

LABOR

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"COVID has done automation a favor," he said. "The pandemic is continuing to influence the reluctance to return to work. People don't want to come back."

Robots have a history in food processing that dates back to the 1980s, when they started stacking boxes on pallets, LaPlante said. Since then, the machines have been moving "upstream" to interact directly with food.

"They are cleanable. They keep things from coming into them and keep things from coming out of them," he said.

Some robots can now learn how to accomplish tasks by being physically guided through them, rather than traditional programming, he said. "It streamlines the process, makes it a lot easier."

In agriculture, robots have already been deployed to harvest peppers, for example, but the technology is still at a relatively "infantile" stage, LaPlante said.

The challenge is creating software for robots to successfully interact with the environment, he said. "The robot can do what you tell it to do, but you need someone to tell it what to do."

Robotics offer a way to make up for the shortfall in workers and automate dull and unpleasant tasks, LaPlante said. Existing employees can then engage in more productive and rewarding duties.

"It's not our enemy. Automation is our friend," he said. "It's more of a tool to use than a threat to people's jobs."

Workplace culture is a crucial consideration for employers who are competing against other companies whose workers perform similar tasks, said Matt Crabtree, sales director with Redzone.

Given a choice between filling boxes with products or peeling onions, for example, a worker may choose the company "where people want to go and spend their time," he said.

"Retention is the cheapest thing you can do to maintain productivity," Crabtree said.

It's worth spending the time to continuously educate and train employees,



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press
Oswaldo Granillo, sales director at Redzone Production Systems, speaks about labor shortages at Food Northwest's recent process and packaging expo in Portland.

focusing on communication and soliciting feedback on work processes, said John Damon, workforce development manager for Food Northwest, a food industry group.

Workers are less likely to jump ship if they see a future at the company, he said. "In this environment, you've got to keep engaging them and make them feel important. If they feel like family, they will stay."

Bright employees can act out and become "smart alecks" when they're bored, so it helps to provide them with a purpose and opportunities for advancement, Damon said. "They see a career path where they didn't see one."

Promoting people from within the company ensures that employees in leadership roles know "every crack and cranny" of the operation, said Debbie Radie, vice president of operations at Boardman Foods in Boardman.

"My top mechanic today started on my trim line," Radie said.

Boardman Foods has a generous paid time-off policy and started an all-day child day care program to retain female employees who'd otherwise be compelled to stay home during the pandemic, she said.

"We find creative ways for people to have that work-life balance, even on the work floor trimming onions," Radie said.



Davis Carbaugh/The Observer

Light pours into the gaming lounge at La Grande Poker Room on Friday, Feb. 4, 2022.

POKER

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Brown then received a gaming permit at the February city council session, in which La Grande Police Chief Gary Bell informed the council of permit requirements in years to come. The council has the authority to approve the opening permit, while the city's police chief controls that authority in the future.

Councilors David Glabe and Gary Lillard voiced concern over granting the gaming permit during the recent meeting, stating they did not support the promotion of gambling in La Grande.

Brown explained that he sees La Grande Poker Room as a social gaming and entertainment venue, as opposed to a typical gambling site.

"We're not a machine. I can go put my \$100 in a machine and it doesn't care. Here, you have to go through the dealer and we know what's going on," Brown said. "There is definitely more of an atmospheric feel to it. It's more hanging out than like a pure slot machine or something like that."

Brown also stated at the council meeting that several of La Grande Poker Room's dealers have a background in addiction recovery and know what

behaviors to look out for.

The business owner will appear in front of the city council one more time, looking to receive an alcohol license. As of right now, the social gaming site has a cooler for soft drinks.

After having a packed house for the opening tournament on Feb. 6, Brown is hopeful La Grande Poker Room will become a popular entertainment venue in the city.

"I think it's something that's going to be a lot of fun in the La Grande community," Brown said. "We're going to do our best to make it a fun atmosphere, and we hope to see people down here."

PENSIONS

Continued from Page B1

a plan (Tier 2) that is in effect from January 1996 to August 2003.

The retirement plan that applies to most now blends contributions from employees and their employers in what

are known as individual account plans.

Contribution rates for participating governments also are "collared," which means part of the increase is carried over into future budget cycles, so that participating governments do not get hit with the full amount in a single cycle.

The board approved a

change last year in how rates are calculated for the collar, which limits what a rate increase would be otherwise.

"Emotion is not part of being an actuary," said Matt Larrabee, also of Millman. "But we are happy that the rate-collar structure is performing for this first biennium (two-year cycle)."

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2022

CROSSWORD PUZZLER

ACROSS

- 1 Comfy shoes
5 PC key
8 Speaker's need
12 Winner's feeling
13 -tzu ("Tao" author)
14 Holy image
15 Compelled
16 Tenet
17 Slip sideways
18 UPS competitor
20 Univ. degrees
22 Support
24 Hotel entrance
28 Unheard-of
32 Use a blender
33 Russian river
34 Hammett's Spade
36 Little creek
37 Harangues
39 Reasonable
41 Villain's smile
42 Tax-form ID

- 43 Narrow inlet
45 Motor oil amount
49 Old Dodge model
52 Not I
54 Bait
56 Unskilled worker
57 Previously
58 Camelot lady
59 Sharp taste
60 Distress signal
61 Soufflé base

DOWN

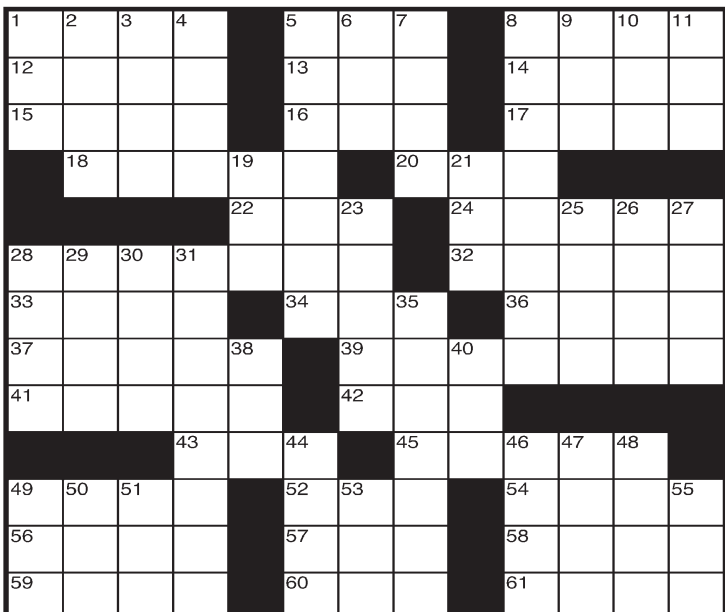
- 1 Movie studio
2 Norse king
3 Give up territory
4 Kind of pearl
5 Cure-alls
6 Airline to Stockholm
7 Remove tangles

Answer to Previous Puzzle



2-10-22 © 2022 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS

- 8 Iowa neighbor "Ick!"
9 Colorful carp
11 Finale
19 Organ of hearing
21 Jungfrau or Eiger
23 Starts a card game
25 -a-brac
26 Gymnastics coach - Karolyi
27 Bellow
28 Prickly husks
29 OPEC member
30 Big name in Western novels
31 Tailor's job
35 Muezzins' houses of worship
38 - Lanka
40 Lion's quarry
44 Skippers' assents
46 Sheltered
47 Toller
48 Math subj.
49 Make a decision
50 - culpa
51 Madame's refusal
53 Sierra Madre gold
55 Sullivan and Murrow



110 Announcements 110 Announcements 114 Self-Help Group Meetings
AL-ANON Keep Coming Back Family Group
NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS Monday, Thursday, & Friday at 8pm.
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