

Child poverty in Oregon worse since recession

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

Economists may have declared the Great Recession over in 2009, but child poverty rates in Oregon have actually gotten worse since then.

An annual report from Children First for Oregon found 22 percent of Oregon's children living below the poverty line — an increase of 10 percent since 2009.

"We call this our progress report, but in fact we're not seeing a lot of progress," Children First executive director Tonia Hunt said.

The numbers in Umatilla County, taken from a 2014 report by the Department of Human Services, show that the number of people on food stamps per capita is in line with the state average, but 45 percent of SNAP recipients in Umatilla County are children, compared with 37 percent statewide.

The Children First report shows other statewide indicators of child welfare — including health and education — aren't so strong either.

The nonprofit noted abuse rates have gone down by 2 percent in Oregon since 2003, but declined by 25 percent in the United States as a whole during the same time period.

Hunt said one of the biggest things the state can do to address that is to expand home programs where experts make home visits to advise new parents.

"We have families identified who are high risk, who want to participate in these programs, who are asking for people to come into their home and teach them and we don't have the resources to provide that," she said.

Hunt said home visiting programs that have reduced abuse and neglect only reach about 15 percent of at-risk children in Oregon.

Much has been said about Oregon's dismal graduation

rates and state test scores, and Children First for Oregon condemned them as well. The organization encouraged the state to move toward funding universal preschool for all, while in the meantime expanding Head Start.

In Eastern Oregon steps are already being taken to expand Head Start services. Umatilla-Morrow Head Start announced last week that was awarded a \$780,000 grant from the federal government to add 50 more children to the Head Start rolls through a partnership with private childcare providers who volunteer to become certified Head Start teachers.

Compared with the rest of the county, Children First for Oregon found that Oregon ranked in the bottom half of nine of the 10 child welfare categories it measures. The only place Oregon shone was in mothers having access to adequate prenatal care, where Oregon is ranked 11th in the country.

To combat Oregon's low scores, the nonprofit suggested a number of initiatives that should be considered by the state legislature, including a \$15 minimum wage, earned sick days for low-wage workers, expanded access to preschool and increased assistance for domestic violence victims and their children.

Hunt said people who are concerned about "making Oregon the best place to be a kid" can sign up online at www.orunitedforkids.org to join a coalition of organizations and concerned citizens in sharing ideas for a "Children's Agenda" for the state legislature to consider.

"I think as a state we need to stand up and be very clear children are a priority," Hunt said.

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BROWN: Said she was impressed by the efforts from both the public, private sectors

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CEO Jim Cheney estimated 40 to 45 percent of his workforce lives outside city limits.

Over the course of the meeting, business leaders listed La Grande, Walla Walla and Hermiston as residential areas employees are coming from to work in Pendleton.

The tough housing market has an effect on incoming professionals as well.

Austin Black, a manager at Lifeways, was recruited from San Diego to work in Pendleton.

He lived his first three months in a hotel while he searched for a home, finding potential housing either insufficient or too expensive.

When he heard about the Pendleton Heights development, he was eager to move in, even before the project was complete.

"I pointed to a pile of dirt, and I said, 'I want that,'" Black said.

Now residing in a three-bedroom home at Pendleton Heights, Black said only 25 percent of his staff live in Pendleton.

Echoing the words of his fellow professionals, Black said the lack of housing was a deterrent to attracting high quality employees to the city.

Outside of the model home Brown held the meet-

ing in, the lack of landscaping belied the fact that Pendleton Heights is still a work in progress.

Market analyst Greg Nilan, attending on behalf of Pendleton Heights developer Saj Jivanjee, said Pendleton Heights is an example of how public/private partnerships could boost the city housing market.

To jumpstart the project, the city donated the land and fronted the money to extend utilities to the development, to be paid back by Jivanjee.

When a lender was only willing to lend 60 percent of the project's value, Oregon Housing and Community Services stepped in and made a 25 percent loan guarantee, causing the lender to increase their offer to 75 percent.

Brown said she was impressed by the efforts from both the public and private sectors in coming up with a creative solution to build workforce housing.

In an interview after the meeting, Brown said each community in Oregon has unique housing problems and encouraged further work from the state's regional solutions centers to solve those issues.

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PENDLETON

Convicted murderer Craigen guilty on explosives charges

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

George West Craigen lost his second criminal trial stemming from his murder of a Milton-Freewater man in 2011.

Craigen, 52, was on trial this week at the Umatilla County Courthouse, Pendleton, for five counts of possession of explosive devices. Umatilla County's chief deputy prosecutor Jackie Jenkins and defense attorney Will Perkinson of Pendleton presented the bulk of their cases Wednesday and Thursday. Courtroom staff said the 12-person jury discussed the ver-



Craigen

Craigen's property in Milton-Freewater while investigating the shooting death of Rob Carter. A jury last fall convicted Craigen of Carter's murder. In the case, circuit court Judge Russell

dict for less than two hours Thursday and returned at about 1:40 p.m.

The jury was unanimous in finding Craigen guilty on all counts.

Police found the devices on Craigen's property in Milton-Freewater while investigating the shooting death of Rob Carter. A jury last fall convicted Craigen of Carter's murder. In the case, circuit court Judge Russell

West sentenced Craigen to 27 years in prison.

West presided over Craigen's new trial as well, and the sentencing is pending. West will determine if sentences for the new convictions should run concurrent or consecutive to others.

The sheriff's office ramped up courthouse security for the trial, requiring people entering the court area to pass through a metal detector. Courthouse sources said West even took the precaution of not allowing Perkinson to wear a long tie, which Craigen would have been able to grab. So Perkinson wore a bow tie.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

More than 300 competitors face off in a no-limit Texas Hold'em tournament at the 2014 Wildhorse Summer Poker Round-up in Mission.

WILDHORSE: This year's operating budget is almost \$70M

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tion for the tribes."

The gaming company would manage the facility for five years, at which time the tribe could sever the contract or extend it for two more years.

George said the tribes viewed the opportunity as one that would provide jobs. Tribal leaders took part in planning and waded through gaming regulations. Federal and state gaming law was — and is — somewhat fuzzy for tribes. In 1988, Congress had enacted the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, which basically allows tribes to offer gaming activities that are allowed in the state where the reservation is located.

A four-man negotiating team — George, CTUIR Legal Counsel Dan Hester, Board of Trustee Chairman Elwood Patawa and Economic Development Director Dave Tovey — spent 18 months hammering out a compact with then-Governor Barbara Roberts.

At the time, Oregon allowed bingo halls, horse

and greyhound racing, poker clubs and casino nights for charity. Because Happy Canyon, part of the Pendleton Round-Up, allowed craps, blackjack and roulette, those activities became fair game for Oregon tribes.

"Happy Canyon served as a kind of springboard to get into that type of gaming," George said.

A temporary gaming operation opened in a modular trailer on Nov. 5 1994 as a way to train staff. Customers showed up in droves to test drive the 100 slot machines. Some waited in the rain when the facility reached capacity.

"There were huge lines to get in," George said. "Collectively, we thought, wow, this has a chance to succeed."

Customers continued to flock to Wildhorse. On March 9, 1995, operations transferred to a brick-and-mortar facility that had a Disney-esque ambience with rolling thunder, faux rock, a tree in the restaurant, waterfalls, singing birds and a talking deer head over the

snack bar. The facility offered 300 slot machines, six table games and a bingo hall.

In 1996, a hotel was built. The next year, a golf course and RV park were added. In 1998 came the Tamastlikt Cultural Institute, which is now independent from the casino.

After five years, the tribe took over management of the casino and George moved into the CEO position. Since then the larger hotel and theaters have been added and the lights and noise of 1,200 machines fill the sprawling gaming floor.

George put the rapid-fire growth in fiscal terms.

"In 1995, the operating budget was \$500,000 and we employed 73 people," he said. "In 2014, we employed 796 people — 860 in the summer — and spent approximately \$24 million in wages."

This year's operating budget is almost \$70 million, he said. All gaming revenue net profit goes to support tribal programs, economic development, local charitable organizations and the

general welfare of the tribes. The tribes employ 1,600 people, making it the largest employer in Umatilla County. Currently, the CTUIR is one of nine Oregon tribes that operate casinos.

As George looks into the future, he said he believes Wildhorse and the tribes will continue to grow and diversify.

Likely future upgrades include another 10-story hotel, more gaming space, more food and beverage venues, the razing of the small original two-story hotel, possibly a bowling alley and a multi-purpose event center that could seat 1,500.

George said Wildhorse's success spills over into the greater Pendleton community.

"Some people view Wildhorse as a threat, but I would counter by saying we bring a lot of business to the area," he said. "There's no doubt in my mind that as we grow, everyone else is benefiting."

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