

# Tour highlights technical school's offerings

By SAMANTHA O'CONNOR  
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — A rainy day didn't deter the Baker Technical Institute from welcoming state legislators, county commissioners, Blue Mountain Community College representatives and company representatives from around the region for a tour on Monday, March 28.

State Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, whose district includes Baker County, had visited Baker Technical Institute, which is based at the Baker High School campus, a couple years ago.

Findley, along with BTI President Doug Dalton, worked with the Eastern Oregon Workforce Board to plan the tour showcasing what BTI has to offer students and adults. About 20 people participated in the tour, including Sen. Bill Hansell, a Republican from Athena, in Umatilla County.

"I toured BTI about two years ago and was so impressed with this facility and what you guys do up here," Findley said.

The facility, which started about eight years ago in the Baker 5J School District, offers a heavy equipment operator school, a truck driving school, a health care program and training in agriculture, natural sciences and natural resources, and it recently partnered with Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative to start a utility worker training center.

Sandy Mitchell, program coordinator for BTI, explained that BTI is a technical college.

"We contract back with the Baker School District and provide all of the (grades) 7-12 career technical education pro-



Patrick Raimondo, manager of Behlen Country's livestock equipment factory in Baker City, takes his turn operating a heavy equipment simulator at Baker Technical Institute on Monday, March 28, 2022.

grams and then we also are licensed as a technical college in the state of Oregon through HECC, Higher Education Coordinating Commission," Mitchell said.

She said BTI partners with industries across the Pacific Northwest to take BTI training programs to other communities.

"Right now, we're in Eastern Idaho. In Idaho Falls, we have 20 students that we're training in construction," Mitchell said. "So, last week they actually poured concrete and they're learning concrete masonry at a rest area. We do community projects and our instructors will go in and teach them."

She said all 20 of the students learned skills in blueprint reading, construction math, how to find the volume, what you need for concrete and how to order it.

Mitchell said BTI instructors also set up remote location mobile classrooms with trailers that contain simulators that students use to learn how to operate heavy equip-



— State Sen. Lynn Findley (R-Vale)

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ment such as backhoes and excavators.

"We feel really strongly about getting students as many certifications as possible," Dalton said.

In health care, Dalton said BTI has mobile labs that allow instructors to work inside hospitals across the region, including in Pendleton, Heppner, Wallowa, John Day, Burns and Ontario.

"We're now building labs to be able to teach medical classes from here into even smaller rural communities," Dalton said.

## Hands-on training

Participants in the March 28 tour experienced the mobile heavy equipment simulators, including truck driving and logistics training.

"These trailers go all over the Northwest," Dalton said.

Patrick Raimondo, plant manager at Behlen Country's livestock equipment factory in Baker City, attended the tour along with the plant's human resources manager, Stacy DeLong, and Angi Boruch, quality and safety manager.

DeLong and Boruch chose the truck driving simulator. Users settle into an authentic truck seat that moves just as a real truck would depending on terrain and road surface.

Three screens showed the view through the windshield, windows and rear-view mirrors.

An instructor chooses different driving scenarios for the student to deal with, including inclement weather, a deer leaping into the road



Samantha O'Conner/Baker City Herald  
State Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, tries his hand at a truck-driving simulator at Baker Technical Institute on Monday, March 28, 2022.

or a blown tire or other mechanical problem.

"I've got to give it to the truck drivers. This is not easy," Boruch said after her turn on the simulator.

"This is wild," DeLong said.

## Agriculture, health care offerings grow

Dalton led the tour from the simulators to the FFA greenhouse, where students were tending to flower baskets for the Mother's Day sale. It will be held in person.

The BTI president said that "90% of our ag program is directed at high school students, (the) FFA program here. We've got a full plant science pathway and a full animal science pathway. And then we offer ag business and ag technology and innovation classes."

The BTI ag program was voted program of the year for Oregon and the region.

BTI also has an ESports team, the first in Oregon. The team participates in electronic sports tournaments.

In health care, BTI has courses focusing on rural medicine, including

wilderness first aid.

"We train everybody from physicians that need continuing ed, and we're approved through the American Medical Association to give them rural life support skills," Dalton said.

Dalton said BTI has a student base of about 2,000 students around the area and the school is continuing to grow.

"We have a contract with the Baker School District. We do all their high school (career technical education) and we ship middle school students up here to get started," he said. "So, they are earning industry certifications here as high school students, which is awesome. We'll train about 400 during the day here up until afternoon, and then at about 2:30 the adults start coming in."

Dalton said the average starting salary for students who had completed classes was \$56 per hour. He said BTI students learn to prepare resumes, go through mock interviews and learn about entrepreneurship and financial record-keeping.

"We celebrate work ethic and we talk about it every day," he said.

# Police called to disturbance during GOP forum at Baker Elks Lodge

By JAYSON JACOBY  
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Two Baker City Police officers responded to a complaint about audience behavior during a forum featuring several Republican candidates for Oregon governor Friday, March 25, at the Baker Elks Lodge.

Officers Justin Prevo and Jonathan Parsons responded to the Lodge, at 1896 Second St., around 6:09 p.m., according to the dispatch log.

They escorted a few people from the Elks Lodge early in the forum, which started about 6 p.m. Police didn't make any arrests and no charges were filed, Police Chief Ty Duby said.

Duby said on March 29 that he "doesn't feel really comfortable" with what happened.

"It puts us in a bad situation," Duby said.

He said he doesn't believe police are responsible for ensuring people attending an event such as the forum, which took place at a privately owned venue, comply with the audience rules.

So long as people attending aren't acting in a threatening way, Duby said he doesn't believe police officers should be involved.

Greg Baxter, Baker County district attorney, said he is awaiting reports from the Baker City Police to determine whether there is anything to pursue with possible charges.

Rick Rienks, of Baker City, who along with his wife, Penny, was escorted from the Elks Lodge by Prevo and Parsons, contends that the situation didn't warrant summoning police.

Rienks said he and his wife, who are registered Republicans, attended the forum because they wanted to hear from the candidates.

## Rules cause conflict

The conflict stemmed in part from rules that the Baker County Republican Party, which organized the forum, set, including a prohibition on people videoing the event or applauding while candidates were speaking.

Kerry McQuisten, Baker City mayor and a Republican gubernatorial candidate who attended the forum, said some candidate forums this year, including one in Pendleton on March 24 and one on March 26 at Vale, had similar rules.

McQuisten said she believes the "disturbance" during the forum at the Baker Elks Lodge was "scripted and preplanned."

McQuisten, whose mother, Suzan Ellis Jones, is chair of the Baker County Republicans, said that prior to the forum she overheard a group of people talking about their plan to speak out in opposition to the rules.

McQuisten said some of the people she overheard were carrying campaign signs for Marc Thielman, who is also seeking the Republican nomination in the May 17 primary.



McQuisten



Thielman

Thielman called the forum rules "weird" and said he was disappointed that some candidates drove for hundreds of miles to attend the forums with a goal of "getting their message out" and meeting voters, only to have disturbances interfere.

Thielman said there's "no validity" to McQuisten's implication that his supporters conspired to disrupt the Baker City forum.

In a March 28 letter responding to the incident at the forum, the six-member executive committee of the Baker County Republican Party blamed the disruption on Baker County United, the local group formed last summer that has objected to Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's executive orders requiring mask wearing and vaccinations during the pandemic.

"Law enforcement was made aware that we may have an issue at this event," the letter reads. "We hoped not."

The executive committee consists of Jones; vice chairman Julie McKinney; treasurer Joanna Dixon (who is also treasurer of

McQuisten's campaign committee and, like McQuisten, a member of the Baker City Council); secretary Justin Langan; and delegates Tom Van Diepen and Keith Jones.

The letter states that the ban on livestreaming the forum, except for hosts, was added after "ugly behavior" at a forum in the Portland area when someone "used their recording/livestreaming to bash other candidates with slander and name calling."

Suzan Ellis Jones said the organizers' video of the forum will be posted online.

The letter states that during the Baker City forum, one couple was recording the event and, after being asked to stop, declined. Jones said she believes Langan, who was part of the security detail along with Van Diepen and Sharon Bass, then called police.

Rienks said that when officers Prevo and Parsons arrived, he told them that he was there to listen to the candidates and did not feel there was any reason for him and his wife to leave.

He said he considers the episode a "betrayal" of the candidates who attended, and he intends to send an apology letter to each of them.

# Irrigon police department will have one officer

East Oregonian

IRRIGON — Irrigon is not renewing its contract with the Morrow County Sheriff's Office for law enforcement services.

The city council at its meeting Tuesday, March 15, voted instead for the city to establish a one-person police department.

City Manager Aaron Palmquist in a memo to the council explained this has been a topic of discussion in the town.

"As Irrigon grows and may desire to take charge of their destiny, should they continue down the road of contracting or begin the step in moving in the direction of having their own law enforcement," according to the memo.

He said Mayor Margaret Anderson wanted the council to address the issue because "we are at a good time for all parties to make any adjustments if needed and desired."

The Irrigon City Council voted unanimously to renew.

The small town on the Columbia River has been paying the Morrow County

Sheriff's Office more than \$95,000 a year in a contract for services, plus the purchase of a car for the sheriff's office every three years, which the sheriff's office returned to the city after three years.

Irrigon now is searching for a new chief, who will be the only officer in the department. The city also will purchase a new car and renovate an office in city hall for the new department.

Under the plan, there will not be 24/7 police coverage for the town of more than 1,800 people, but per Oregon law, the county still will have to provide some services. Code enforcement and complaints, however, would be solely the city's responsibility.

"This may be an opportunity for Irrigon as we continue to grow and become more resilient," Palmquist told the council in the memo.

Additionally, he continued, the Irrigon Municipal Court "has been a good addition and is working through to strengthen Irrigon's presence and strength in the region."

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