

# FOOD BANK

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space, allowing the regional food bank to provide more fresh food items, such as milk and eggs.

"It will give us more options. We will be able to provide a wider variety of healthier foods," Davidson said.

The new distribution center will not only provide more space inside but also outside, with an expansive parking area, making it much easier and safer for large trucks to make deliveries. Davidson noted that presently it's difficult for large trucks to make deliveries at the Union County Senior Center which has a much smaller and more crowded parking lot.

The distribution center's move to Island City will have no impact on the services it offers to the public at the Union County Senior Center. All services there now will continue at its present site, including food distribution services.

Community Connection began looking for a larger distribution center site about 2-1/2 years ago.



Mat Barber and Margaret Davidson, of Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, discuss the renovation of the old Pendleton Grain Growers building into a food distribution center on June 11, 2021. Davidson is the executive director of Community Connection and Barber is the construction manager for the project.

The search was frustrating at first. The first six sites looked at failed to meet all of Community Connection's needs. Davidson said for a while it appeared that Community Connection would have to construct its own building. Then it was learned that the PGG building, which

Romans' Precision Irrigation had just moved out of, was available for sale.

Community Connection leaders soon determined that the PGG building had met all its needs.

"Everything clicked. It was perfect," Davidson said.

Renovation work started

in late March. The construction manager for the project has been Mat Barber, of Community Connection.

"He has been invaluable in keeping the project moving," Davidson said.

The Northeast Regional Food Bank must be out of its storage building at



The Northeast Oregon Regional Food Bank sign hangs on the old Pendleton Grain Growers building in Island City on June 11, 2021. The building is being converted into a food distribution center for the food bank.

the Union County Senior Center by July 31 due to an order from the Federal Transit Administration.

The FTA issued its order because the food bank's present location was originally built to serve as a site for the operation of a public transportation operation, Davidson said. Northeast Oregon Public Transit, which Community Connection also operates, will later use the site to house vehicles and equipment.

Davidson said the FTA order spurred Community Connection to begin

searching for a new distribution center site. She noted though that even before the order, the organization needed a larger distribution center.

"We knew we needed more space before then," she said.

The Northeast Oregon Regional Food Bank provides food to 18 pantries in Union, Wallowa, Baker and Grant counties plus additional sites including Department of Human Services offices. The food bank provided 1.3 million pounds of food in 2020.

# GAU

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that's occupied, with the faculty and staff still being in there," Moore said. "Getting everybody coordinated can be a big challenge."

## 'A win-win for everyone'

For Gau, the close proximity of his music classes in Loso Hall to the McKenzie and Schwarz theaters made it easy to balance school with work because he was always in the same building. A major project Gau worked on was the reflooring of the McKenzie Theater, which he says was a much-needed renovation.

"He did a really good

job and it was a win-win for everyone," Moore said.

Additionally, Gau's other biggest takeaways from the improvements are the extended handicap accessibility and new riggings that are faster and safer. McKenzie Theater will now operate with a digital sound system and LED lighting, which are major improvements from the standalone speakers used in previous years.

"Now having everything connected and plugged together within itself is super nice," Gau said. "It will make our performances and shows even better than they were."

McKenzie Theater will be utilized during the Eastern Oregon Film Festival, the first big event

that EOU has planned in the theater since the renovations. In previous years, the film festival organizers would have to bring in their own equipment and were limited in the scale of the film presentation. Now with a 13-foot by 24-foot projector screen and digital setup, McKenzie Theater is better suited for a large-viewing event.

"From the quality improvements all around as far as infrastructure, we're really excited," said EOFF director and co-founder Chris Jennings.

## Major changes

The most noticeable changes at Loso Hall are the updates to McKenzie Theater, but Schwarz Theater underwent a major upgrade

as well. Construction crews installed the same sound and light upgrades as McKenzie Theater, but also added a rotating turntable floor and painted the walls black for black-box style performances.

In order to add the rotating floor, the workers elevated the entire ground level to align with the rest of the building and make the space more accessible for individuals with physical disabilities. The performing area previously had a step down at all entrances.

"It makes it much easier to work with and adapt," theater professor Mike Heather said. "Getting a piano in here or a lift to work on lighting is now possible."

Gau will mostly perform

in McKenzie Theater, but recognizes what the renovations mean for the future of the music and theater programs at EOU.

"When people come in and they see this brand-new, high-tech and fully optimized theater, it's just an extra sway in the way of Eastern," Gau said.

While the renovations will make Loso Hall an integral part of the school's performing arts programs, Gau pointed out that the professors in the music program are the best he's had in college.

"They're less professors and more mentors and friends," Gau said. "I think that helps with how small we are, but it doesn't stop us from doing anything we want to."

Gau has his eyes set on becoming a music educator, preferably at the high-school level. However, he says construction is a fall-back for him and that those skills can take someone far in life.

With the recent COVID-19 trends, music and theater students at EOU will likely get the chance to return to performing at live events in the 2021 school year. For Gau, it will be a full-circle experience getting to perform in the spotlight of a theater he helped construct.

"I think that this floor will last many years," Gau said. "Seeing all the work I've done and helped put in really puts a smile on my face."

# BILL

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aid were eligible for Oregon Opportunity Grant funds, but only about 16% of those students received grants because of limited available funding.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown had initially recommended funding for the Oregon Opportunity Grant at about \$171 million last December. If lawmakers pass the most recent iteration of a budget bill, the grant would stand at \$200 million for the upcoming two-year budget period.

The Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission says that

extra bump of funding would increase the total number of grant recipients from roughly 65,600 to about 76,600 in the upcoming biennium.

"That is really important, especially for students in this region because we have a lot of students with financial need who want to go to college," Seydel said. "That Oregon Opportunity Grant makes it possible."

Seydel said the pandemic has many students having to make tough financial decisions, but the increased funds could make college a reality for more of them.

Along with the increased funding to

the Oregon Opportunity Grant, lawmakers are also examining changes to another state financial aid program — the Oregon Promise.

The Oregon Promise was created in 2015 to help cover most tuition costs at Oregon community colleges for recent high school graduates and GED recipients. At the time it was announced, Oregon Promise was touted as the state's "free community college" financial aid program.

Another bill in the Legislature would broaden the program's focus and change who's eligible to use it. House Bill 2093 would expand the eligibility requirements for the

program and make other changes such as: lowering the grade point average requirement for students from 2.5 to 2.0, doubling the minimum grant award to \$2,000 and cutting a \$50 per term copay.

Notably, the bill would also expand the permitted uses of the grant funds to include students not only looking to attend community colleges, but also public universities and nonprofit, regionally accredited private institutions.

# COUNCIL

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the mapping methodology, questioning whether the LiDAR technology is accurately taking into account areas covered by trees as well as if newly added areas are necessary if there has never been flooding there in the past. The range determining method used a 20-foot by 20-foot grid across the entire city of La Grande to track the floodplain data and compile an updated map.

The renewed map will directly impact homeowners who have been added to flood zones in terms of the tax value of

their property and the price of flood insurance. This apprehension was voiced by a handful of La Grande citizens and echoed by the councilors as they discussed potential appeal options for homeowners added to the flood zones once the map is sent to FEMA.

The thought of reevaluating the mapping and a potential do-over was discussed, but Boquist and the council agreed that spending more money to reevaluate the map would leave the city short in the long run if citizens need help appealing to FEMA once the maps are put into effect. Carpenter and Boquist noted that using a

smaller grid in the LiDAR measurement would likely still result in the same flood zones.

Clements moved that the city council authorize Anderson Perry to send the map to FEMA and councilwoman Mary Ann Miesner seconded the motion. Councilors John Bozarth, David Glabe and Justin Rock joined Clements and Miesner in voting yes.

Upon sending FEMA the updated floodplain maps, the process of officially marking the new zones will take two or more years to refine. FEMA will work back-and-forth with the city during this time frame if any adjustments need to be made.

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### June 27, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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Stop by at the Union County Chamber for a map.  
207 Depot St. Facebook/Union County Farm Crawl

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