

ROUND-UP: Oregon Tax Court ruled the association is not a charitable institution

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Community organizations almost often use the grounds for sporting activities, meetings and more, he said, but not all of those bring in money. The Blue Mountain Community College rodeo team, for example, practices in the Round-Up Pavilion and pays to cover the cost of lighting the facility, which the Round-Up gives back to the college in the form of rodeo scholarships. And a few years ago the Round-Up stopped charging the Pendleton School District to use the grounds for home football games.

Quesenberry said more income — or not paying as much in taxes — would allow the Round-Up to invest in its facilities and expand and improve the Pavilion. He said the Round-Up hears from plenty of folks that want to use the space, such as for horse clinics, but they often opt out because it is not large enough.

The use of the Round-Up facilities is a key issue the county and Round-Up cited in a joint written statement concerning the property taxes. The Round-Up Association “certainly controls the

property during the month of September,” according to the statement, but “much of the rest of the year the grounds are essentially the property of a host of local organizations — most notably the Pendleton School District.”

Ownership is the other big issue. Murdock in the statement said the Round-Up “kind of owns the property,” but not fully. If Round-Up does not conduct a rodeo for two years, Quesenberry said ownership would revert to the city of Pendleton.

Quesenberry said the Round-Up had too many matters to consider to go forward with the tax challenge. He also said he remained convinced the Round-Up is a charitable organization and improving its facilities would benefit the community.

The Oregon Tax Court in 2012, however, ruled the Round-Up is not a charitable institution under Oregon law and was not entitled to property tax exemption.

For now, Quesenberry said, the Round-Up is tight on the rein and waiting on an outsider appraiser.

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Wal-Mart also filed property tax challenge

Another big property owner also ended a challenge to its property taxes amount — Wal-Mart.

Wal-Mart Store East LP filed an appeal Dec. 22 arguing the county did not properly assess the value of warehouse conveyors, shelves and racking. The county assessed the equipment at more than \$29 million, according to Wal-Mart’s petition, while the company requested a value of almost \$24.3 million.

Jolene Meadows, clerk for Umatilla County Board of Property Tax Appeals, said Wal-Mart withdrew its challenge without providing a reason. That leaves seven appeals for the board to consider when it meets Thursday morning at the Umatilla County Courthouse, Pendleton. Meadows said while the public can attend the meeting, there is no opportunity for public input. The hearings are only between property owners, their representatives and the board.

GRADUATION: 15 are still pursuing a diploma

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take advantage of the Pendleton School District’s three high schools — Pendleton High School, Nixyaawii Community School and Hawthorne Alternative High School.

While these students might come for a fresh start, some eventually drop out and count against the district’s average.

Still, only 25 dropout students transferred into the district after ninth grade, as opposed to the 31 students who entered Pendleton’s school system in kindergarten only to drop out before graduation.

Many of the students studied for the report had transient education, hopping from high school to high school before eventually dropping out.

Not all students who didn’t graduate dropped out of high school.

Fifteen students are still pursuing a high school diploma, 13 received either a GED, an alternative certificate or extended diploma and seven are in a long-term care program at the Homestead Youth Lodge.

Peterson also included the non-graduate demographics in his report — 37 were white students, 28 American Indians, three Latinos, two Pacific Islanders and one African American.

While white students comprised the largest subgroup, Native American students had the highest percentage of non-graduates.

Although the report continued a sobering look at the district’s middling graduation rates, there was a modicum of good news.

A reporting error pushed the district’s average just past the state’s 72 percent average. Pendleton High School, Nixyaawii and Hawthorne all received small bumps as well, thanks to the gaffe.

The error was the result of the district reporting students as non-graduates when they were actually no longer with the district. The report states five students transferred out of the district before graduating while another student graduated early, which the department of education considers a “five-year completer.”

Peterson’s report was new to the district, but it might become a more regular occurrence. Peterson agreed to board member Debbie McBee’s request to gather the information next year so the board could compare and contrast the data with this year’s results.

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PORT: Redeveloping the depot expected to take 20-30 years

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Oregon National Guard for a training facility.

Don Chance, executive director for the authority, said the Army is obligated to generate as close to fair market value as it can off its closed and realigned bases. He is optimistic the port’s offer will be well-received by the Department of Defense, and could pave the way for the transfer of the depot by June.

“Everybody in the region is going to benefit from the port stepping up to purchase that piece (of land),” Chance said.

Once in local hands, redeveloping the depot is expected to take 20-30 years. If successful at drawing investment, the area could add as many as 6,000 direct jobs and \$5 million in property taxes between the two counties.

With so much on the line, port General Manager Gary Neal said it was important not to let negotiations with the Army slip away.

“At the end of the day, we said we’ll step up and figure out how to make that work,” said Neal.

The Columbia Development Authority, formerly the Umatilla Army Depot Reuse Authority, has been working since the late 1980s to secure the depot land for economic development. Opened in 1941, the depot was used to store chemical weapons including mustard gas for the Army beginning in 1962 until it was slated for closure in 1988.

All munitions have since been destroyed at the base.

Chance, 62, said he will retire after the transfer of the Depot is complete. He was hired in 2009 to serve as director of the redevelopment plan, a massive 1,200-page document to address the Army’s strict requirements.

That leaves the authority in need of a new director. Board members will meet at 11 a.m. Tuesday, March 17 to discuss what they envision for the position moving forward before formally seeking applicants.

Chance, who lives in Ellensburg, Washington and is a former planning director for the city of Olympia, said most of his duties with the authority have so far involved communicating between the multitude of state, federal and local agencies, as well as handling the legal hurdles of the land transfer.

The nature of the job will change after the transfer is complete, Chance said. Whoever the authority hires will be shifting focus to attracting businesses and planning the infrastructure needed for development.

“The manager is going to be implementing the redevelopment plan, which is basically an economic development exercise,” he said.

Chance said he enjoyed his six years on the project.

“It’s not very often you start from scratch and decide what to do with 17,000 acres,” he said. “Shutting down an Army base is a unique process. There’s nothing else like it.”

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HEAD START: Children will benefit from a better-trained teacher

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access to Early Head Start resources like mental health screening and free dental care.

Darcee Kilsdonk, Early Head Start director for UMHS, said the concept allows those providers to serve children whose parents work during hours the UMHS centers aren’t open, and in a more personalized setting.

At the same time, all children in those centers will benefit from a better-trained teacher and using a proven preschool curriculum and materials, said Kilsdonk.

“We will be benefiting from the wealth of experience these childcare providers have, and their relationship with the families, while also bringing something to the table ourselves,” Kilsdonk said.

She said UMHS plans to work with childcare providers like the Oregon Child Development Coalition in Morrow County and the InterMountain Education Service District, but will also reserve 14 slots

for people who run a daycare out of their homes.

Kilsdonk said she plans to hold an informational meeting in the future, but for now providers interested in learning more can contact her at Umatilla Morrow Head Start’s Hermiston offices at 541-564-6878.

McGrath said providers who are not awarded an Early Head Start contract will be welcome to come learn and network at trainings.

“Childcare providers tend to be very isolated, and this brings them into the fold,” she said.

McGrath said the grant capitalizes on the recent push locally, statewide and nationally to give more at-risk children quality care and education starting at a young age.

“People are making the investment because they know it makes the difference,” she said.

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Samsung GALAXY S5

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