

EAST OREGONIAN

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139th Year, No. 144 WINNER OF THE 2013 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD One dollar

PERS gamble doesn't pay off

Some bet retirement payouts would be reduced, now have to pay up

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

After legislative cuts to the Public Employees Retirement System in 2013 forced schools and cities to wager on their legality, those who played it close to the vest were proven right last week when the Oregon Supreme Court reversed the cuts.

The court declared that the major component of the PERS reforms — a “grand bargain” that reduced retirees’ annual cost of living adjustment from 2 percent to 1.25 percent — amounted to an illegal, retroactive change in their contracts. The reforms, implemented in 2013, helped temporarily level skyrocketing PERS costs. In Umatilla County alone, public

employers saved more than \$4 million in PERS contributions during the 2013-2014 fiscal year. At that point they were faced with a choice: Should they use the savings to avoid the layoffs the legislation was meant to prevent? Or should they hold onto those dollars, perhaps needlessly, in case the courts struck down the cuts and the state required the full payment?

“Hindsight is 20/20 and it could have gone either way,” Hermiston finance director Amy Palmer said. The city of Hermiston, along with Blue Mountain Community College, InterMountain Education Service District, Milton-Freewater School District and the city of Umatilla all chose to act as if the changes hadn’t gone into effect. They budgeted at the pre-legislation rate and put the

extra money aside. In Hermiston’s case, Palmer said the difference was about \$200,000, which the city kept in a fund to be used should the grand bargain be ruled unconstitutional. “I’m glad we were able to do that,” Palmer said. In BMCC’s case, the money added to a PERS reserve fund the college started paying into in 2009 in anticipation of the steep increases

See PERS/10A

PENDLETON Council confirms medical pot regulations

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

Third time was not the charm for Pendleton City Councilman Al Plute, but he still got what he wanted in the end. Plute made three separate motions to approve zoning regulations for medical marijuana dispensaries at a Pendleton City Council meeting Tuesday night, all of which failed. But a motion made by Councilman Chuck Wood following Plute’s last attempt did pass council muster, although city officials said dispensaries will not be able to open until the council changes Pendleton’s business license laws, which prohibit businesses in violation of federal law. The amendment to the city’s development code allows medical marijuana dispensaries in central mixed-use and service-commercial zones as long as they are not within 1,000 feet of a K-12 school, a public park, another marijuana facility or a community facility primarily attended by minors. The new regulations do not address recreational marijuana. Deliberations over the regulations took more than two hours, with some councilors arguing the city should wait until the business licensing laws were changed while others said the zoning regulations should be passed as soon as possible. Momentum seemed to shift several times before the council settled on a decision. At one point, Wood had a motion to postpone further council consideration until June 16 while city staff worked on a business license proposal. He later withdrew the motion. Plute grew visibly frustrated as his motions continued to be rebuffed. While his first two motions died for lack of a seconding vote, he changed his tactics with his third attempt to allow the regulations to only go into affect after a business licensing

See PENDLETON/10A



Sherwood kindergartner Anna Moore uses binoculars to look for birds while walking on the River Parkway on Monday in Pendleton.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Seven days free of screens



Children participate in a Zumba class on Tuesday at the Round-up Athletic Club in Pendleton.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Screen time affects sleep, food choices and physical activity

By **KATHY ANEY**
East Oregonian

Imagine a week without screens. Children and families around the country are valiantly attempting to banish computers, tablets and other devices from their lives for Screen-Free Week, May 4-10. By unplugging, their bodies and brains will reap the benefits, say health experts. Identical twins Anna and Alexi Moore are giving it a

go. On Monday, the Sherwood Elementary School kindergartners turned their backs on their iPads and went birdwatching on the Pendleton Parkway with their grandfather, Don Moore. “I think it’s really hard,” said Anna, of turning off her tablet and television for a week. She and her sister will give up their favorite Netflix shows such as “My Little Pony.” Instead they will participate in local activities

See WEEK/10A

House passes police body cam legislation

Companion bill clarifies right to record police

By **PETER WONG**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon House has taken the first step toward regulating how police use body cameras to record their interactions with the public. A House vote of 50-9 on Tuesday sent House Bill 2975 to the Senate. Hermiston police and the Columbia County sheriff have decided to equip their officers with body cameras, and Portland is considering it. Mayor Charlie Hales

has endorsed the idea, but equipping the larger Portland police force would be more costly. “We know this technology is new,” said Rep. Jennifer Williamson, D-Portland, the bill’s floor manager. “So I think this is a solid start. I look forward to seeing the policies that agencies develop in their communities.” However, the bill does not require police to use them. Under the bill, officers can activate cameras “continuously” upon reasonable suspicion or probable cause that a crime or violation is being committed. The camera can

See POLICE/8A



Hang ‘em high The sun shines through a hole in a pair of cowboy boots as they hang from a shoe tree off Cold Springs Road on Tuesday, northwest of Pendleton. Tuesday’s sunny skies are forecast to turn cloudy Wednesday as a weather systems brings rain and the possibility for thunderstorms to the area by evening.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris



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