



Jane Hill to resign from city council
REGION/3A



EAST OREGONIAN

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2015

140th Year, No. 54 WINNER OF THE 2015 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD One dollar



East Oregonian

The *East Oregonian* website had more than 1.2 million visitors in 2015, clicking and tapping from all corners of the Internet to view our articles, photos and videos. While most viewers, and especially repeat viewers, come from Umatilla and Morrow counties, the top-viewed stories captured a much wider audience. Here are the top 10 of 2015:

1 “La Grande man pushing for secession to Idaho” (Sept. 24, Jade McDowell, 61,100 views) — Many rural Oregon residents have spent years mulling the idea of separating Eastern Oregon from the rest of the state. Ken Parsons, 72, from La Grande, put a new twist on the concept after reading a letter to the editor in the *La Grande Observer* that suggested instead of merely starting a new state, the eastern counties of Oregon and Washington could join Idaho.

No U.S. state boundary has been redrawn since West Virginia’s in 1863, and there’s not much hope of such a large shift taking place anytime soon. But the idea struck a nerve with many and more than 100 comments were added to the story, debating the difference in values between rural Oregon and the Willamette Valley.

2 “Old city hall on fire in Pendleton” (July 21, Phil Wright, Kathy Aney, Antonio Sierra, 48,200 views) — On the morning of Wednesday, July 21, an explosion caused by illegal fireworks at the old city hall building rocked downtown Pendleton, killed Eduardo Quezada, injured two others and sparked a blaze that took firefighters two hours to contain. *East Oregonian* staff were among the first on the scene, which was just two blocks from our Pendleton office. Along with updates throughout the day on social media and our website, we posted videos and pictures of the fire as we had them available. News agencies around the country used EO-produced video in their newscasts.

3 “New batch of Oregon laws take effect in January” (Dec. 22, Jade McDowell, 43,700 views) — Everybody loves a good list, and the *East Oregonian*’s late-in-the-year recap of new laws created in the 2015 Legislative session got passed around online the week of Christmas. The list was separated into laws affecting the workplace, law enforcement, education and miscellaneous areas of everyday life. At least one of the laws will touch every Oregonian’s life in the coming year, which probably led to the story’s share-ability.

4 “Letter: Farts should be Pendleton council’s next order of business” (May 22, Peter Walters, 38,600 views) — Good satire is hard to come by, but letter writer Peter Walters hit the right note for our online audience after Pendleton City Council added the smell of marijuana

See VIEWED/7A



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

1 In August, the sun sets over the hills west of Pendleton into a layer of smoke in the air created by wildfires that burned throughout the region.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

2 City and county governments debated the approach to legal marijuana sales in rural counties throughout 2015.

East Oregonian

The *East Oregonian* covered countless stories this year, but ten of them made more of an impression than the rest.

They range from natural disasters and public policy to crime and economic development.

Staff were asked to rank their most important stories of 2015, and these received the most votes:

1 Wildfires rage in Eastern Oregon

Wildfire season took a devastating toll on Eastern Oregon in 2015, as historically low winter snowpack combined with summer drought created ideal conditions for bigger, hotter fires.

Three major complexes — Canyon Creek, Windy Ridge and Grizzly Bear — stole the headlines, burning nearly 300,000 acres combined. The Canyon Creek Complex destroyed more than 40 homes near John Day, prompting a visit from Gov. Kate Brown, who activated the Oregon National Guard.

Other fires, including Phillips Creek and Sugarloaf, came uncomfortably close to more destruction. Local fire departments had their hands full chasing field fires around the area, including one blaze in July that charred roughly half the Coyote Springs Wildlife Area near Boardman.

The Oregon Department of Forestry formed a fire program review committee that began meeting in December to help improve fire response for next year.

2 Marijuana goes public

House Bill 3400 changed the way cities and counties in Eastern Oregon approached marijuana sales as the drug became legal to use on July 1.

For counties where 65 percent of voters voted against legalization, local governments would be given the temporary option to “opt out” of legal medical and recreational marijuana sales.

Umatilla County was the first domino to fall in the area, with Morrow County and the region’s smaller cities soon to follow, choosing either to opt out of sales indefinitely or take other legal measures to effectively ban marijuana retailers.

The decision was debated more thoroughly in Umatilla County’s biggest cities — Hermiston, Pendleton and Milton-Freewater. Pendleton and Milton-Freewater briefly flirted with allowing medical marijuana dispensaries in their cities before backing off.

Facing an end-of-the-year deadline from the Oregon Liquor Control Commission and divided public comments, all three cities decided to refer marijuana sales bans to the ballot for voters to decide in the November 2016 election. Until then, no marijuana business of any kind will operate in Morrow and Umatilla counties.

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Weed scientist places roots in Pendleton

Judit Barroso hails from Spain

By GEORGE PLAVERN
East Oregonian

As a child, Judit Barroso grew up in Madrid, Spain, but spent her summers in a small town surrounded by farms on the rolling Spanish countryside.

It was there in Mandayona, along the Río Dulce east of Madrid, that Barroso became interested in agriculture. Her job now is to help Eastern Oregon farmers manage invasive weeds.

Barroso, 41, came to the United States in 2010 and moved to Pendleton in October 2014. She works for Oregon State University as an assistant professor and weed scientist at the Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center on Tubbs Ranch Road between Pendleton and Adams.



Our New Neighbors
Meet Eastern Oregon's newest residents

Part of Barroso’s research includes rotating spring crops such as barley or canola to break up weed cycles among winter wheat, the area’s signature dryland crop.

“It’s trying to make this agronomic system more sustainable in the long term,” Barroso said.

Much like Pendleton, the climate in Madrid is hot and dry in the summer, with temperatures reaching triple digits. Barroso remembers wheat, barley and sunflowers grown around Mandayona, the town where she and

See NEIGHBOR/8A



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Judit Barroso is an assistant professor and weed scientist for the Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center and moved to Pendleton in October 2014.



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