

## CASA: About 200 foster kids in the counties at any given time

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volunteers, the program ignited and spread nationwide. According to CASA, 76,000 volunteers currently advocate for more than 251,000 children.

Umatilla and Morrow Counties have 33 special advocates. Twenty-five of them cover Hermiston and Morrow County. Only one lives in Pendleton.

Umatilla-Morrow CASA manager Jesus Rome hopes to build on that. The ultimate goal is to get children back home, if possible. The state mandates that every foster child have a CASA volunteer. The volunteer has greater freedom to concentrate on the child than often-overworked Department of Human Services' caseworkers.

"The state is a lousy parent," Rome said. "Everyone agrees to that, even the state."

Umatilla & Morrow Circuit Court Judge Ronald Pahl benefits from the CASA program, which in this area is under the umbrella of Head Start. As presiding family court/juvenile judge for Umatilla County, he considers the observations of a CASA before making decision affecting foster children. "A CASA gets to know the relatives, the neighbors and the child, and gives the child a voice in the courtroom," said Pahl.

Pahl said he gains insight from CASA reports, which sometimes contain disquieting revelations.

"Child abuse and neglect is not rosy," Pahl said.

Jeanette Herron, the only Pendleton-based CASA volunteer, got started two years ago. She began with one child and now advocates for a pair of young siblings. The first step is to gain trust, which isn't always easy.

"They can have a hard time attaching," said Herron, who is a DHS investigator for her day job. "They're used to people disappearing."

The children kept her at a distance until about the third visit. As she watched them during a riding lesson, they finally talked to Herron as they circled the arena.

"It was them in their element," she said. "Afterwards, we went to the park and played."

These days, they're excited when she arrives. It's during play when Herron gets to know the children and what forces are at work in their lives. As they play, she can sense their desires and fears. The children often come from unstable environments, she said, with responsibilities greater than their years, such as taking care of an addicted parent or a younger sibling.

"They look around the world and know something's not right," Herron said.

CASA Coordinator Diane Shockman, of Hermiston, described Herron and other advocates as "a constant in a child's life

### CASA Training

**WHEN: March 7, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.**  
**WHERE: Umatilla County Courthouse**  
**For more information call**  
**Jesus Rome at 541-667-6170**

through their journey through the court system." They keep abreast of caseworker and legal files and write their own reports for judges.

"When a child is ripped from his home for his own protection, he loses everything that's familiar," Shockman said. "A CASA is dedicated to staying with a child through his journey."

That journey takes an average of about two years, Rome said. He recommends each CASA visit their children a minimum of once a month, though "more is sometimes better."

Shockman said she and other CASAs are free to concentrate on the children and sometimes recommend unorthodox solutions to complex circumstances. She offered one example. A drug-addicted father abandoned his daughter by leaving her with his girlfriend. The woman left the girl, as well as her own daughter, with her own mother and took off. The unrelated girl ended up in foster care.

Shockman came to find the girl missed her "sister," the girl she had been abandoned with, horribly. The pair had formed a strong bond much like soldiers together in battle. Shockman advocated for regular visitation time for the two girls and arranged for them to meet weekly at a McDonald's play area. The time together helped both girls, but "was not in the scope of what a judge could order," Shockman said.

Rome said the population of Umatilla and Morrow County foster children continues to rise. The vast majority, 90 percent, have suffered neglect. Many of the parents abuse drugs or alcohol, or struggle with mental illness.

"There are about 200 foster kids in the counties at any given time," he said, more than CASA can handle. "We serve the highest-need children who are in foster care."

Rome hopes more volunteers will come forth. A weeklong training starts Monday, March 7, at the Umatilla County Courthouse from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day. Each volunteer must undergo a background check and provide three letters of recommendation. Rome said he will be flexible with interested people who aren't available during training hours. Those interested in knowing more should call Rome at 541-667-6170.

Contact Kathy Aney at [kaney@eastoregonian.com](mailto:kaney@eastoregonian.com) or call 541-966-0810.

## ENERGY: Vote followed more than two hours of Republican procedural moves that extended the debate

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she supports the bill, but has not said publicly whether she will sign it.

The bill also requires Portland General Electric and PacifiCorp to stop using coal power to serve their Oregon customers. Representatives of Portland General Electric and the advocacy group Renewable Northwest told lawmakers last month the bill might actually have a greater impact on utilities' decisions on whether to replace coal with natural gas, because Portland General Electric already plans to close Oregon's only coal power plant in Boardman by 2020 and stop purchasing coal power from out of state.

At the same time, incentives added to the legislation last week could fire up more power plants that burn wood and garbage. Sen. Lee Beyer, D-Springfield, said Wednesday that the biomass incentives would lead to job creation in rural areas of the state. But researchers have also raised concerns that wood-burning power plants can generate more pollution than coal. They have questioned the carbon reduction calculations underlying classification of biomass as a source of renewable energy.

Beyer, who previously served as an Oregon public utility commissioner, said he remembered the concerns raised in 2007 when the Legislature adopted the state's first renewable energy mandate. The bill that the Senate passed on Wednesday would double the existing mandate.

"One of the things I heard a lot at that time was it was going to add significantly to ratepayers rates," Beyer said. The legislation passed on Wednesday allows the utilities to seek rate increases to pay for renewable energy that is up to 4 percent more expensive than traditional sources such as natural gas. Utilities can request those rate increases, which are

allowed under the current renewable energy mandate, in addition to broader periodic rate increases. "We've never gotten close to that cost cap, and it's unlikely we will," Beyer said.

That did not quell opposition by Republicans.

The vote Wednesday afternoon followed more than two hours of Republican procedural moves that extended the debate but had little impact on the outcome. Democrats had identified the bill as a top policy priority from the start of the short session, and the utilities and environmental groups also lobbied hard for the legislation.

Much of the controversy around the bill stemmed from news reports that Brown's administration had instructed the Oregon Public Utility Commission not to go public with talking points it had drafted regarding concerns about the legislation. Public utility commissioners raised concerns the measure would be expensive for ratepayers yet do little to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from coal plants.

"What I do object to is shutting out people who ought to have a full franchise in the discussion about an energy policy like this one," Senate Republican Leader Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day, said during a floor speech

Wednesday. "The idea here would be, at least if it's conducted in the Oregon way — the way I like to think of the Oregon way — would be to gather proponents and dissenters together, and hear the best from both of them."

The utilities, environmental groups, renewable energy industry and Citizens' Utility Board of Oregon drafted the original version of the legislation behind closed doors starting in late 2015, and that process also fueled much of the criticism of the bill.

After environmental groups failed to get a bill to end coal power passed during the five-month legislative session in 2015, they began gathering signatures to place measures that would accomplish this and other policy goals on the ballot in November. The environmental groups agreed to drop their efforts to get voters to pass several new renewable energy mandates in November, including an initiative that would eliminate coal power, if lawmakers and the governor approve the legislation.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group. Hillary Borrud can be reached at 503-364-4431 or [hborrud@eomediagroup.com](mailto:hborrud@eomediagroup.com).

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## HOMELESS: Council also voted to make Mary Dedrick the new council president

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council discussed on Tuesday was to find a piece of land suitable for camping and create a space there to mitigate some of the public health threats created by homeless camps. Trott said he has heard from some people that they won't use that section of the river for kayaking or other recreation anymore after seeing human waste floating downstream.

Boyd Sharp, planning commission chair, told the council when he lived in Spokane, the city set up a designated transient camping area that addressed those sanitation issues and also made it easy for police, churches and social service workers to visit.

"It was a beautiful solution and it worked," he said. "I believe we have to do the same thing."

Several city councilors voiced their agreement with Sharp and the mayor, noting that there were always going to be people in the county who were homeless, whether by choice or misfortune, and so it was important to come up with a longterm solution to where those people could live instead of continually shuffling them down the road.

Mark Ribich said he had family members who ended up homeless while in the grip of mental illness, so the issue was near and dear to his heart. He suggested representatives of the faith community be included

**"There is a very, very fine line between helping and encouraging the behavior, and it's extremely difficult to walk that line."**

— Roak Ten Eyck, Umatilla city councilor

in plans for the workshop, and said eventually the city should have a discussion with people in the homeless camp themselves.

Councilor Roak Ten Eyck said there were no easy answers to the problem, but the city and county needed to try to come up with the best solution they could without enabling bad choices.

"There is a very, very fine line between helping and encouraging the behavior, and it's extremely difficult to walk that line," he said.

Umatilla residents who spoke up during the public comment portion of the meeting voiced some of the same concerns, asking the city to keep in mind that the homeless community can include people with criminal histories, addictions or unpredictable mental illnesses. But they also said that they agreed something needed to be done.

"I would encourage you to look at what other communities have done, because there's a risk when you engage with (the homeless)," Daren Dufloth said.

Trott asked new city manager Russ Pelleberg to contact the county public health district, Department of Human Services, nearby

cities and other relevant agencies about setting up a summit on homelessness for March 25.

Pelleberg said he had already floated the idea at a meeting of west-end mayors.

"We all agreed something needs to be done collaboratively, so I think this meeting is going to be a real plus," he said.

On Tuesday the council also announced and ratified the results of the February vote to appoint Mark Ribich to the city council to replace George Fenton, who resigned for health reasons. The move rectified an unlawful vote the council made via private ballot.

The council also voted to make Mary Dedrick the new council president, approved a \$10,000 façade grant to the Riverside Sports Bar and Lounge and approved a 25-year lease with the Army Corps of Engineers for land along the Umatilla River near Nugent Park. The lease will allow the city to take the lead on improvement projects along the river such as eradication of non-native plants.

Contact Jade McDowell at [jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com](mailto:jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com) or 541-564-4536.

## BERENTSEN: Department pushing to make all career employees assume a dual role

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Community College, where she received her firefighter and paramedic certification as well as an associates degree in general education and applied science.

She returned to Eastern Oregon after she graduated, returning to the Hermiston fire district to work as a contract firefighter/paramedic. She worked there until landing this Pendleton paramedic job.

Ciraulo said he plans to promote Berentsen to a firefighter/paramedic as a part of a department-wide push to make all career employees assume a dual role. He said one of his predecessors began recruiting single-role paramedics with the intention of generating more revenue for the department through ambulance transports.

Although the initiative has been successful,

Ciraulo noticed that his firefighter personnel were shorthanded during recent fires and traffic accidents.

With increased ambulance transports, Ciraulo said the department should be able to sustain the extra pay that comes with the dual roles.

Ciraulo plans to promote Berentsen sometime during the next fiscal year when money is freed up in the budget, given that she passes a few more required tests.

Although Pendleton might seem late to the game in hiring a female firefighter, its not that uncommon to see fire departments without any women.

According to a 2008 survey, only 3.7 percent of the nation's firefighters were women and about half of the nation's fire department had never hired a woman in their history.

That's not to say

women aren't interested in firefighting — many of the rural fire districts in Umatilla County utilize women as volunteers.

Built in 1959 when emergency services was an even more male-centric profession, Fire Station 1 needed some upgrades in order to accommodate Berentsen.

Ciraulo said the best the department could do was to turn a storage closet into Berentsen's bedroom, with better living quarters not expected until the department gets a new station.

Berentsen said her living quarters were fine, as long as she could participate in the emergency services lifestyle she's grown to love.

"There's no real words to describe it," she said.

Contact Antonio Sierra at [asierra@eastoregonian.com](mailto:asierra@eastoregonian.com) or 541-966-0836.

## Sign dedication includes salute to veterans

East Oregonian

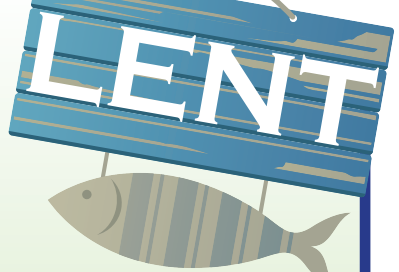
A ceremony honoring Umatilla County veterans who served and died in World War I coincides with the erection of highway signs.

Military veterans will give speeches, a color guard will be on hand and a military band will play "Taps" during the dedication event, which is Wednesday, March 9 at 9 a.m. at Pendleton VFW Post, 1221 SE Court Place,

Pendleton. Three signs honoring WWI veterans will be placed on Highway 395, south of Pendleton and north of Hermiston.

For more information, call Glenn Scott at 541-667-3125.

# Friday Meals



March 4 from 5 to 7:00 p.m.

@ the St. Anthony Hospital Blue Mountain Cafe

**Cedar Plank Salmon - \$7.50/Adults**  
**- \$7.00/Children & Seniors**  
with Rice Pilaf & Buttered Green Beans

**Baked Potato Bar - \$4.00/with toppings** All you can eat.

**Salmon/Potato Bar Combo - \$11.50**

**Clam Chowder Bread Bowl - \$4.25**  
Single Cup \$1.25



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