

DOGS: Will be matched with their person at 18 months

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met their puppies face to face. The handlers seemed simultaneously dazed and ecstatic — like somehow they'd been transported to the 50-yard line of the Super Bowl just before kickoff. The men kept their elation in check until JLAD Director Joy St. Peter gave them some basic guidelines. When she unleashed them, the inmates plopped onto the floor and got to know their puppies.

LeRoy Bussey, a convicted murderer with tattooed arms and a gray goatee, met Shrek, an English cream golden retriever who bounced and wriggled. He admitted to a wave of emotion — something he hadn't felt much since he was incarcerated decades ago.

"I've been anticipating this for days and days," Bussey said.

He said he looks forward to learning a valuable skill and "to know I'm doing something to benefit someone else."

Ronnie Bart, 39, said he hadn't petted a dog since 1995 when he landed in prison, also after a murder conviction. On Monday, as he got to know a blonde Labrador retriever named Razz, Bart's emotions started flowing again like water trickling through thawing pipes.

"You get frozen in here," he said. "You forget your emotions."

The puppies' antics seemed a bit surreal in this place of razor wire, sliding steel doors and inmates living in limbo, but St. Peter believes this is a perfect match.

This is the organization's first foray into a prison, she said, but there are plenty of other programs across the country showing good results. St. Peter said the program will benefit the inmates, the puppies and the organization, which will be able to increase the number of dogs trained at one time. The service dog organization has a three- to five-year waiting list.

EOCI Superintendent Jeri Taylor said she welcomes the program because of its reported therapeutic effect for inmates. Anecdotal evidence from other prison



Joy St. Peter, director of the Joys of Living Assistance Dogs, demonstrates how to kennel train a puppy on Monday in Pendleton. Twelve inmates in teams of two will be training six puppies to be service dogs.



Inmate Owen Youngblood rubs the belly of Jade, a 12-week-old English cream golden retriever, as his cellmate and training partner Brian Chandler holds the leash.

programs suggests dogs in prison may lower recidivism, depression and misconduct. Additionally, inmates have proven themselves to be good dog trainers. They are motivated and free of distractions.

St. Peter and an assistant will spend two hours with the trainers and puppies each week. For the first year-and-a-half, the inmates will teach the dogs basic manners and obedience.

"At 18 months, the dogs will be matched with their person," St. Peter said. "Then we start customizing their training."

The dogs will each live in a cell with two inmate handlers, one who acts as primary trainer and the other as a back-up. Each dog will wear a blue vest with a pocket for a card that can be flipped from red (in

"It's such a win, win, win."

— Joy St. Peter, director of Joys of Living Assistance Dogs

training) to green (available for petting). The trainers will carry kibble in their pockets and spend time each day in the play yard running their dog through a series of drills. Inmates in the prison shop are busy building obstacles such as ladders, ramps, stairs and even faux light switches.

"The prison has been phenomenal," St. Peter said. "They put in a potty yard, a training yard and a grooming station."

Capt. Jeff Frazier oversees the day-to-day operation of the program. He said the handlers will fill out daily training logs, which



are sent to St. Peter. Each six months, the dogs rotate to different trainers.

The dogs will leave the prison for one week each month to live in the community. Volunteers will socialize the animals by exposing them to such things as home life, pedestrians, traffic and stores. St. Peter said all the volunteer spots are currently filled.

On Monday, the newbie dog trainers watched as St. Peter and her assistants put an older dog named Babs flawlessly through her paces. The Lab will soon go to live with Dana Haefler, a La Grande woman who struggles with multiple sclerosis and who recently lost her first service dog, Dakota, to cancer. The big English golden retriever helped Haefler with her balance, reminded her when it was time to take medication and nudged her awake during nightmares.

She said Babs will open up her world once again.

"She and I will become a team," said Haefler. "Babs has a zest for life that is contagious."

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PGG: Lost \$7.9M in 2014

Continued from 1A

Eastern Oregon farmers and families," Hawkins wrote.

PGG currently has 1,079 members eligible to vote May 2. At least 50 members are required for a quorum, and the resolution will need a two-thirds majority to pass.

Rick Jacobson, PGG general manager, insisted the co-op is not insolvent and still has support from CoBank, which extended a \$15 million term loan and \$20 million line of credit last June. That came on the heels of PGG losing \$7.9 million in 2014, and approximately \$4.4 million in 2013.

The co-op also discovered through an audit that it had overstated earnings by \$1.8 million in 2010 and \$5.7 million in 2011, according to financial statements. PGG did net \$434,681 in total income in 2012.

Jacobson, who was hired by PGG in 2012, said he is optimistic about getting a deal done with United Grain Corporation to sell the McNary river terminal, Feedville piles and 19 upcountry grain elevators, but couldn't get into specifics. Other aspects of the business are doing well independently, he said, such as the energy division and Precision Rain. But PGG is simply not bringing in enough bushels of wheat to generate a profit that will allow them to invest in those services.

Last harvest, the co-op figured it would need at least 8 million bushels to continue on as it has. Jacobson didn't provide the exact number it carried, but said they fell short.

"Some stayed with us, but nowhere near enough," Jacobson said. "The vote was with their bushels."

The board felt it would be best to dissolve PGG and sell off those assets to another company, Jacobson said, thus maintaining services and — hopefully — retaining jobs in the community. He said United Grain Corporation is in a good position to work with local farmers.

"I think it's the best thing to do, given the circumstances," he said.

Preston Winn, who leases about 147 acres of wheat fields near Weston, said he's been a member of PGG for roughly 50 years. Over the years, he said the co-op gradually lost focus on customer service, while members' trust whittled away.

Winn, who also chairs the agriculture department at Blue Mountain Community College, said PGG was slow to change in how it received, stored and handled larger shipments of grain. Instead of taking 15 minutes to unload shipments at PGG's old country elevators, he said growers decided to turn to competitors that could unload them in a fraction of the time. In particular, he said Northwest Grain Growers of Walla Walla and Gavilon have both added grain piles in nearby Athena in recent years.

"We're going to go to a place that has better customer service," Winn said. "We're going to go to a place that can unload us in an expeditious manner."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture also pulled PGG's warehouse license for 44 days in 2012 after discovering discrepancies, which Winn said shook some confidence.

"I've heard people say, 'I don't think I can trust them,'" Winn said. "Anytime you don't have confidence ... I think that's where this fell apart."

Eric Nelson, who farms organic wheat north of Pendleton, said losing PGG would be a hard hit to the community. The co-op has been a major supporter of local organizations, Nelson said, and he hopes whoever comes in carries that same sense of commitment.

"It's going to be hard to fill that hole," Nelson said. "It's a tough blow to the community in general."

Jacobson said the board realizes how difficult the decision is, and carries the burden of the decision. He praised the board for its willingness to do what they feel ultimately will be the best for the membership.

"I feel reasonably confident the best will come out of this," Jacobson said.

TURNER: Wants council to focus on more important priorities

Continued from 1A

the executive director of the Marine Corps War College and retired with the rank of colonel in 2003.

Turner initially moved to Pendleton to become BMCC's provost, but he was promptly elevated to interim president in 2004 before the college's board of education gave him the job permanently in 2005.

By the time he retired from BMCC in 2013, Turner had already established himself in local politics, having just won a second term on the Port of Umatilla Commission after being appointed to the seat in 2008.

Turner set his sights on the open District 58 seat in

the Oregon House of Representatives in 2014, but was handily defeated by Cove businessman Greg Barreto in the Republican primary.

Despite his defeat, Turner remains on the port commission and serves on the board for Round-Up Development Corp.

When Turner takes office in 2017, he'll preside over a very different council than the one that started 2016.

Two councilors — Chuck Wood and Tom Young — declined re-election runs and will retire from the council at the end of the year.

Councilors Becky Marks and Paul Chalmers are running for new terms against opposition, the latter having only served on the

council for a few months after he was appointed to fill the rest of former city councilor Jane Hill's term in February.

Although not up for election, Councilor Al Plute has vowed to resign after the council passes the city's next budget, and also is facing a recall campaign.

Even with some turnover on the council, Turner doesn't expect a "seismic shift" in the council's approach to issues.

Turner wants the council to focus on its more important priorities rather than getting bogged down in more trivial issues.

"On a scale of 1 to 10, for the city's future, Main Street artwork is about a 2," he said.

"Things like the future of our infrastructure and good government policy and long range planning is far more important than whose statue is on Main Street."

Turner activated his election committee, Friends of John Turner, for the municipal election, but Oregon Secretary of State website shows a zero balance and no activity since March 2015.

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Summer ODOT project will replace road signs

East Oregonian

Traffic signs around Eastern Oregon will be getting bigger and better this summer as the Oregon Department of Transportation completes a \$550,000 project.

The project will span hundreds of road signs in Umatilla, Morrow, Union, Baker, Harney and Malheur counties.

Damaged signs will be replaced, and other signs will be upgraded to reflect current ODOT standards for size and proximity to the road. Some signs, such

as curve speed signs, will reflect updated calculations for recommended speed, while some pedestrian crossing signs will include solar-powered LED lights to remind drivers to look for pedestrians.

In Umatilla County signs will be replaced on Benschel Road, Adams Road, Powerline Road, Stanfield Meadows Road, Umatilla River Road, Westland Road, Orchard Avenue (Hermiston) and Isaacs Avenue (Pendleton). In Morrow County, Tower Road and Willow Creek Road will get new signs.

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