

Students build homes in Eastern Oregon

By JANET EASTMAN
The Oregonian

in 2013.

The Columbia Basin Student Homebuilders Program, which is open to high school students from Hermiston, Umatilla and Stanfield, was launched in 2013 with a \$372,674 Career and Technical Education grant from the Oregon Department of Education.

The money was used to buy equipment and materials to build the first house. Proceeds from the sale of each new home fund the next project.

Coach Berger reminds his crew of students that the house they build will stay in the community for a long time.

“This is not a term paper you throw away,” Berger said. “We’re under pressure. Winning is completing the house on time.”

His says the team works in dust, dirt, cold and heat. Despite the challenges, they show up on time, learn how to do the work and do what they said they would do.

Caitlin Anderholm, 18, joined the program as a freshman. Over four years, she graduated from construction classes to hands-on building.

The loud and heavy circular saw no longer intimidates her. And when she moves into her first apartment this fall to attend Green River College in Washington state, majoring in earth science, she has confidence she can make repairs.

She says Berger’s encouraging teaching style is “Live and learn. You will make mistakes but he’ll always be there to say, ‘Don’t



Columbia Basin Student Homebuilders Program
Students help build a home in Hermiston.

do it again.’ It’s a good environment.”

Hundreds of high school students participate in each build, says Berger. Over the school year, students enrolled in computer-assisted design, construction and landscaping classes visit the site.

With guidance from instructors, architects and engineers, students design the floor plan to fit the lot. Then about a dozen seniors spend two hours each school day working, from digging the foundation to sealing air leaks after the Energy Trust of Oregon’s final inspection.

The program receives

guidance from craftsmen and suppliers who are members of the Northeast Oregon Homebuilder’s Association.

Advertising students help real estate agent Bennett Christianson of Christianson Realty Group market the property for sale.

None of the original owners of the seven previous homes has moved out and this year’s house sold in January for \$499,000, when sheet rock was still visible on the walls.

Demand for housing is high in Oregon and “our reputation is good,” says Berger, 60, who has been an educator in the Hermiston

School District for 31 years.

Before being named the student homebuilder director, Berger taught vocational classes. He later earned an Oregon contractor’s license.

Professionals are hired to install trusses, electricity and plumbing. After graduation, students who help finish the property before the open house are paid.

To help out during the pandemic, Gideon Fritz, who graduated from Hermiston High in 2019, worked afternoons on the house after he completed his online coursework to earn his degree at Oregon State University. He now works as Berger’s assistant.

Pandemic supply chain issues didn’t delay the project, says Berger, but scheduling already overworked tradespeople created gaps. Instead of taking downtime, the students built sheds.

“I told my students, ‘COVID is not going to shut us down,’” he says. “It’s like winning the state title, focus on the goal and put in the work. The past does not guarantee success.”

Berger says people attending the first open house were surprised by the quality of the construction.

“They thought it would be a shack built sideways with crooked doors,” he says. “Now people know these are the nicest homes in town,” with high-end features such as a stone entryway, illuminated crown molding and an outdoor living space with low-maintenance landscaping.

“These are Street of Dreams-level homes for

under \$500,000,” he says.

The new two-story house has 2,330 square feet of living space under a roof with four gables. The temperature of the top floor bonus room is maintained by an energy-efficient electric mini-split system.

On the main level, the living room has a stone fireplace wall that rises 22 feet to the ceiling. The primary suite has a vaulted ceiling, walk-in closet and a spa-like bathroom with a tub, shower and walls clad in cultured marble.

There are two more bedrooms, another bathroom and a powder room. A barn door from Noland Door Co. conceals the laundry room, says Berger, adding, “the doors in the house are real knotty alder and they’re just gorgeous. I want to hug every door.”

Energy efficient features, built above code standards, include enhanced insulation, heating, cooling and ventilation systems, says Berger. The kitchen has a five-burner gas stove, quartz counters and a center island.

There is a convenient central vacuum system, SimpliSafe security system and speakers throughout the house.

A sliding glass door opens to the barbecue area overlooking the lawn, raised bed planters and a space plumbed for hot tub in the fenced backyard.

The three-car garage has a 10-foot-wide bay door to park an RV or boat. The home is ready for a solar system and electric car charging station.

FDA bans Juul e-cigarettes tied to teen vaping surge

By MATTHEW PERRONE
and TOM MURPHY
Associated Press

flavored cartridges. Those already on the market must be removed. Consumers aren’t restricted from having or using Juul’s products, the agency said.

To stay on the market, companies must show that their e-cigarettes benefit public health. In practice, that means proving that adult smokers who use them are likely to quit or reduce their smoking, while teens are unlikely to get hooked on them.

The FDA noted that some of the biggest sellers like Juul may have played a “disproportionate” role in the rise in teen vaping. The agency said Thursday that Juul’s application didn’t have enough evidence



Brynn Anderson/AP Photo

An electronic cigarette from Juul Labs.

to show that marketing its products “would be appropriate for the protection of the public health.”

Juul said it disagrees with

with regulators.

In a statement, the FDA said Juul’s application left regulators with significant questions and didn’t include enough information to evaluate any potential risks. The agency said the company’s research included “insufficient and conflicting data” about things like potentially harmful chemicals leaching from Juul’s cartridges.

“Without the data needed to determine relevant health risks, the FDA is issuing these marketing denial orders,” Michele Mital, acting director of the FDA’s tobacco center, said in the statement.

Joe Murillo, Juul’s chief regulatory officer, said in the company’s statement

that Juul submitted enough information and data to address all issues raised by regulators. He noted that the company’s application, submitted more than two years ago, included comparisons to combustible cigarettes and other products.

He said it also included information on potential harmful effects of the company’s products.

Since last fall, the FDA has given the OK to tobacco-flavored e-cigarettes from R.J. Reynolds, Logic and other companies. But industry players and anti-tobacco advocates have complained that those products account for just a tiny percent of the \$6 billion vaping market in the U.S.

Local News at your fingertips

DOWNLOAD THE ASTORIAN’S APP FREE TODAY



- Breaking News Notifications
- The Latest Local News
- Explore Photos, Videos and More
- Personalize Your News Feed
- Easily Save and Share Articles



the **Astorian**