

TEFAP supports ag, needy families

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
East Oregonian

With Christmas around the corner, U.S. Agriculture Undersecretary Kevin Concannon is emphasizing the importance of American farms in providing fresh, wholesome food to needy families.

In particular, Concannon said the USDA purchases roughly \$300 million worth of food through the Emergency Food Assistance Program, or TEFAP, which is made available to local food banks.

TEFAP served roughly 47 million people in 2014 and provides about 20 percent of the food distributed to the Feeding America network of food banks — including the Oregon Food Bank.

Concannon said it's possible the program could get an additional \$40 million in funding next year.

“Not everybody is as



Concannon

well off as we might feel we are,” Concannon said in an interview with the East Oregonian. “Our role is providing support on the government food side.”

TEFAP was established in 1983. The USDA buys the food and distributes it to states based on its low-income and unemployed population. States then distribute the food to food banks and pantries.

“I’ve seen it in action. I can’t say enough good things about it.”

— **Kevin Concannon**, U.S. Agriculture Undersecretary speaking about the Emergency Food Assistance Program

In addition to feeding the hungry, TEFAP has also become an important source of revenue for some farms. Between fruits, vegetables, dairy, grains and meat, there are very few agricultural sectors the program doesn’t reach, Concannon said.

Those food purchases can also help to stabilize commodity prices when the agricultural economy struggles, Concannon said. This year, the USDA has bought up excess cranberry, dairy

and peanut crops, he said.

Despite the government’s assistance, he said food banks need plenty more donations from people to keep up with demand. Feeding America is made up of 220 food banks nationwide, with 50,000 locations operated primarily by volunteers.

“I’ve seen it in action. I can’t say enough good things about it,” Concannon said.

In Eastern Oregon, the nonprofit Farmers Ending Hunger expects to set a new single-year record in 2015 donating nearly 4 million pounds of locally grown food to the Oregon Food Bank. On average, about 284,000 Oregonians rely on emergency food boxes for meals, according to the organization. Of those, 34 percent are children.

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LA GRANDE

Nightingale Gallery exhibit features Crow’s Shadow director

East Oregonian

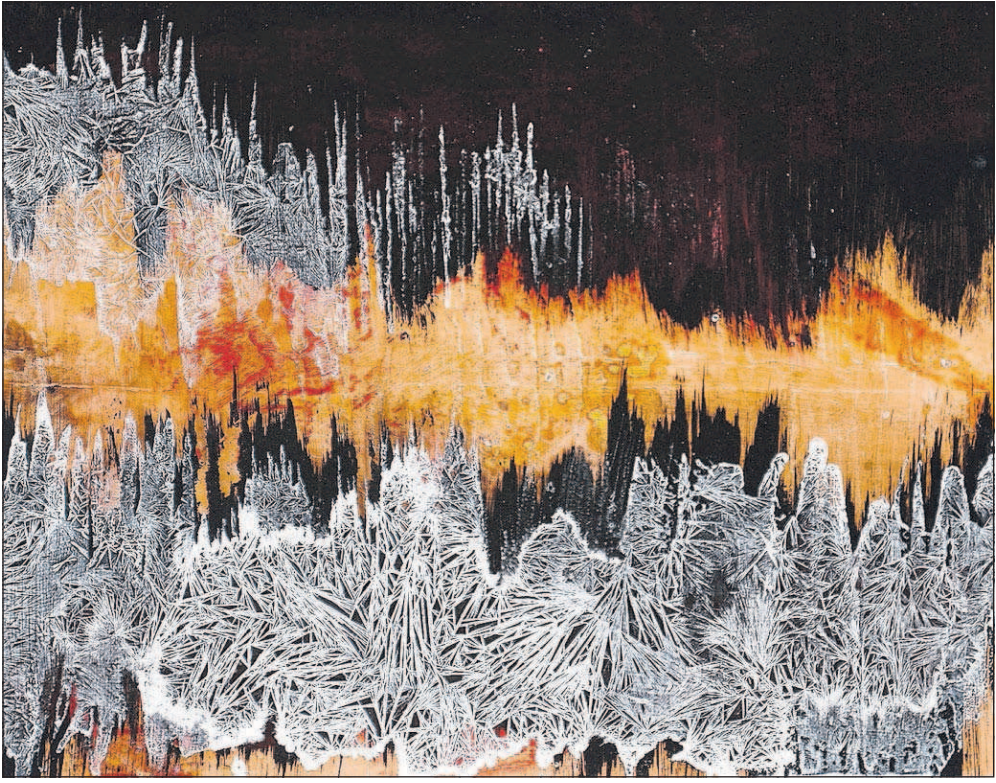
Through the layering of a variety of unrelated materials, a Pendleton artist created “Shadows of the Floating World,” which will be on exhibit in the Nightingale Gallery at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande.

Nika Blasser’s paintings explore the idea of landscape through layering and materials that are visibly impacted by time. Her most recent paintings were developed out of an earlier series of “saltscapes,” which were made only with salt and pigment on paper.

The solo exhibit opens Friday, Jan. 8 with an artist’s reception from 6-8 p.m. in the gallery, located in the university’s Loso Hall. It’s free and open to the public.

The first layer in Blasser’s new paintings is textured and often topographical in nature, which is then highlighted by either copper or silver leaf. This layer of reflectivity creates a luminous base. Multiple layers of ink and paint provide visual structure and atmosphere over the leaf.

Finally, she paints areas of saltwater over the surface, allowing crystalline structures to emerge as the water evaporates. The salt crystals form with somewhat unpredictable results. This element



Contributed photo

Nika Blasser created her Floating World Series with copper leaf, ink, acrylic and salt. The Pendleton artist is featured at an upcoming exhibit at the Nightingale Gallery at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande.

of chance — and the tension created between things that she can control versus things that she cannot — is a perpetual inspiration for her artwork.

“Visitors will be treated to a unique exploration of landscape painting created in an individual way, reminiscent of the creation of the landscape itself,” said Cory Peeke, Nightingale Gallery

director. “We are pleased to have the opportunity to introduce Nika’s work to the Eastern Oregon community.”

Blasser received a Master of Fine Arts in intermedia and drawing from the University of Alberta and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting, drawing and printmaking from Portland State University. She has exhibited her work throughout

the Pacific Northwest and Canada. In addition to her studio practice, she is the marketing director for Crow’s Shadow Institute of the Arts in Mission.

Nightingale Gallery hours are Monday through Friday from noon to 4 p.m. The exhibit will run through Wednesday, Feb. 10.

For more information, visit www.eou.edu/art.

CRASH: Herrmann said crews had not cleared ice in the left lane

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victim lawsuits last year in Washington state and federal courts. Mi Joo handed over its entire insurance liability — about \$9 million — as a fund for the victims.

Then Larry Levy, with Washington Arbitration & Mediation Services, evaluated all the victims’ claims and came up with total slightly more than \$50 million.

The available fund was 18 percent of the total for the claims, Herrmann said, so victims received 18 percent of the value of their individual claims. Someone with a \$1 million claim, for example, received \$180,000.

The Umatilla County civil case is deciding just how much the Oregon Department of Transportation is at fault, he said. And Circuit Judge Eva Temple is still deciding on the number of plaintiffs.

Herrmann explained the state is seeking summary judgment — asking the court to decide a matter without a jury — on about half the plaintiffs. Assistant attorney generals James Smith and Nicole DeFever for the state argued those plaintiffs did not give technical notice of their claims within a 180-day window, as Oregon law prescribes.

The state, though, had actual notice, Herrmann said, given the crash that injured 39 people and killed nine others was nationwide

news. Herrmann said Temple planned to hand down a ruling after the holidays, and even if she halved the number of plaintiffs, the case would look to go to trial.

Attorneys for the state did not respond to requests for comment.

Herrmann said the number of plaintiffs was a technical legal issue and does not deal with the merits of the case: That Mi Joo and its driver were negligent, as was the Oregon Department of Transportation.

The bus was westbound on Interstate 84 the morning of Dec. 30, 2012, when it crashed on Cabbage Hill near milepost 226.

Herrmann said the bus was in the right lane when its driver tried to pass a slower vehicle and lost control on in the icy left lane. That led the bus to crash through a guardrail and plunge 200 feet down a cliff.

Some survivors suffered bumps and bruises and psychological trauma, he said. Others are crippled for life. Nine died.

Herrmann said state road crews cleared ice and dropped gravel on the right lane, but no crews had done any work to the left lane for almost 17 hours. One member of the road crew showed up for work that Sunday morning, and she was not able to get others to come in before the deadly wreck. Herrmann also said the state failed to issue warnings to urge caution on a

stretch of state highway notorious for dangerous winter conditions.

Herrmann said the state blames Mi Joo and its driver for the crash. And while Mi Joo bears the brunt of the negligence, Herrmann said, the state bears some, too. If, for example, the state was 25 percent responsible, that would be add another \$12.5 million to the victim’s fund.

Getting that much, however, would require another court ruling. Oregon caps the state’s liability for personal injury and death at \$3.6 million. A judge, though, can determine the cap is not “substantial” enough to cover damages.

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PENDLETON Arts committee recommends \$6,000 for Vert promotion

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

In an effort to boost activity at the city-owned Vert Auditorium, the Pendleton Arts Committee recommended the city council allocate an additional \$6,000 to promote the venerable venue.

Asked by City Manager Robb Corbett to look into the issue, Pendleton Convention Center manager Pat Kennedy wrote a letter to the committee with a request for funding.

Inexperienced in auditorium marketing and entertainment booking, Kennedy began having conversations with Michelle Liberty, a Pendleton resident and a privately contracted marketing director with the Gesa Power House Theatre in Walla Walla.

In return for a \$1,000 per month fee, Liberty guaranteed Kennedy that she could bring six events to the Vert over the next year.

According to the letter, Liberty told Kennedy that the sales and management costs would be covered by the performers’ contracts to rent the Vert, the proceeds from which Liberty said would ensure a net profit.

Attached to the contract were advertisements for recent shows at the Power House, which includes a Celtic concert, a comedy show and a magic performance.

“I will be actively pursuing grants to offset some of these costs, not only for the \$1,000 per month but whatever capital improvements are necessary

to bring the Vert stage, sound and light systems up to today’s specifications,” Kennedy wrote. “But the grants I have checked into have a deadline around the first of May. I would hope we would not have to wait until mid-year to get started but rather could get started as soon as the concept is approved.”

The committee was supportive of increasing the Vert’s usage but were more hesitant to commit \$12,000 for a year’s worth of Liberty’s services, which would eat up most of the \$14,000 the art fund receives per year from its small cut of the transient room tax.

“I just think we’re shooting ourselves in a foot,” said Louisa Allman, a committee member and a paralegal for the city. “We’re going to have all these other performing art programs saying ‘Well, you gave them \$12,000 to market the Vert, why don’t you give us money to do blah blah blah.’”

Charles Denight, a committee member and the associate director of the Pendleton Development Commission, said Liberty’s fee would go toward marketing the city-owned Vert facility and not any specific arts organization.

As a compromise, the committee agreed to recommend to the council a \$6,000 allocation to the Vert.

The city council will make the final decision on the arts fund expenditure.

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HERMISTON

Parks & Rec program offers dance lessons

East Oregonian

In the new year, area residents can learn the West Coast Swing, the Night Club 2-Step and line dancing in classes offered through Hermiston Parks & Recreation.

Instructor April Dyntera presents the swing dancing class for both beginners and those wanting more practice. The unique dance features funky and sassy music in multiple genres, including pop, country and hip-hop. The Night Club 2-Step dance is slow, romantic and is enjoyed for its smooth motions with graceful appearance.

Both classes meet Thursdays from Jan. 7 through Feb. 11. The 2-step

is from 6:15-7:15 p.m. and the swing session is 7:30-8:30 p.m. The cost is \$30 for Hermiston residents and \$38 for non-residents.

People can learn popular line dances to their favorite songs in just four hours. The Line Dancing Workshop is Saturday, Jan. 30 from 1-5 p.m. The cost is \$20 for residents and \$25 for non-residents.

All of the dance classes meet in the basement at the Hermiston Public Library, 235 E. Gladys Ave. They are open to participants 14 and older.

For more information, visit www.hermistonrecreation.com. To register, call 541-667-5018 or stop by the recreation office, 180 N.E. Second St., Hermiston.

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