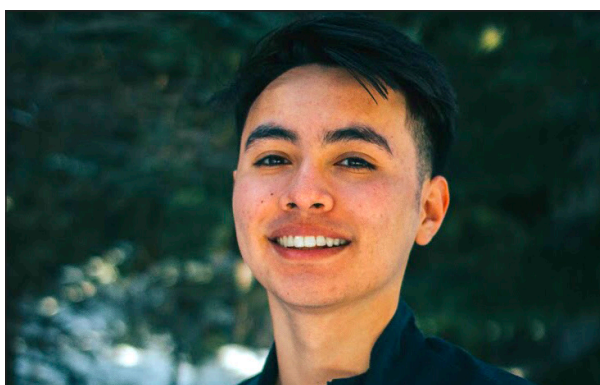


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Weather
Chance of showers likely Fri. and Sat.; possible showers through Monday. High of 75-80 on Wednesday

Columbia Gorge News

HOOD RIVER | THE DALLES | WHITE SALMON

Wednesday, May 5, 2021 Volume 2, Issue 5

\$1.00

Grand View



A man with a motorcycle pauses to admire the view of the Columbia River from "The Hook at Hood River," which gives access to the river at the west end of the Hood River waterfront.

Mark B. Gibson photo

Schools, union reach contract settlement

HOOD RIVER — Hood River County School District (HRCSD) and Hood River Education Association (HREA) reached a tentative settlement on a new three-year collective bargaining deal in the early hours of Thursday, April 22, during its third meeting with a state-assigned mediator. The HRCSD Board of Directors reviewed and unanimously approved of the contract at the April 28 public meeting.

The teachers' union held a vote earlier that day and voted to ratify the contract.

Superintendent Rich Polkinghorn began the April 28 board meeting with the news.

"We'll start with some good news to share with you all and our community, that we've reached a tentative settlement agreement with the Hood River Education Association," he said.

HRCSD and HREA agreed upon a readjusted salary schedule that will benefit teachers new to HRCSD and the teaching profession in the 2020-21 school year. They also agreed upon a

2.5 percent increase for both the 2021-22 school year and 2022-23 school year. Furthermore, the contract includes a monthly district contribution of \$75 to a Tax-Sheltered Annuity for all educators. Part of the wage increase includes extending the teacher's contract year by two days. In negotiations discussions, HRCSD and HREA prioritized keeping a competitive wage and benefit package to attract and support the best staff.

In addition to salary, another key financial agreement related to insurance plans. The school district will continue to provide teachers a \$500 deductible insurance plan with the Group HRA with a \$117 monthly employee premium share for the life of the contract.

HRCSD will also increase the number of credits available for reimbursement for continuing education. Additionally, HRCSD will provide a salary differential for bilingual staff. The school district also will provide monetary recognition for educators who hold

See **CONTRACT**, page 3

Affordable housing proves elusive

By Walker Sacon
Columbia Gorge News

Joel Madsen directs both Mid-Columbia Housing Authority and Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation. The two organizations have separate but related roles working towards a single goal: promoting and administering affordable housing in the Gorge.

Affordable housing is defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as housing costing no more than 30 percent of an occupant's gross income. For local groups like Madsen's, Washington Gorge Action Programs (WAGAP) and Mid-Columbia Community Action Council, an affordable unit doesn't "rent-burden" a person or family making a "low income," defined by HUD as those at-or-below 80 percent of the area's median income.

WAGAP director Leslie Naramore makes a distinction between "affordable housing" and "workforce housing," though the two are not mutually exclusive and both are lacking in the region.

"I think the way it gets muddled

is ... for example, right now in Hood River they're talking about the middle housing and a lot of people are referring to that as affordable housing and it's affordable housing for that income bracket but it's not technically 'affordable housing,'" Naramore said.

Madsen oversees 389 units of housing spread between 23 properties from Cascade Locks, Ore. to Roosevelt, Wash. and administers rent assistance through state programs and the federal Housing Choice Voucher Program, commonly known as "Section 8."

The rent assistance program makes up the difference between what someone can afford before being burdened and the cost of their housing, Madsen said.

A shortage of inventory at all levels of the region's market makes finding a rental to assist with difficult, even when funding is secured, Madsen said.

"We still need to have a healthy housing market where there are units available to rent in order to have that public private partnership," Madsen said. "We need landlords who will engage with us, and



Mid-Columbia Housing Authority director Joel Madsen stands outside Hood River Crossing's playground on April 22.
Walker Sacon photo

we need the housing stock to be existing where we can use that rent assistance to support lower-income households.

"Our whole region is under-producing in the global housing stock, and that impacts us across the whole socio-economic strata," Madsen said.

Mid-Columbia Community Action Council, the non-profit community action agency for Hood River, Wasco and Sherman counties, is directed by Kenny LaPoint. LaPoint's previous job was with Oregon's Housing and Community

See **HOUSING**, page 2

Rezoning delayed

By Jacob Bertram
Columbia Gorge News

WHITE SALMON — A public hearing will continue next month for the Klickitat County Board of Commissioners to decide whether to approve a rezoning proposal to redesignate an 80-acre forestry parcel in the Trout Lake Valley as a General Rural zone.

County planning commissioners made the recommendation at a March 15 meeting for county commissioners to approve the rezone, which would allow for agricultural

See **REZONING**, page 9

Suit alleges breach of contract

By Walker Sacon
Columbia Gorge News

Last Stop Saloon in The Dalles was one of six plaintiffs in a lawsuit filed against the Oregon Lottery in Marion County Circuit Court on April 19, 2021, according to the plaintiffs' petition for judicial review.

The suit alleges the lottery committed a breach of contract in the course of terminating plaintiffs' contracts. Last Stop's contract was terminated on Jan. 29 and lottery

See **SUIT**, page 3

GORGE LOCAL — EDUCATOR SPOTLIGHT

Bus drivers pick up odd jobs, extra routes

By Walker Sacon
Columbia Gorge News

Hood River County School District's bus drivers — around 24 of them, not counting the two mechanics who also drive when needed — lost a lot of work in the past year.

With school buildings closed, kids didn't need to be picked up or dropped off. Drivers picked up hours delivering lunches, painting, weeding and cleaning, interim Transportation Supervisor Ed Drew said.

"They appreciated the district's efforts to find work for them to do, driver Jennifer Springer said, but they were ready to get back on the road.

"I'm done pulling weeds and painting. I just want to drive, drive, drive," Springer said.

With buildings back open and buses back to normal capacity, the

drivers once again "start the kids' day off right with a smile and good morning," Drew said.

Drivers cycle through the lounge in the bus barn each morning, grabbing yogurt, fruit or coffee and chatting about kids on their routes, family at home and spring turkey hunts — Drew filled his tag last week.

They check their brakes, lights, tires and engine fluids and hit the road. The earliest route's driver leaves the lot just after sunrise.

When the weather gets tough, Custodial Supervisor Todd Rainwater gets out on the road early — often by 3 a.m. — to help the district make a decision on delaying or canceling school for the day.

Drew said drivers' professionalism has shown through in their ability to follow "COVID protocols" with their backs to students while keeping their concentration on the



Tammy Ambers checks her bus before heading out April 27.
Walker Sacon photo

road. Rick Meyers' niece Debbie Meyers recommended he join her driving for the district after an on-the-job injury ended his career

driving for construction companies. School bus driving offered Rick a change of pace from the solitude of

See **EDUCATORS**, page 3

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