

Umatilla Co. Fair Board names new fair director

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

The Umatilla County Fair has a new director.

Don Slone, director of the Harney County Fair for the past 25 years, will take over management of the Umatilla County Fair starting Feb. 1.

Slone is also the president of the Oregon Fairs Association, which county commissioner Larry Givens said made him an ideal candidate.

"He's got a vast amount of experience not only with the Harney County Fair, but

with fairs around the state," Givens said.

He said Slone has visited the Umatilla County Fairgrounds and worked with local fair staff in his capacity as president before.

Slone is replacing Peggy Anderson, who announced her resignation in August in order to take a job as fair director in Josephine County, where she grew up.

At the time, the fair board announced that the position would likely be reduced from full-time to part-time in light of the planned move to the Eastern Oregon Trade

and Event Center, where business manager Heather Cannell could take on some duties previously associated with the fair director.

On Thursday Givens said the decision to use the current fairgrounds for an additional year means Slone's position will be full-time for 2016. After that, Givens said, it is undecided exactly what the position will look like while Slone helps the fair transition to the EOTEC grounds.

Slone is a graduate of Eastern Oregon University. According to a news release, during his tenure at the

Harney County Fair he helped attract 34,000 volunteer hours at the event.

Givens said Slone is a respected leader in the county fair world and the county commission and fair board are confident he has the experience necessary to take on the challenges associated with moving the Umatilla County Fair to a new venue in 2017.

"We're just excited to have Don with us," he said.

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PENDLETON

BMCC to host safety summit

East Oregonian

Dozens of government entities and community organizations from across Eastern Oregon have been invited by Blue Mountain Community College to discuss security at the Pendleton Convention Center.

According to a press release, the upcoming regional safety summit was spurred by the Oct. 1 Umpqua Community College shooting in Roseburg.

"That tragedy hit very close to home for us since UCC is another Oregon community college and many of our staff have colleagues who work there," BMCC President Cam

Preus said in a statement. "We've learned from that incident that there is a big reliance on the community to step forward to provide assistance and resources, so BMCC wants to make sure we have those partnerships in place ahead of time throughout our district."

BMCC has invited

school districts, law enforcement agencies, emergency personnel, city and county governments, hospitals and health districts, prison personnel and other interested parties from across Umatilla, Morrow and Baker Counties to the event.

Attendees will hear a speech from Mary Schoenfeldt, a Marysville, Wash., specialist in school system emergency management and crisis response.

At a more local level, Umatilla County Emergency Manager Jack Remillard and Oregon State Police Sgt. Mark Banks will hold a discussion the 2013 tour bus crash on Cabbage Hill.

After those talks, organizers will break attendees into regionally-based groups where officials can identify resources and draft formal safety partnership agreements.

The safety summit will be held at the Pendleton Convention Center Jan. 21 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Grass-fed gobblers

A rafter of wild turkeys forage for food in a stand of tall grass near the Umatilla River on Thursday outside Rieth.

ENERGY: Wind prices have dropped by two-thirds since 2009

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of their energy mix by 2030. That's no small feat, since coal makes up nearly one-third of PGE's energy portfolio and two-thirds for Pacific Power.

A coalition of environmental groups and clean energy advocates has filed ballot measures to make Oregon coal-free by 2030. Rather than fight a costly and contentious battle at the polls, Pacific Power spokesman Ry Schwark said parties came to the table to negotiate.

The result, Schwark said, is a policy that accomplishes the same renewable energy goals while including safeguards to protect rates and reliability for customers. The plan is supported by environmental groups such as the Sierra Club and Oregon Environmental Council, as well as the Citizens' Utility Board, the state's primary advocate for residential ratepayers.

"We have a very broad

and strong group of folks who have come together in agreement on this," Schwark said. "It was relatively swift coming together."

The legislature won't have much time to consider the bill during this year's short session, which convenes Feb. 1 and adjourns March 6. If it passes, clean energy advocates said they will withdraw their ballot measures for November.

Pacific Power is already moving toward more clean energy and less coal in its most recent long-range energy plan, though opponents of coal said the transition wasn't happening fast enough.

Schwark said the trend has been aided by falling prices of wind and solar, along with the utility's involvement in a shared energy market with California and other Western utilities.

"One of the key benefits of regionalizing the grid in the West is the volatility of renewables can be smoothed

out over a wider footprint," Schwark said.

The new clean energy plan also includes safety valves to protect against significant jumps in power rates for customers. The plan maintains a 4 percent incremental cost cap, meaning that Pacific Power and PGE won't have to add renewables if the cost is more than 4 percent higher than the cost of developing non-renewable power.

Steve Corson, spokesman for PGE, said the plan's schedule also provides a more balanced path and greater flexibility for phasing in renewables and phasing out coal plants.

"We feel comfortable we can do this," Corson said. "This is a path we've been on for a little while."

Brad Reed, spokesman for Renew Oregon — the coalition behind the ballot measures — said wind prices have fallen by two-thirds since 2009, and the price of solar panels has gone down 85 percent over the same time

frame, making those projects more cost-competitive than ever.

Reed said negotiations were not easy, but the agreement ultimately moves Oregon closer to its clean energy goal, which by 2050 calls for reducing carbon emissions to 25 percent of 1990 levels.

"I think the bottom line is this is what Oregonians want," Reed said. "It's become increasingly clear to people the effects carbon pollution are having on our way of life."

In particular, Reed pointed to last summer's drought that hurt agriculture and raised water temperatures in rivers enough to kill some populations of fish.

"These things are in the DNA of the Northwest," Reed said. "People see the benefit of renewable energy going forward."

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BAILOUT: Ongoing investigation into agency's handling of tax credits

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begin in 2019 and could cost taxpayers at least \$15.3 million, according to the Treasury. The cost could increase if more loans go into default.

"As a result, to cover loan payments, money will be allocated away from vital public services such as education, public safety and human services programs," the Oregon State Treasury wrote in a press release.

Brown's press secretary Chris Pair said Thursday that the Governor's Office was examining the loan program as part of a broader review of the Department of Energy.

"Governor Brown has concluded that lingering residual issues have interfered with the Department of Energy's ability to focus on Oregon's future energy-related needs," Pair wrote in an email. "The agency review currently being conducted by the Governor's Office is assessing the Small Scale Energy Loan Program and, along with the Legislature's recently-formed joint committee, will ensure that these issues are addressed responsibly and carefully. As Governor Brown has said before, while we want to move expeditiously, we must ensure that we do it right."

Wheeler asked Brown to suspend the loan program so the state can review it and issue recommendations to the Legislature on how to proceed.

The state created the small scale energy loan program in 1981 to provide low-interest loans to governments and businesses. The program's problems are not new and despite its name, the loans were not what many people would consider small.

Wheeler pointed to the default several years ago of an \$18 million loan to an ethanol plant in Clatskanie, which went bankrupt, as an example of why the program now requires a bailout. Other large loans have since gone into default and been written off as non-collectible, "which has further deteriorated (the program's) balance sheet and reserve balances," Wheeler wrote in the letter to Brown.

The State Debt Policy Advisory Commission, which includes members of the Oregon House and Senate, repeatedly raised

concerns about the loan defaults including last year, when the commission warned in a report that payments by loan recipients might not cover debt. Wheeler said in his letter to Brown that he asked former Gov. John Kitzhaber three years ago for money to offset losses from defaults in the program.

"In 2012, after a review of projected loan payments versus debt service requirements, I recommended to Governor Kitzhaber that the program's depleted loan-loss reserve be replenished to safeguard the State against future potential defaults," Wheeler wrote. "Instead, the program continued without augmented reserves."

Wheeler, who is an ex-officio member of the commission, will formally present recommendations on

the energy loan program at the commission's scheduled Jan. 19 meeting.

The Treasurer's Office sent the letter to the governor a week before the first scheduled meeting of a new legislative committee which will consider whether to overhaul or eliminate the Department of Energy, following years of news reports about problems at the agency. The governor also announced in December that she planned to pursue a review of the agency.

The Oregon Department of Justice has an ongoing criminal investigation into the energy agency's handling of tax credits. In September, a top administrator at the Department of Energy who was brought in to run the loan program and other renewable energy and efficiency incentives resigned.

BRIEFLY

Sheriff's office to seek local bids for new vehicles

PENDLETON — The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office will buy two new SUVs. But the department will have to ask local dealers to bid on a pair of other vehicles.

Sheriff's Capt. Dave Williamson told the county board of commissioners at its Dec. 30 meeting the patrol division needed two 2016 Ford Explorer all-wheel drive vehicles, the marine patrol needed a 2016 Ford F-250 super cab pickup and the civil division needed a pair of 2016 Ford Fusions, all to replace older vehicles.

The Explorers would cost \$60,999, the F-250 would be \$28,991 and the Fusions totaled \$36,384. The vehicles would come from a Gresham dealer via a state contract and the money would come from the county's vehicle replacement fund.

Commissioner Bill Elfering pointed out the county has no obligation to use the state contract, and while the state might be able to offer a better price, the sheriff's office never asked local businesses to offer bids.

County counsel Doug Olsen said local dealers do not carry the required vehicles, so commissioners voted 3-0 allow that purchase. Then they voted 3-0 to have the sheriff's office seek bids for the other vehicles.

During the same meeting, the board also gave authorization for the Community Justice Department asked to spend \$28,884 on a 2016 Ford Sedan police car.

Library offers weekly craft projects

PENDLETON — People of all ages are invited to participate in craft activities each week at the Pendleton Public Library.

Crafters are offered Tuesdays at 4 p.m. at the library, 502 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. It's free and advance registration

isn't required.

The public is invited to drop in for different activities each week. Sometimes the craft will be a group effort and other times it will be an individual project.

For more information, call 541-966-0380 or visit www.pendletonlibrary.weebly.com.

Library displays art masterpieces

HERMISTON — A selection of American art masterpieces will be on display throughout the month at the Hermiston Public Library.

Provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the collection seeks to introduce Americans to their artistic heritage and inspire them to become more informed citizens. The organization carefully selected the masterpieces as a starting point to learn more about our nation's artistic legacy. Well known artists such as John James Audubon and Norman Rockwell are among the many American artists whose works are included in the collection.

The library is open Monday through Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Friday and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. It's located at 235 E. Gladys Ave., Hermiston. For more information, call Marie Baldo or Jodi Hansen at 541-567-2882.

New club focuses on photography

HERMISTON — Shutterbugs of all skill levels are invited to join the Hermiston Public Library's photography club.

Anyone with a passion for photography or an interest in improving picture-taking ability is invited to attend the second Tuesday of each month at 5 p.m. at 235 E. Gladys Ave., Hermiston.

There will be photo assignments, guest speakers and field trips. The club is free and open to the public.

For more information, contact Jodi Hansen at 541-567-2882 or jhansen@hermiston.or.us.

SUBMIT COMMUNITY NEWS

Submit information to: community@eastoregonian.com or drop off to the attention of **Tammy Malgesini at 333 E. Main St., Hermiston** or **Renee Struthers at 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton**. Call 541-564-4539 or 541-966-0818 with questions.

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