a celebration back in La Grande. The team received a police escort on its return into town — similar to the way it left for Hermiston earlier that afternoon — then was greeted by hundreds of fans packed into Local Harvest on Island Avenue for festivities that lasted well past midnight.

Brandon Zollman, father of wide receiver and defensive back Josh Zollman who was at Local Harvest, said he was jazzed up for his son and the team.

“He had such a great year,” he said, adding he was pleased they played a great game.

Simonis said he recalled the way the win 45 years ago united the community, and anticipates this win will do the same.

“The thing that sticks in my mind most is the

community,” he said. “It really brings the community together.”

Goss concluded by saying: “Congratulations to them. Enjoy the ride. It’s a neat deal.”

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