



Demond Lofton, of Sumitomo Electric Lightwave, demonstrates a visual fault locator Thursday, March 3, 2022, during a fiber optic splicing course offered by Blue Mountain Community College and Amazon Web Service in Hermiston.

Amazon splices its way into BMCC

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Amazon Web Service attempted inconspicuousness when it first came to Umatilla and Morrow counties by operating under a pseudonym. Now the web giant is openly trying to build goodwill in the Columbia Basin, and in its latest endeavor has partnered with Blue Mountain Community College on a fiber optic splicing course.

On the afternoon of Thursday, March 3, Demond Lofton, of Sumitomo Electric Lightwave, was demonstrating an optical time domain reflectometer — a device that tests fiber cables. As Lofton joined two fiber lines, a red light glowed from the center.

A student asked the instructors what would happen if they looked directly at the lasers being emitted by the lines. While the human eye is supposed to naturally avert its gaze, trying to intentionally stare at the light was not encouraged.

“Again, don’t look into the eye of the laser,” Lofton said to laughs from the class.

In an interview, Michael Punke, vice president of public policy for Amazon Web Services, compared fiber optic splicing to a middle school project where students worked with copper wires to conduct electricity. As the world becomes increasingly reliant on the cloud to store digital data, Punke said skills such as splicing together fiber optic lines are coming into higher demand.

The reasons behind why a group of students from the Umatilla Indian Reservation wanted to take the course varied.

Colton Star said he’d worked in sales and construction but was interested in the course as a way to explore a new career path. Mollie Minthorn had experience in programming and coding and thought fiber optic splicing could be another asset to her skill set. Vivan DeMary is semi-retired and self-identified as a tribal elder but still liked the idea of picking up new skills she could bring back home to the tribes.

“I feel like this is the future,” Star said. It was a sentiment



Students watch as Demond Lofton, of Sumitomo Electric Lightwave, teaches a fiber optic splicing class at Blue Mountain Community College in Hermiston on Thursday, March 3, 2022.

shared by Punke, who said Amazon intends to establish itself in the community in part by offering training that could land them jobs in the tech industry.

“This is a 21st century industry,” he said. “It’s going to be a 22nd century industry. We very much hope to be long-term members of the community.”

Large tech companies for the most part are associated with urban areas, such as the San Francisco Bay and Seattle. But these companies have sought rural communities for their data centers, where they can find large quantities of water to keep their servers cool and local government officials willing to trade tax breaks for jobs. Google built a data center in the Dalles while Facebook and Apple targeted Prineville for their own facilities.

When Amazon Web Services established a presence in Boardman in 2010 and Umatilla in 2012, it often operated under the name of a subsidiary:

Vadata Inc. When Amazon planned its expansion into Hermiston in 2019, the city council and Umatilla County Board of Commissioners agreed to abate 15 years of property taxes in exchange for a flat \$40 million.

In recent years, Amazon has shed some of its secrecy and upped its public investments.

In 2021, Amazon announced more than half a million in donations to community organizations across Umatilla and Morrow counties. Later that year, AWS cut the ribbon on its Think

Big Space, a career technical education space at the SAGE Center in Boardman.

Nayeli Contreras, the director of Blue Mountain’s Hermiston Center, said the collaboration between Blue Mountain and Amazon has been in the works for years but the coronavirus pandemic delayed an in-person class. She said the class aligns with BMCC President Mark Browning’s goal of having the college work more with the region’s employers on job training.

Contreras said she hopes Blue Mountain will collaborate with Amazon on future classes, even if they are in areas other than fiber optic splicing. She added she’s kept a list of students who registered for the class but weren’t able to attend so she can reach out to them for future opportunities.

Teen injured in Hermiston shooting

Schools asked to go into secure room protocol during the incident

East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Hermiston police are investigating a shooting Monday, March 7, that put three rounds into an unmarked police vehicle and sent a teen to the hospital.

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston in a press release also reported his department asked the middle schools and high school to go into a secure room protocol during the incident.

Hermiston police at about 1:30 p.m. responded to the area of West Madrona Avenue and Northwest 13th Street on a report of gunshots. According to the press release, an on-duty detective in the area on an unrelated matter and called in the gunfire.

“As the detective followed one of the involved vehicles to call out the description and direction of travel for patrol officers, he began receiving fire from an unknown location,” Edmiston reported.

The detective observed a second vehicle and reported its description. According to the press release, the detective’s vehicle sustained damage from three rounds but the detective was unharmed.

After receiving the vehicle descriptions, officers located a red Nissan Altima on the 1000 block of West Orchard Avenue. Police stopped the car, detained the driver, who was 17, and took the person to the Hermiston

Police Department for questioning.

Police seized the car pursuant to the execution of a search warrant, according to the press release, which did not reveal any more information about the identity of the driver.

Officers learned a person with a gunshot wound to the leg had been dropped off at Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston. According to the press release, police questioned the “uncooperative 18-year old from Umatilla” who did not suffer life-threatening injuries.

“This investigation is ongoing,” according to Edmiston. “However, it appears to be an isolated incident revolving around a fight that escalated.”

The police chief also explained the request to have some local schools use secure room protocol “was not instantaneous as we were trying to assess exactly what we had (to include whether our officer was injured or not) while dispatch was receiving numerous additional calls regarding the unidentified vehicle speeding around town. The elementary schools were released as normal, 40 minutes before this incident began.”

This is at least the third shooting in Eastern Oregon involving teens since March 4.

The Grant County Sheriff’s Office arrested a 16-year-old male in Prairie City after a teen girl was shot in the face and suffered significant trauma to her head.

And Manuel Adam Peralez Jr., 19, of Walla Walla, faces a murder charge stemming from a shooting March 5 in Milton-Freewater that killed Jason Samuel Warner, 18, of Milton-Freewater.

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