

Local

Economic Development

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Savage added, “One of the things I really wanted to mention was marijuana... They’re treating marijuana just like alcohol. If they (employees) get caught with it, they’re out. You know, they’re off the job. They can lose their job just from taking a drink or smoking weed,” speaking about comments about company policies concerning recreational marijuana, made by a panel of local business owners who attended the event.

Bainter said, “The Baker County Chamber of Commerce will be the home of Hatch Baker, as of January 1st (2016). We did have a CPO (Community Public Offering) launching event at Barley Brown’s on Tuesday night. We had about 20 people attend.” She mentioned that representatives from both Baker City Saddle Company and McDougall & Sons Bats Company were present at the event to discuss their CPOs.

Orcutt said, when asked by Ward for any additional comments, said, “The only thing I would add, as far as the inmate program, is that, it’s—you don’t realize, you don’t think about what a struggle it is to get out and stay straight, with the biggest hurdle being a driver’s license, and in some cases, a social security card, because they shred them, am I correct, when they go in?” She stated that the issue is being addressed by some facilities.

Smith’s Economic Development update included discussion regarding local employment issues. “One of the struggles that our employers believe is out there—I don’t think I can disagree with them—is that, for a lot of folks, it’s a lot more financially beneficial to remain on social services, than it is to go out and get a job... It doesn’t pay as much as social services, and so, I think that’s an issue, as a society, we’re going to have to work

through. With all that said, we’re hearing about a lot of employers who are advertising, and want to hire more folks.”

Smith said within the last few weeks, his office was contacted by a real estate equity company interested in locating a Fortune 1,000 retail business east of I-84. Smith was not furnished with the name of the company at the time, but when he asked if it’s Shopko, the response was that it would be a “competitor of Shopko,” and a seller of primarily clothing, dry goods, and other products.

“We’ll see what comes of that, but, I think that’s positive. It’s exciting to have that development occur on the east side, and spur that type of activity,” he said, noting that the bulk of new business development has occurred on the west side of I-84.

Peacock asked, “Do we have any information on a Haggen replacement?”

Smith said, “Here’s what I can share with you. I’ve had several, legitimate, family-owned grocers contact us (from within the state, and Idaho). Right now, the building owner, and the current occupants and previous occupants need to work through some issues...”

Peacock and Smith were referring to Haggen Food & Pharmacy, the grocery retailer currently occupying the former location of Albertsons, a 46,000-square-foot commercial building at 1200 Campbell Street, which sits on property owned by Greg Sackos of Intermountain Realty.

Purchasing the Albertsons store and opening just this May, Haggen filed a lawsuit on September 4th, with an extensive list of claims against Albertsons (Albertsons, LLC, and Albertsons Holdings, LLC). On September 8th, Haggen (Haggen Holdings, LLC) filed for Chapter 11 relief in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in the District of Delaware (Case #15-11874-KG), with the

closure of the local Haggen store expected in November leaving Safeway as the sole major grocer.

Nelson said, “In the timeline you’ve expressed this afternoon, maybe we can—because, we’re going to be down to one grocery store for over a year, it sounds like—but, I thought, maybe we could go to Kennedy’s (Kennedy’s Eastside Grocery), and these other small markets, and see if we can help them...”

Orcutt voiced concerns about losing a local grocer, regarding lost jobs, economic impacts, and citing an example that, “Albertsons was worth \$25,000 to \$28,000 a year to the (La Grande) Observer, as far as advertising. So, in a market like Baker, if you lose a grocery store, that’s a lot of money that’s pulled away from anyone...”

In a recent interview, Sackos said, “I think it’s a really unfortunate circumstance that the federal government (Federal Trade Commission) has, in typical form, decided we couldn’t have a monopoly with two stores (referencing Albertsons’ merger with Safeway), so, now, we have one (Safeway). The public will suffer with that. Lack of competition is not a good thing, and, Baker’s right on the cusp of being big enough to support two or more, or, maybe not... We need another grocer...”

The group discussed the necessity to show continued support of established local businesses, and new prospects, and to showcase Economic Development efforts by having new business grand openings, for example, with highly visible advertising and media involvement. Harvey said, “Let’s toot their horn for them, okay, because, we’re connected to it. Let’s show the public that we’re helping them.”

Peacock said the Baker Technical Institute female welding program, which began several weeks ago, is progressing well, stating that, “We hope that that’s

going to stimulate some interest, particularly among the representative population of females...”

He spoke, with comments from Harvey, Smith, and Nelson, about the issues facing high school graduates in today’s world, with passing employment drug tests, having opportunities and skills upon graduation, having good role models, and avoiding social services dependency.

Bainter suggested a collaborative Career Day possibly in late winter, as a way of preparing students and steering them toward goals and opportunities by the time they graduate the next June.

Peacock mentioned that students need to be exposed to the idea of potential career opportunities early, and this concern is being addressed at BTI before the high school stage, in the 7th and 8th grades.

Peacock said, also to address this issue, there is collaboration between BTI, through its welding programs, and Behlen Manufacturing Company and Natural Structures, both located in Baker City.

He praised the students for their efforts with different BTI programs, including robotics, aquaculture and aquaponics, and said that there are about 1,000 tilapia currently being raised. Peacock said the students plan to raise trout, and to eventually release them, with a license from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW).

Ward, stating that the EDC Board had taken tours of the BTI programs, asked Peacock if there were other interested parties who had taken tours.

Peacock said, “Oh, gosh, yes. It’s amazing, the number of people who’ve probably gone through there...”

The next EDC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, November 12, 2015, at 4 p.m., in the Commission Chambers of the County Courthouse.

Platform caucus



Submitted Photo.

Former gubernatorial candidate Dennis Richardson spoke at the event. Richardson says he is still considering a run for Oregon Secretary of State.

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Heidi Justus, bonus delegate, said she was able to provide input into the Healthcare and Education planks, and “sat in on the tail end of the Natural Resources caucus.”

Heidi added, “I felt as though the majority of the Republican platform was well thought out and there was a great deal of wordsmithing that brought all the planks up to date with where we need to go as a state.”

“The process is somewhat tedious,” said Kody Justus, “but for those who like parliamentary procedure, it was fun.”

Kody, who is also a member of Baker County’s NRAC or Natural Resources Advisory Committee, was especially interested in the GOP’s Natural Resources caucus. “Listening to the problems each county faces was very educational—and governmental regulations and over-reach are at the root of most, if not all.”

Also hammered out was a Law and Criminal Justice plank supporting second amendment rights, and the right for people to use reasonable and necessary force to protect themselves, property and livestock.

After a recent ORP transparency tour, a Government Transparency, Accountability and Honesty plank was forged, stressing limited, accountable, efficient and transparent government, at all levels, according to Whitsett. A balanced budget is also key in this plank.

Dyke said, “It was an awful lot of work and a lot of stress. We accomplished a lot though, even people who disagreed could work together on what we finally agreed on. The whole atmosphere of the convention was real positive—and I’m and looking forward to good campaigns in the next year and hopefully wins.”

Dyke, as vice chair of the education caucus said a number of paragraphs in her plank were either reworded, added or strengthened from previous years.

“Primarily, we were able to stress that sex education is the responsibility of parents or legal guardians and that parental permission needs to be given. We were opposed to mandatory vaccinations being given to children in public schools.”

A stance against Common Core previously existed in the platform. “But we made it stronger as a stand-alone statement,” Dyke said.

In addition to the platform caucus, the ORP State meeting followed into the weekend, hosting a number of guest speakers, including former state representative Dennis Richardson, who has visited Baker City several times. Richardson says he doesn’t have another gubernatorial run in mind this time around, but may toss his hat in the ring for Secretary of State.

Jones was invited to give a presentation showing a collection of photographs of the wildfires that swept through Baker County this past fire season, photographs that Dyke said had several in the room from western Oregon who were unaware of the devastation due to the lack of coverage on Portland news, moved to tears.

The full scope of ORP platform changes and additions will be input, formatted and made available on that organization’s web site for download in the near future.

Sumpter Dredge

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Though Bubba Howard did not work on the dredge, he remembered his father letting them come on board at night and stay in the winch room with him until he finished his shift.

The dredge ran around the clock 363 days a year, shut down only for Christmas and Independence Day. Each shift had a three man crew: winchman, head oiler and stern oiler.

The brothers explained that each crew rotated shifts, spending two weeks on days, two on swing shift, and two on graveyard.

Although only three men per shift were required to operate the dredge, the dredge operation also employed surveyors, electricians, machinists, and a shore crew to move the line, among others. The dredge (the third of three to operate in the area) ceased operation in August 1954.

Though the dredge will be closed until next May, the trail system remains open year round for hiking and wildlife viewing.

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Tree grants available from City

Interested in planting a tree or maybe two?

The Baker City Public Works Department currently has grant funding available to assist property owners or renters with the cost of planting street trees at their property.

A street tree is a tree which is generally located between the sidewalk and the street and is located within the public right-of-way.

Applications will be accepted November 1, 2015 through April 1, 2016 or until approved grant applications meet or exceed the grant funds available.

Grant applications and more information can found online at www.baker-city.com or by stopping by the Baker City Public Works Department in City Hall at 1655 1st Street in Baker City.