

## PENDLETON

## New store the king when it comes to gaming

Store offers safe place for kids to hang out, play

By JONATHAN BACH  
East Oregonian

Oliver Brown wanted to make his unborn daughter proud.

His wife miscarried during his final term at Portland State University, where he studied from 2011 to February of this year. For three months thereafter, he was “in a fog,” he said.

At PSU, Brown studied community issues around American Indians, blacks and Latinos regarding health care, schooling and immigration. Some professors there were understanding of the death, others weren’t — but it knocked him off his feet regardless. He didn’t graduate.

Brown did, however, take what he learned in school and apply it to the real world. He opened Game King at 106 Southwest Court Avenue in Pendleton last month.

For Brown, 29, the new store is not just a place to buy video games and movies, but also a community space



Staff photo by Jonathan Bach  
Oliver Brown, 29, stands inside Game King at 106 Southwest Court Avenue in Pendleton on Wednesday, which opened last month.

wherein kids and teens from a wide swath of social demographics play together for free on game consoles set up near the front of the shop.

Community members donated a number of the couches, chairs and televisions to him for the kids hang out on.

He said he wanted a safe place for kids to go, which is also why he keeps the

consoles running until 9 p.m. some nights. Here, strangers become friends. He estimates around 40 kids will come through the doors on an average summer day, though that business has slowed as the school year looms.

A goal for the store is to have, for example, low-income students and high-income students mix, so that when they return to

the classroom, bullying goes by the wayside.

He said couples, hardcore gamers and even those who don’t have consoles at their houses stop by to play.

“Kids are precious,” said the father of 2-year-old Oliver II, who toddles around Game King’s wooden floors. In a way, Brown is paying it forward from when he was younger.

He grew up for a time in North Carolina, the son of a single mother. He remembers riding his bike across intersections as a young boy in the big city to pore over wares sold at video game stores.

He said his godfather would also spend hours with him each day, buying him food and playing basketball with him. He said the YMCA, where he spent more than 10 years, only had his mother pay for the first month’s membership fees. Brown went on to play ball at the college level, and said he would have probably gotten himself into trouble had it not been for these intervening factors in his life.

Now, he has taken on a mentorship role of his own. He’ll talk to young ones about the fact that you don’t have to be a genius or an athlete to get into college, and that there’s no shame in pursuing an education at a community college.

Sometimes, if kids don’t have the money for a game or DVD, he’ll cut them a deal or give it to them for free.

Of his unborn daughter, he said, “It was really for

her, a place that I could want her to be a part of.”

But this isn’t his first business. Brown said he owned a power-washing service, but a fire ravaged it.

“It all blew up in my face, literally,” he said.

As for the new business, “it’s also frightening,” he said. He acknowledged doubters exist, and he said he values their input. But for each of them, he said he has three times as many grateful patrons.

“The main thing that saves me too is selling retro stuff,” he said. Some days, the products that move fastest are older consoles, from Ataris to original PlayStations to Nintendo 64s.

But there is certainly strain on him. He said he doesn’t have as much time for young Oliver II, other than when they are both in the store. Despite the long hours, he said he sees relationships blossom over the video games where they would not have without the space.

“It makes it worth it, by far.”

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## EOTEC: Erection of building now slated to start Sept. 4

Continued from 1A

utilities. The bid package for site electrical work, for example, only received one bid that Frew Development is recommending the board reject.

Brookshier said there are questions about whether construction of the rodeo arena, which hasn’t been sent out for bid yet, will be able to be completed in time.

“These are questions we need to answer together and we need to answer quickly,” he said.

Umatilla County sold Hermiston School District the current fairgrounds for \$3 million in 2012 to help pay for EOTEC, but the fair has a lease agreement with the district to use the property through the end of 2016 if needed.

Despite some delays, work does continue to move forward with the project. Gary Winsand of Frew Development reported on Friday that other than site electrical and pavement, horizontal construction is “basically completed.” The footings are in for the prefabricated event center building, which has been delivered on-site, and the floor is scheduled to be poured Tuesday.

Erection of the building is now slated to start Sept. 4, a delay from a June estimate of Aug. 10.

Meanwhile bids for construction of the barns were due Friday and design work for the rodeo arena is being completed by Michael Building & Design.

Bob Barton of Barton Laser Leveling, which completed grading and other horizontal construction, praised Frew Development Group for its “staunch stewardship” in keeping the project on budget.

“I feel as though Frew did a great job of managing the money for the project,” he said.

Heather Cannell, the business manager for EOTEC, said she has ordered chairs, tables, office furniture and event scheduling software for the new center. She said she spent most of fair week on the fairgrounds getting a feel for the needs of the fair and rodeo and talking with people about EOTEC.

“There is definitely a mix,” she said of reactions to the project. “Some people are nostalgic and don’t want to leave, other people are excited for more room.”

David Bothum reported to the board that this year’s rodeo was a solid success, with an exceptionally high-quality roster of cowboys

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— Sen. Bill Hansell

that included 19 of the top 20 cowboys in the world for many events.

“Each night was just like watching an NFR (National Finals Rodeo),” he said.

Board member Dan Dorran said he wanted to thank the community for its overwhelming support for the fair, especially this year when it was responsible for record-breaking auction sales and high attendance despite overly hot and windy weather.

He said this year’s fair was pushed to the limit when it came to handling electricity, water drainage and more.

“What causes that is success,” he said. “It’s not because we’re failing, it’s because we get bigger and better.”

Whether the fair moves in 2016 or 2017, fair board and EOTEC board member Don Miller said the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center is coming not a moment too soon, because “we’re making it a reality 10 to 15 years later after we have outgrown the grounds.”

“Utilities and infrastructure are almost to the point we will not be able to exist,” he said.

Senator Bill Hansell attended the meeting and told the board that the project has been “near and dear to my heart” since he started working on the idea as a county commissioner in 1982 and he was pleased to be able to put in a good word toward the crucial extra \$1.5 million the EOTEC board got from the legislature this year.

“My personal commitment to making this a success goes way, way back, almost as far as anybody, and now as a state senator I’m excited to help this move forward any way I can,” he said.

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## BRIEFLY

### NEOEDD seeks agritourism consultant

PENDLETON — A USDA Rural Business Development Grant is funding the hiring of a consultant to help businesses and tourism partners in five Eastern Oregon counties.

The focus includes developing and marketing culinary and agricultural tourism in Union, Baker, Wallowa, Umatilla and Morrow counties.

The consultant’s project activities include taking an inventory of agritourism products available or under development, engagement with agritourism groups, hosting agritourism development workshops and development of marketing goals and action plans. The project activities are expected to be completed by Nov. 30, 2016.

“We are really excited to leverage new opportunities for our businesses,”

said Sara Miller, Northeast Oregon Economic Development District economic development specialist. “We want to make sure that travelers can find and enjoy agricultural experiences and products as part of their visit to northeast Oregon.”

Miller is accepting proposals from consultants interested in working on the project. For more information, contact [saramiller@neoedd.org](mailto:saramiller@neoedd.org) or 541-426-3598. Consultant proposals are due Friday, Sept. 4.

### Heppner chamber to share all-entities report

HEPPNER — Catch up on what’s happening around Heppner during the upcoming Heppner Chamber of Commerce meeting.

The no-host luncheon will feature an all-entities report. It runs Thursday from noon to 1 p.m. at Heppner City

Hall, 111 N. Main St. The lunch, which is catered by Howe’s About Pizza, includes assorted pizza, green salad and a dessert. The meal is \$10 per person.

To ensure there’s enough food and space, those planning to attend must RSVP by calling 541-676-5536 by Wednesday, Sept. 2.

### Downtown association meets monthly

PENDLETON — The Pendleton Downtown Association invites business owners and other interested citizens to meet with them the first Thursday of each month.

The next gathering is Thursday, Sept. 3 at 7 a.m. in the Community Room at Pendleton City Hall, 501 S.W. Emigrant Ave.

For more information, contact Fred Bradbury at [fbradbury@yahoo.com](mailto:fbradbury@yahoo.com).



## WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THESE TWO HOMES?

HINT: IT HAS TO DO WITH SAVING ENERGY AND MONEY.

Though two homes may look alike, energy-efficiency upgrades can make a big difference in terms of maximizing comfort and reducing energy use and cost.

Energy Trust of Oregon can help you find a trade ally contractor and provide cash incentives that help offset the cost of qualifying energy improvements. With upgrades to your water heater, appliances and lighting, you could save up to 20 percent on your home energy costs while not having to scale back on comfort.

Start getting more from your energy today. Visit [www.energytrust.org/homes](http://www.energytrust.org/homes) or call us at 1.866.368.7878.

Serving customers of Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, NW Natural and Cascade Natural Gas.

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