

# Return from remote work provides energy-saving opportunities

By **JADE McDOWELL**  
Hermiston Herald

HERMISTON — As businesses reopen, extend their hours or bring workers back to the office for the first time since the pandemic began, Energy Trust of Oregon is reminding them it is a good opportunity to examine their energy usage.

“Smaller changes that wouldn’t be noticeable to employees working in the space or customers can make a big difference,” said Susan Jowaiszas, marketing lead for Energy Trust of Oregon.

She said businesses can think about how they’re using their buildings, and pull back on heating or cooling areas that aren’t being used, for example.

That practice has been a focus for Blue Mountain Community College.

Dwayne Williams, facilities director for BMCC, said his department has asked all staff to provide a schedule of when they will be in their offices or classrooms so that they can plan heating, cooling and lighting accordingly. If no one is going to be in a certain room or section of the building, the temperature will be allowed to drop or climb, depending on the season.

“We’re doing our best to try and conserve as much energy as we can while still keeping everyone comfortable,” he said.

The HVAC systems across BMCC’s campuses can be controlled remotely from Pendleton, as can much of the lighting, which is also attached to motion sensors.

The college is part of Energy Trust of Oregon’s Strategic Energy Man-

agement program, which provides a free year-long training and cash incentives for businesses and other organizations looking to save money on energy. Williams said BMCC has saved thousands of dollars through simple management practices, and been able to funnel that money back into things like new equipment for groundskeeping staff.

In 2019 they had a contest between buildings owned by the college. The building that saw the most energy savings over the course of a month got \$1,000 for staff in that building to use on something that would help them save energy, such as lap blankets. Williams said that small activity provided a good reminder for people to get in the habit of thinking about their energy

consumption.

“People would walk by and turn the lights off if no one was in the room,” he said. “We did actually see some pretty good savings.”

In addition to being strategic about heating, cooling and lighting schedules, Energy Trust of Oregon recommends businesses think about the air they’re using. Jowaiszas said with the focus on airflow in preventing the spread of COVID-19, many businesses are following recommendations to pull in 100% of the air coming through the HVAC system from outdoors instead of recirculating the same air inside the building.

While that is a good practice to help protect people from airborne viruses, she said, pulling hot air in from outside takes more energy to heat, so

businesses keeping their HVAC system on to some extent in their off hours could consider recirculating air during times no one is in the building.

Keeping blinds closed when hot sunlight is pouring in during the summer and opening them to let sunshine in during the winter can also help, she said. So can keeping thermostats at a more moderate level, sealing up cracks with caulk and using weatherstripping under doors.

If a business is opening up their building after a long period of employees working from home, she said, they should be especially careful to check that filters, heat pumps, vents and other parts of their HVAC systems are clean.

“It’s not uncommon to find birds’ nests, raccoon leavings, beehives,

and things like that inside, which can hinder airflow,” she said.

When it comes to equipment, starting up large items on a staggered timetable instead of all at once can help prevent a surge to the system. Jowaiszas recommends people also do their research on energy ratings and available incentives when purchasing new appliances or other equipment for their business.

“When people are looking at purchasing equipment, they need to look at not just what the equipment costs upfront but also what it will cost to run over time,” she said.

The cheapest energy is the energy we as a society never have to produce, she said, so Energy Trust of Oregon is here to help people save as much power as they want to.

## BEES

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kind of motivated me to get started,” Barnes explained. “And it was purely a hobby. I only extracted enough honey for our own use.”

After 10 years in Washington working as an open channel hydraulic engineer, Barnes grew tired of the growing population and wanted to move to somewhere she could ride her horses. While visiting Oregon, she stopped in La Grande and noticed its resemblance to her hometown in Colorado, which inspired her to move to the area.

When she moved to La Grande and began a job as a hydraulics engineer for the Oregon Department of Transportation, Barnes signed up for the Oregon Master Beekeeper Program at Oregon State University, and she never looked back.

“That program really

kicked me into expanding into more than just a couple of hives,” Barnes recalled. “I learned a bunch, and when I decided to leave work a little early, I got more into it and then I did some traveling to Slovenia for a beekeeping excursion.”

According to Barnes, the trip to Slovenia completely changed the way she viewed beekeeping. While there, she toured local beekeepers’ operations and saw them in practice.

“I came back from Slovenia really inspired,” she said. “The beekeepers there are phenomenal, and they might be small, but their hearts are really in it.”

Now, two years after that trip, Barnes has expanded Circle A Bees to 12 beehives, each of which starts with one queen bee and nearly 25,000 worker bees. She said that the Farm-2Food accelerator program has given her new ideas for expanding her business and working with other



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Caroline Barnes inspects a hive as worker bees scatter across the honeycomb on Tuesday, June 22, 2021. This hive, according to the La Grande beekeeper, is missing its queen as evidenced by the lack of larvae cells.

beekeepers.

“Small beekeepers aren’t making any money because the prices don’t reflect the amount of work that goes

into it,” Barnes said. “I get excited about other beekeepers on a similar scale, and I’d like to explore creating a co-op for beekeepers

that are producing honey and not selling to large corporations.”

However, Barnes has learned that running your

own beekeeping business is no easy task. Every spring, she works to replace queens, clean out hives, move the hives to different locations, and then work to feed them. For most of the summer, she performs regular inspections to ensure the bees are being fed and producing the honey.

In the fall, she extracts and packages the honey.

She works mainly by herself, though she hopes to hire someone long-term next year.

But to Barnes, beekeeping isn’t about money — it’s about the integrity of her product and of the process behind it.

“I don’t envision making much money off of it,” she said. “It’s all about respecting the environment, trying to reduce impacts and supporting good practices. Beekeeping is a lifetime experience of learning. The more you know, the more you realize you don’t know.”

## RANCH

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“Now, six years later, they’re gathering them again,” she says, though she’s unsure of the herd’s current numbers.

“There are a lot of horse advocates out there for the wild mustangs, too, who say, ‘Hey, this is an American heritage, a living symbol of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West.’ But you really have to look at it as overpopulation,” she says. “It’s just like with people. You have to manage it somehow or it’s just going to get out of control. I don’t want to say I believe in slaughter, but ...”

Dawn said she’s aware of three horse slaughterhouses in Canada and five in Mexico. The last three in the U.S. closed in 2007 under pressure from animal-rights groups. But was that the best solution?

“Even the loving horses that you’ve raised from birth, people will take quarter horses ... and, unfortunately, there’s a bad rap going on for the (BLM’s Adoption Incentive Program) right now,” Dawn says.

### Taming friends

Dawn spends hours each day working with her mustangs learning the idiosyncrasies of each.

“I troubleshoot what each horse will let you do,” she says.

The first difficult chore, once a mustang has been brought to where it will be trained, is to get a halter on it. Keeping the bridle on can be a chore, too. One mare, CoCo, was an example.

“She’s still learning that touches aren’t going to hurt her and what is OK and what isn’t OK,” Dawn says. “She lost her halter the other day and it took my husband about 10 minutes to get it back on.”

She has to find ways to gradually get horses used to being touched.

“When people try to put a bridle on a horse, the horse is like, ‘Don’t touch me.’ They’re very sensitive up here,” she says, touching CoCo’s head.

Dawn is still trying to get her wildest mustang to relax around her. Girlfriend was only two weeks out of the wild.

“It took me about a week to be able to touch her,” Dawn says.

She often uses a long stick with a string on it much like is used to direct show hogs. It gets the mustang used to being touched.

“She’s the wildest,” Dawn says. “She’s the most apprehensive about being touched.”

She coos and talks to to Girlfriend, allows Girlfriend to get used to Dawn’s smell to get Girlfriend used to her and calm down.

“This is just basically teaching her that I’m not going to kill her,” she says. “When they realize that I’m not going to kill them, they really start settling down.”

### Preparing for adoption

Under the BLM’s Adoption Incentive Program, the horses remain government property and an adopter signs a one-year contract to ensure they properly care for the horse. Adopters must show they have sufficient feed, water, pasture, a trailer and can pay veterinarian expenses.

Under the program, an adopter pays \$25 for the recently captured mustang and in about two months, receives from the government \$500 to help cover



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Dawn Medley stands with 5-year-old Mouse, one of her tamer gelding mustangs Thursday, June 10, 2021, at her Medley’s Mustangs, the ranch she operates in the Imnaha Canyon with husband Eddy Medley.

costs of training. Dawn says about two months prior to the conclusion of the contract, the government gives another \$500.

“It’s an incentive to get more people to adopt more mustangs that are completely wild,” she says. “The government would really like you to take that \$500 and send that horse to a trainer rather than just spend it — put it toward the animal instead of toward your personal gain.”

She charges \$125 for a horse that goes to an adopter.

“It may be the most-expensive \$125 you spend, but I’ve got three and I will never go back to domestic,” she says.

### Home on the range

The Medleys love what they do and where they do it. Their ranch is about 5 miles downriver from Imnaha and the 18 acres have hardly a flat spot among them.

“It’s almost all vertical,”

Eddy says.

He’s the one who did the lion’s share of building the ranch before he came down with a disability.

They have a garden and a wide variety of fruit trees. They also have a boar, a sow and a litter of piglets, along with chickens and dogs.

Dawn’s two older kids from her first marriage are grown and gone, but her daughter recently made Dawn a grandmother. The two younger kids, ages 6 and 9, help on the ranch and attend school in Imnaha.

But in the three years they’ve been training and taming mustangs, the Medleys seem to have found their calling.

“We have a motto: To get as many wild-to-mild mustangs out of the corals and find the loving adoptable homes,” Dawn says. “Also, to watch something so majestic and ‘wild’ become your partner and become one with them” she finds fulfilling.



The Observer, File

Firefighters with the Oregon Department of Forestry training in June 2017. U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden says he is awaiting an announcement by President Biden’s administration about a mobilization plan for firefighters and equipment for widespread forest fires in the West.

## FIRES

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order to deal with this grave threat,” he said.

In Oregon, that responsibility is divided among fire protection districts, Oregon Department of Forestry — which also contracts to protect western Oregon forests overseen by the Bureau of Land Management — and the Forest Service for national forests.

Wyden said Congress should increase the amount of money available for the Forest Service to reduce

hazardous-fuel buildups in national forests. Oregon itself has about 2 million acres eligible for treatment. Wyden said Forest Service chief Christiansen estimates it will take \$20 billion to eliminate the backlog.

Wyden also is promoting the creation of a 21st century equivalent of the Civilian Conservation Corps, the New Deal-era agency that put primarily young and unmarried men to work in the nation’s forests between 1933 and 1942. Silver Falls State Park, east of Salem, is one of the CCC’s legacies in Oregon.

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