

Prairie Wood Products is up and running again

By **STEVEN MITCHELL**
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Prairie City residents woke up last week to a sound they had not heard in years.

A working sawmill. The Prairie Wood Products sawmill officially reopened on Monday, July 11, for its first full day of operations.

The D.R. Johnson Lumber Co. announced last month that it intended to reopen the mill, which was shuttered 15 years ago. To staff the operation, the company hosted a two-day job fair at Chester's Thriftway in John Day.

Plant manager Tom Moore said the mill hired roughly 25 people. He said once the planer is up and running, he would be looking to hire 15-20 more employees.

Prairie Wood Products President Jodi Westbrook said the company was happy to be able to hire the staff needed to get the mill running again.

"They are working hard," she said. "I've been in the mill watching them go as hard as they can."

Westbrooks said there are some kinks in the sawmill has to work out with the old equipment. But all in all, she said, things are running smoothly at the mill.

"It is going," she said, "and we are thrilled."

Moore, who used to work for the DR Johnson-owned Grant Western sawmill in John Day, told the Eagle that the mill's mothballed cogeneration plant has some issues that must be worked through before it can be fired up again.

Craig Trulock, Malheur National Forest supervisor, told the newspaper last month that the cogeneration plant could provide a way to remove biomass from the forest. Currently, he said, there is no market for that material.

The biomass, which consists of small logs, branches and bushes that would otherwise get burned up in the forest or left on the ground, could be ground and burned in the cogeneration plant to generate heat and electricity, Trulock said.

Westbrooks said the company plans to get its timber supply from a combination of public and private lands and will purchase logs from independent loggers and landowners.

Brett Morris, the owner of Morris Forestry, said in a Friday, July 15, interview that he had already delivered nine loads of logs to the sawmill.

"(Prairie Wood) is really

cranking up production," he said.

Morris said he works as an independent logger in the spring, but during fire season he works as a wild-land firefighter with his logging equipment, which makes him good money. With Prairie Wood open, he said he would be running his logging company during fire season.

In the long term, he said running his business would be better for him and his family.

"My family will appreciate that I won't be gone for two to three months in the summertime," Morris said.

Moore said his company had been about a month behind schedule with the late spring rain, but things are going well now.

He said if the mill had not been open in Prairie City, he would have had to haul logs to Elgin or Pilot Rock for milling. With rising fuel costs, there would have been a good chance he would not have been able to operate.

"My little company couldn't afford to haul (logs) that far with the way fuel is right now."

Having the mill open benefits local private landowners with respect to fuel reduction and removing wildfire risks, Morris added.

While Prairie Wood hopes to collaborate with the Malheur National Forest and other public agencies on forest restoration projects, Moore said the mill has primarily been working with private landowners so far.

He said the company hopes to build other relationships going forward.

Moore said he could not say how many board feet of timber the mill plans to process because it is in its "infancy stages."

Nonetheless, Moore — who worked for Malheur Lumber before coming to Prairie Wood Products — said that reopening the mill has been a great feeling.

"It is not every day," he said, "that you get to bring something back from the dead."

The Prairie City mill was purchased by the D.R. Johnson Lumber Co. in 1976. Two years later, the family-owned company added a stud mill and planer. Then, in the late 1980s, the company installed a cogeneration power plant.

The sawmill, which operated successfully in Prairie City for more than 30 years and employed upwards of 100 people who worked two different shifts, shuttered in 2008 amid a housing market crash that led to a lack of available sawlogs.



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

Dustin Wright of John Day, part of the gang edger crew at Prairie Wood Products, shortens a saw blade on Thursday, July 14, 2022. Prairie Wood Products officially reopened on July 11.

'This is my final move'

Veteran National Guard aviator and FAA inspector happy about return to Pendleton

By **JOHN TILLMAN**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Army aviator Chief Warrant Officer 4 David Long this month moved back to the town he loves from the Willamette Valley.

Long resided in Pendleton from 1995 to 2009, while serving with the "Dust Devils" Oregon Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook heavy-lift helicopter unit based at the airport.

"This is my final move," he said. "I am here to stay."

The 36-year veteran is assigned to the Oregon Army National Guard UH-72 Lakota helicopter unit in Salem. The Airbus Helicopters' Lakota has two engines, with a single four-bladed main rotor. Boeing Chinooks have two tandem, counter-rotating, three-bladed rotors.

Long moved to the Portland area in 2009 to work as an aviation safety inspector for the Federal Aviation Administration field office. He has flown almost every rotary wing aircraft, but for the FAA specializes in night vision goggles, large helicopters and air ambulances.

Long recently returned from an FAA assignment in France with Airbus Helicopters. There he was one of the first Americans to fly the new H-160, a medium utility helicopter in the Airbus MH-65 Dolphin family. It's a scaled up Dolphin, with a new five-bladed main rotor and an empty weight of 9,348 pounds, versus MH-65's 5,267. The U.S. Coast Guard operates four-bladed



Dave Long/Contributed Photo

Dave Long gives a check ride to his Afghanistan battle buddy Brad Wahl of Wildhorse Helicopters, Pendleton, in a Bell 47 above Umatilla County in September 2021.

Dolphins. Lakota weighs only 7,904 pounds.

"It was the pinnacle of my flying career to be on the certification team for the FAA and to represent America," Long said. "It was a great honor to be on the team that certifies a new prototype helicopter for import into the United States."

Long deployed to Afghanistan with the Dust Devils in 2005-06, brigaded with the Nevada Guard's Mustangs. His barracks roommate and friend, Pendleton native CWO Adrian Stump, 22, and Staff Sgt. Tane Baum, 30, formerly of Athena, were killed in action. Three other soldiers died with them on Sept. 25, 2005. There is a large Mustang 22 Memorial in Reno and a smaller one in Pendleton.

An assignment to train pilots in Bangladesh followed.

Every summer the Dust Devils fought wildfires across Oregon, dipping underslung giant, 20,000-pound (when filled) Bambi buckets into water sources. He often engaged in search and rescue missions. Boeing gave his flight crew an award for a

daring, long-range rescue in the Sierra Nevada at 13,100 feet.

Long's lengthy aviation career has prepared him well for his next assignment in October. Though eligible to retire, he has volunteered for yet another deployment — flying the Lakota on the southwest border.

"The mission will not be easy," Long said. "We will fly each night. Our mission is to stop fentanyl, meth and other illicit drugs from crossing the border, and additionally, to stop human trafficking and provide humanitarian aid to those in need. But my priority will be to use all of my skills and experience to bring everyone home on this deployment."

Long's final goal is to serve his last eight years in Pendleton, once again flying the CH-47.

"My last flight in the Lakota will be Texas," Long said. "Upon my return, I will check into the Pendleton Chinook unit, and they will either tell me to turn in my gear and retire, or send me to fly the Chinook. Either way, I am good."

Long has spent a lifetime of public service in

many capacities. He served several years on the Pendleton Airport Commission, is an ex-board member of McNary Yacht Club, a Pendleton Air Museum co-founder, former member of the Pendleton City Club and a 27-year volunteer at Happy Canyon.

"I can't wait for Round-Up," Long said. "I love the run-in."

Long has an interest in helping the Pendleton Air Museum.

"I have a lead on an old UH-1H (Huey)," Long said. "I think I can help PAM get the helicopter and we could put it on static display at the airport."

Long can work for the FAA remotely from anywhere within commuting range of Portland in his Rutan Long-EZ home-built light plane. World-famous engineer Burt Rutan autographed it in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, as the finest example of his design he had ever seen.

"I picked Pendleton because all my friends are here," he said. "Pendleton is my home. I love dinner at Cimmiyotti's on Friday night, a cold beer at the Packard, CrossFit at 1910 and the real feel of a community here."

Eastern Oregon town forgives fines after challenges

By **APRIL EHRlich**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

ONTARIO — The Eastern Oregon city of Ontario is waiving over \$1 million in unpaid fines and penalties stemming from its nuisance abatement rules.

City nuisance abatement policies typically regulate garbage and weeds at businesses and homes. Some say Ontario's rules were too strict and vague. Its own mayor in 2019 sued the city over a \$500 fine and won.

In June this year, the city settled a lawsuit with the Oregon Law Center, a legal-aid nonprofit, in a case involving

two clients: Heriberta Contreras Granados and Susan Ragsdale.

The legal complaint says the city failed to send notices to Contreras Granados in Spanish, even though that's her primary language. She later tried paying the city's penalties, the complaint says, but the city put a nearly \$10,000 lien on her property.

"These are prohibitive amounts of money for our clients to pay," attorney Emily Teplin Fox said in an interview with OPB. "They just don't have it; they can't pay it down. And it's completely disproportionate to the types of property nuisances at issue here."

It was also unclear how the city wanted Contreras Granados to improve her home, Teplin Fox said. The city's notice said Contreras Granados had "outdoor storage of non-trash items," but it didn't explain what those items were, according to the complaint.

The notices were especially difficult for Contreras Granados to understand because they were only in English. Compared to many other Oregon cities, Ontario has a significant Spanish-speaking population; almost half of its 11,600 residents identify as Hispanic or Latino, according to U.S. Census data.

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