

Hermiston's 'Snow White' leads full life

Jilli Smalley doesn't let autism, seizure disorder slow her down

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

HERMISTON — Jilli Smalley is open about her abilities. The 31-year-old Hermiston resident smiled broadly prior to a recent exercise session, and she boasted of her ability to make friends.

"Even Grumpy likes Snow White," Jilli Smalley said.

Her mother, Kristi Smalley, explained that her daughter, who lives with autism and a seizure disorder, loves Disney and often communicates with references to Disney movies. She will refer to herself as Snow White, though she sometimes calls herself Doc or Sleepy, depending on the situation.

Speaking in a soprano-like, melodious tone, the younger Smalley indeed sounds a bit like Snow White of the Disney movie. Also like the young princess, she is warm and draws people near her. At the exercise session, a gathering of people at The Arc Umatilla County, she met with several other Zumba practitioners. Before rushing over to join the Zumba crowd, she talked about her life.

The first thing she mentioned was her work at Pizza Hut, employment that she said she enjoys. She works as a dishwasher four nights a week, 3.5 hours per shift.

"I wash dishes and mess



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

Jilli Smalley poses March 30, 2022, with tiny figurines that she fashioned herself.

around," she said.

She added she likes the people there, and she sometimes makes sugar cookies for them.

Over at the pizza place, her coworkers stated their profound affection for the woman. Manager Dave Beatty said she is a great asset to his team.

"The mood around here is different when she is not here," he said. When she is present, the atmosphere is bright. When she is gone, less so.

In addition, he said, she is a hard worker. In contrast to some other employees, she approaches each task with single-minded focus.

"She's a highly-valued employee, because she loves repetitive work, so she's perfect," her mother said.

A fellow employee, Kimberly Parker, attested to Jilli Smalley's drive.

"She is a bulldog in the dishwashing pit," Parker said. She added that Smalley will spray people with water on occasion when they get in her way.

Michele Kietzke, Smalley's job coach at the Eastern Oregon Service Support Brokerage, said it is not all fun and games. There are times when Smalley will lose muscle control, succumbing to her seizure disorder. This trouble can last 20 minutes. While temporary, Kietzke said, it does necessitate the presence of a trained professional.

A day in the life of Jilli Smalley

Even aside from her dishwashing job, Smalley leads a busy life. She said she wakes up at 5:20 a.m. and eats breakfast, packs her lunch and readies for the day. She goes to Trenditions Inc., an organization that teaches job skills to people with disabilities.

Shredding documents, she said, is among her favorite activities there.

After Trenditions, she will run errands, then she will meet with friends for games before going to work. On good days, she said, she will be able to

attend Zumba classes.

"I love Zumba," Smalley said, adding it's fun because it lets her "shake the body." Other favorite activities include swimming, bowling and walking. If she has time, she will do crafts.

After work and activities, she returns home and gets ready for bed. Bedtime is 8:20 p.m., she said.

Kristi Smalley said she and her husband accompany their daughter on many of these activities, as the young woman would not be able to do these things on her own. Also, she gets help from the Eastern Oregon Service Support Brokerage, which has been helping people like Jilli Smalley for 20 years.

At the age of 18, Jilli Smalley was able to enter the brokerage. Three years later, after she graduated from high school, the EOSSB stepped up its assistance to her, helping her lead an adult life, Kristi Smalley said.

Kristi Smalley is on a board that oversees the EOSSB. As such, she

helps watch over the decisions of that organization, which is a personal matter to her because her daughter receives assistance from it.

Four EOSSB personal service workers supervise Jilli Smalley on activities, including her regular walks and her employment.

Helping people live regular lives

Laura Noppenberger, executive director, and Kristi Avery, Umatilla County lead personal agent, said Eastern Oregon Service Support Brokerage exists to help people with intellectual disabilities who are 18 and older. They receive assistance in their own homes and communities.

"We advocate for services and resources for those people we serve," Avery said. "We help people live better, more positive lives. It's interesting, and there's something new every day. And the people we help are great."

Noppenberger said she has worked for the EOSSB since it began two decades ago. Among the many things she had done for others, Noppenberger said helping a person obtain a ramp for her home was one of the most satisfying.

Avery said she has supported many people during the 20 years she has been with the organization, including helping one Milton-Freewater resident move out of her parent's home and into her own place.

People, they said, can receive a wide range of assistance. A helper may, for example, go to a person's home to set up medication, aid in laundry, create meal

plans or go to the store.

EOSSB helpers also may assist with employment, as with Jilli Smalley, they stated.

"A lot of the people we serve have jobs in the community, so they might need support with getting to work, staying on task, being dressed appropriately for the job, getting ready to go and being successful," Noppenberger said.

"We help them work if they want to work," Avery added. "They learn how to handle money, work on being healthier and navigate health matters. And if they want to travel, see things or do activities, we help with all of that."

Noppenberger said that the EOSSB is one of 14 brokerages in Oregon, paid for with state tax dollars and federal funds. It currently serves more than 450 people in the counties of Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, Wheeler, Morrow, Umatilla, Grant, Harney, Union, Baker, Wallowa and Malheur.

The organization has 30 staff members, who are mostly based in their homes, near the people they serve. The EOSSB's one office is in Hood River. As EOSSB employees live near the people they serve, they said, they are better able to assess their needs and support them.

Each client's plan, Noppenberger and Avery said, is tailored to meet their specific needs.

"Essentially, we're navigators, cheerleaders," Noppenberger said, "helping to connect people with the resources in their community to be successful."

BMCC plans deep cuts to faculty in new budget

Program, position cuts aimed to help shore up \$2M shortfall in 2022-23 budget

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — After warning about impending budget cuts for months, the other shoe has dropped at Blue Mountain Community College.

At an April 25 budget committee meeting, BMCC administration will propose shuttering three programs and eliminating 10 full-time faculty positions in addition to several part-time positions. Should the BMCC Board of Education approve the move, the college would lose its criminal justice, college prep and industrial systems technology programs while also dropping instructors from its business, English, humanities/fine arts, math/computer science, science and social science departments.

Blue Mountain President Mark Browning said the budget cuts need to be made to help close a \$2 million shortfall in the 2022-23 budget.

"We have to start living within our means," he said. "That's the bottom line."

The news was not well received by the Blue Moun-

tain Faculty Association, the union that represents the college's instructors.

Union President Pete Hernberg described the list of proposed cuts as "extraordinary and shocking" and raises questions about the college's commitment to the community.

"These cuts are shocking," he said. "They are arbitrary. And they are unnecessary."

Hernberg questioned why BMCC administration wanted to cut the college's criminal justice program at a time when law enforcement was trying to recruit skilled personnel. He added that eliminating the industrial systems technology department represented a "broken promise" to Boardman, which would still have its Workforce Training Center but not one of the signature programs the center houses.

Browning was prepared to defend his administration's choices.

He said a degree from the college's criminal justice program isn't a requirement to enter the law enforcement field, and while he admitted the industrial systems technology had been a "good

idea" when it was started, the program's low enrollment meant it can be replaced in Boardman by the higher-demand diesel tech program.

Browning turned his focus to the English program, which would lose one of its instructors under the administration's proposal. He said the department's four-person staff is the same size as it was a decade ago, even though enrollment has shrunk 65% over the past 11 years.

BMCC, and other community colleges across the state, have seen significant enrollment declines in recent years, and Blue Mountain staff are starting to see the effects of that trend.

Since 2019, the college has reduced its workforce by 39 positions, albeit under different presidents. Those figures don't include additional staffing cuts made when Blue Mountain was forced to renegotiate its prison education contract with the Oregon Department of Corrections during that time period.

This round of proposed cuts differs from previous years because it mostly focuses on making cuts to faculty. With previous staff reductions focused on administration or classified staff, Browning said there was little room to cut in those areas.

But Hernberg argued that BMCC was using its budget to deprioritize instruction and programming in favor of contracts with consultants and tech companies.

"What our community needs is jobs and training for those jobs," he said. "What our community needs are degrees and classes toward those degrees. That's the promise that our taxpayers expect us to keep. They don't expect us to hire some consulting firm. They don't expect us to send a giant chunk of cash to some tech company."

Browning contested Hernberg's interpretation of the proposed budget, saying they were one-time investments in improving the college's website and conducting a review of Blue Mountain's programs, moves that will better position the college for the future.

At a time when BMCC is facing increasing competition from nearby community colleges in Washington and trade schools, Browning said the staffing cuts could actually help with recruitment.

"We're not actually offering fewer classes," he said. "We're having fewer people offer the classes that we do currently have, and we'll be offering new and different approaches to some

of the outcomes so that (students are) better employable upon completion. The assertion that we're offering fewer classes is simply not borne out in the data."

While BMCC is holding firm on its cuts, the faculty union is not treating them as a settled issue. Hernberg said the union plans to

explore its legal options and is also planning a "vigorous" public campaign to convince the college to reconsider its plans.

"We believe that there is a sacred trust between this community, these educators and our students, and we're going to do everything we can to protect that," he said.



Browning

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Great-Great-Grandchildren: Aaro, Oaklen, Oz, Ramona

Thank You

Our family has been blessed and humbled by the many acts of kindness shown us since the loss of our husband, dad and grandpa. We extend our sincere thanks to those who offered love, sympathy and support in so many ways. A special thanks to Teresa, Terry, Trena and the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo Board of Directors. Thanks also to the Joseph Quick Responders, the EMTs, Bollman Funeral Home and Loveland Funeral Home.

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