

Local

What it's like to be a ... Middle School counselor

With college students choosing majors and high school students deciding between college or the workforce, this series will highlight one career path each week in August and September.

*This week, we introduce you to **Silas Turner**, Baker Middle School Counselor. After beginning to teach, he felt counseling is where his heart was.*

BY GINA K. SWARTZ
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The BCP: Tell me a little about your background.

Silas: I'll take it back to High School. I graduated from Powder Valley High School (in North Powder) in 1994. I had a great experience there; it was just a good base for my career in education. I had great teachers there that challenged me and pushed me and I really credit a lot of my base as far as my interest in education to my experience in High School. So, from there I received a Bachelor's Degree in History from Eastern Oregon University in La Grande. I always wanted to be a History teacher and got a job with the Baker Middle School back in 2003 as a part-time social studies teacher and a part time woodworking teacher. It was an interesting split.

I do have a background in cabinetry and wood-working, and so it was actually a really fun experience for me and I enjoyed the diversity—going from building birdhouses to talking about the Second World War. In the spring of 2007 I had a little bit of change in my career goals. I really enjoy working kids and I wanted to work with them more, so I enrolled in Grad School at Adams State University out of Alamosa, Colorado. I wanted to become a school Counselor and I researched a lot of different school counseling programs across the nation and settled on Adams State. It was a two-year program and the district (5J) was really flexible with me, a -lowing me to work in this capacity and attend school as well for the Master's Degree program.

The BCP: Were you able to do that Master's Program online?

Silas: Yes, it's a cool program. Throughout the academic school year it's online but they require you attend on campus for two summer intensives, that's what they called them, and it was intense (he laughed). Very grateful for that opportunity. So, I've actually been the school counselor here since the fall of 2007.

The BCP: Tell me about how a typical day starts for you and flows?

Silas: (Laughing) I learned really fast in the counseling world that um—I do have a frame-work for each and every day and I have goals and objectives that I'd like to accomplish but no two days are the same especially with this age group – but I love it! I love that almost unpredictability about this age group. A



Gina K. Swartz / The Baker County Press

Silas Turner is the counselor at Baker Middle School.

typical day might start out with me working in a classroom. I try to get into the classrooms and do a lot of preventative work on situations and challenges that I know kids are going to have.

The BCP: Do you have an open door policy here for the students?

Silas: I do. I make sure the kids know that my door is always open and make sure they know where my office is. We've just found that that is the best practice, if we can get kids in this age group talking to us and let us know what's eating at them.

The BCP: This is such a hard age for kids.

Silas: It is. I remember what it was like for me, and I have to remind myself of that there is just so much going on developmentally.

The BCP: What advice would you give to anyone exploring this career path?

Silas: I think it's an awesome career choice if your passion is working with kids and wanting to make a difference daily in the life of kids. Sometimes you don't see that difference made tangibly. I've had students come up to me years later and say 'Mr. Turner, Thank you.' And I didn't feel like I was having an impact at the time. My advice would be sometimes you don't see the immediate impact that you are having but if you have a passion for kids and working with kids ... I enjoy my career, I really do.

The BCP: How easy or hard is it for you to leave the job at work?

Silas: My mentor, Aaron Moxon he is just an amazing individual—the first two years I was here he mentored me and came in twice a week for two years and he said to me, 'Tf you're not going to get burned out in this job you have to be able to leave it at the door.' And I'd like to say I could do that immediately but it took me some time to do that.

The BCP: What would you say is the saddest story you've encountered?

Silas: Without getting too specific, we have had some tragedies in our community in recent years. Working so closely with kids and families, we are a small community. I have a passion for the people in

this community and their tragedies affect us here and their hardships.

The BCP: What has been the happiest?

Silas: Helping kids build resilience in their lives. Kids that from might come from underprivileged backgrounds and seeing them build on the strengths that they have inside of them and becoming resilient young adults in spite of their circumstances. Honestly that is what keeps me going. It brings me a lot of joy. Kids overcoming.

The BCP: What would you say is your least favorite thing about being a school counselor?

Silas: Oh, that is a hard one. I'd have to think about that one. I guess the small amount of time I get with the kids, it's only two years they are here. To middle school kids that seems like a long time but it just really isn't.

The BCP: What has been your biggest challenge?

Silas: The grad school program was intense; it really was their whole philosophy was, 'You cannot be a counselor until you have overcome your own issues.' They really wanted to ensure that they were putting forth qualified professional school counselors in that program. It was rigorous. I would work here and then have 4-5 hours of homework. I was getting up at 4 in the morning and typing papers. At the time it seemed like 'Whoa, two years of this? It's never going to end.' But looking back I'm so glad it was challenging I wouldn't change it.

The BCP: Are requirements different for a school counselor than a Licensed Therapist, an LCSW?

Silas: A little. I took the school counselor track, the only difference was a matter of one less semester. The alignment for school counselor and LCSW is pretty similar, the difference being in my program they wanted you to be proactive and preventative in your schools. You know what the issues are going to be let's get out there and talk to teachers, kids, parents.

The BCP: When an emergency occurs, how are those situations handled?

Silas: Well, of course we have the standard drills

Fire, earthquake. We are planning on doing lock-down and evacuation drills this year. What we really want to do is prepare kids for those situations, prep them for the drills explain what they will look like and educate them.

The BCP: And what If an incident occurs where the SRO is called. Do you get involved as well? For say, a fight

Silas: Mine is more of a secondary role in those situations. The cool thing about my job is I wouldn't have to be involved in any of the investigating or decision regarding discipline.

The BCP: What if a student and teacher have a problem?

Silas: I speak with them either separately together or both. What I really try to do is problem solve and what I find is that 99% of the time it is just miscommunication and perception. I enjoy that part of the job and I really try to support staff in working with students.

The BCP: Since you are a school district employee you get summers off? How do you spend those?

Silas: I work for the Forest Service, out at the Air Tanker Base in La Grande, loading up the planes with fire retardant.

The BCP: I know a lot of teachers have to continue to keep up with their education, often during the summer do you have to do continuing education?

Silas: Yes, in fact it's a little more rigorous for counselors, as it should be we have to continue to take graduate level courses. I just finished one up in fact, it was a course in school violence.

The BCP: Parting thoughts, words?

Silas: We have begun the career pathways program here at the Baker Middle School. We are going to expose them to options, let them know what is out there. Maybe they'll find something that interests them and stick with it. As far as the career, it is just rewarding in so many different ways. It is a dynamic career, you're working with different kids different families every year. There are so many really good families in this community.

NRAC sends draft plan to County Commissioners for second time

BY TODD ARRIOLA
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The Baker County Natural Resource Advisory Committee (NRAC), through a majority vote, approved the County's 42-page final draft Natural Resource Plan (NRP) last Thursday, September 10, 2015, in the Commission Chambers of the County Courthouse. This is the second time the draft has been approved—a revote taken due to complaints about the amount of notice given prior to the last meeting. The adoption of the NRP was recommended to the County Commission on Wednesday of this week for approval; however, that failed to happen.

Present for the NRAC meeting, which began at 3 p.m., were County Commission Chair Bill Harvey, County Commission Executive Assistant Heidi Martin, NRAC Chair Doni Bruland, NRAC Coordinator Eric Wuntz, and NRAC members Kody Justus, Lyle Defrees, Dick Fleming, Eileen Gyllenberg, Laurene Chapman, Alice Knapp, Cynthia Long, Jan Kerns, Craig Ward, Emily Braswell, Chuck Chase, Ken Anderson, and Jake Bingham.

Lorrie Harvey, Craig Bruland, John and Ramona Creighton, and Wanda Ballard were also in attendance. Doni and Harvey introduced and briefly described Wuntz's role as NRAC Coordinator, also stating that Wuntz will be working half-time in that position.

Ramona was the sole speaker during both of the public participation segments of the meeting, after the introductions, and later after the NRP discussion and vote. During the initial segment, she said, "I really do hope that today, there's going to be a resolution to this (adopting the NRP), because, we've attended some other meetings with other counties, and, they're actually waiting to see what Baker County does. As far as I'm concerned, I know it's not perfect, but it's not written in stone, and it can be changed at any time..."

During the public participation segments, each member of the public is given three minutes to speak on natural resource topics only.

Harvey said, "At this time, I'd like to just help people understand the parameters of what we're doing today. We're going to be voting on the Natural Resources Plan, and it's going to be as it was presented to you before. In regards to that, this is the plan. This is not a zoning ordinance. This is going to be a workable document, that will be altered or adjusted at your discretion, with meetings, of information being brought to you for discussion and consensus, and then, voting on, and then presenting your suggestions to the Board of Commissioners. So, that's where we're at at this point in time."

He said that on Monday, the Commission issued a letter invoking the process of coordination with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and other agencies. He also said that progress was good regarding meetings with the USFS, Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), etc., to discuss topics such as salvage logging..

"It's going to be pretty full (the future coordination/meetings process), with salvage logging, road improvements, things we have to address because of the fires situation. We're going to be pretty busy doing that for quite a while. It gets quite divided up, because we've got BLM (Bureau of Land Management), Oregon Department of Forestry, private lands, and Forest Service lands out there. All of them are greatly affected. All of them need help. We're attempting to do all-encompassing, the same treatment on all the lands," Harvey said.

After those comments, Doni asked the group for a motion to vote to adopt the NRP, and it was so moved, and seconded.

Harvey explained that Jan Alexander, Arvid Andersen, and Page Frederickson, all absent from the meeting, voted via email, and their votes would be counted as specified.

Kerns asked if the vote for the current NRP would include the section titled Energy, and Harvey responded that the vote would include the section covering energy sources, as-is. He then said that the Planning Department hasn't finished its work regarding zoning ordinances covering energy sources, and he explained that it's necessary to wait for that to happen (possibly up to eight months), in order to have consistency with that department.

Knapp voiced some concerns about the timber industry and the Forest Resources section of the NRP, and Doni read the following excerpt from the first paragraph of that section, stating that it hasn't been removed: "In order for the County to provide and maintain roads, schools and other services, the forest industry and the forest products commerce within the county must be encouraged and strengthened."

After some confusion about which version of the NRP the group would be voting to adopt, Harvey and Bruland reiterated that it's the same one the NRAC reviewed and approved at the August 18th meeting, and changes could be made at a later date.

Ward said, "I looked over the Weeds section, which is somewhat incomplete and inaccurate, and I drew something up which didn't change much, but, it actually makes it very explicit and precise for the Board of Commissioners. If we vote on this plan, that (the original section) was somewhat ridiculous, whereas, I have document I can insert."

Harvey said he hadn't received Ward's document until that day, and he said time would be needed to discuss the document. Ward said, "So, we're going to vote on a plan that's incomplete?"

Harvey said, "Yes, you will, actually, because, every plan that's proposed is incomplete, according to somebody."