GOOD MORNING TO JUDY COVETT OF HEPPNER

Visit the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce for a free charm trail starter bracelet

The Chamber means business!

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Winners, losers and this week's Pigskin Pickers
Sports/2B

61/48

EAST OREGONIAN

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2016

140th Year, No. 244 | WINNER OF THE 2016 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD | One dollar

Officials face truth behind soaring cost of state pensions

By TED SICKINGER
The Oregonian

PORTLAND — Just how bad is Oregon's public pension funding crisis?

Bad enough that Rukaiyah Adams, the normally polished investment professional who is vice chair of the Oregon Investment Council, broke down in tears last week as she spoke of passing a record $22 billion in unfunded promises to future taxpayers.

"My call to the legislature and to the governor is for leadership on this, and I mean right now," Adams said during last Wednesday's joint meeting of the Oregon Public Employees Retirement System board and the citizen panel that oversees its investments. "This is becoming a moral issue. We can't just talk about numbers anymore."

The numbers are bleak. Oregon's pension system owes billions of dollars more to retirees than it has, and the last major attempt to fix the problem was shot down in courts.

This month, cities, school districts and others will find out how much more they'll pay to help prop up the system. Higher pension costs could come at the expense of funding for other needs, including social services, infrastructure investments and education programs.

Last week's meeting was extraordinarily candid. And it provided a brief, reality-based peek behind the financial charade taking place not only in Oregon's pension system, but also in systems across the country.

Experts openly acknowledged they're understating the magnitude of Oregon's problem. They're relying on optimistic assumptions about investment returns. And they're holding down required pension payments below what's needed to keep pace with the debt, to avoid eviscerating school and

See PERS/8A

More inside

Bipartisan legislative group begins work on options moving forward. Page 8A.

HERMISTON

Umatilla County promises 2017 fair will be at EOTEC

Commissioners put pressure on board for 'agressive transition'

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Umatilla County commissioners stressed the 2017 fair will be at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center — no matter what.

The three-member board during its meeting Wednesday in Pendleton discussed the plan to move the fair from the site near Hermiston High School to the event center, 1705 E. Airport Road, Hermiston. Commissioner Larry Givens, who sits on the EOTEC board, said the fair will place equipment into storage containers at the event center and Hermiston School District will take possession of the old fair site on Jan. 1.

The county board approved spending up to $30,000 to buy five shipping containers, build a security fence and install lighting and related items at a new, permanent storage area. Givens also said the county would cut employees whose jobs are no longer necessary due to moving the fair to new location.

Board Chairman George Murdock said he and Givens met last week with the fair board to talk about an "aggressive transition" to EOTEC and expressed deep concerns about the event center's readiness, particularly barns that the fair needs to operate.

"There's no question the barns have to be there," Murdock said.

The EOTEC board plans to seek bids on the metal buildings in October. Murdock told Givens the board must understand the barns are "imperative."

EOTEC is also seeking a contractor to build an arena to house the Farm-City Pro Rodeo, which has a long history with the county fair. Givens said that relationship was due to the rodeo operating on the county's fairgrounds.

Now, he said, the county's sole focus is the fair.

See EOTEC/8A

'NUISANCE' PRESSURE ON OLD CITY HALL

The old city hall has remained a burned-out shell since the 2015 fire in downtown Pendleton that killed 25-year-old Eduardo Quezada.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Winter is coming

City leaders worried building won't survive, forcing owners to make a decision on its future

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

The leaders of the current Pendleton City Hall are taking action against the owners of Pendleton's old city hall.

At a Pendleton Development Commission meeting on Tuesday, commission chairman and city councilor Chuck Wood said the city was going to start enforcing the nuisance ordinance, a move that is meant hasten the building's fire damage repairs and could cost the family that owns the building $500 a day.

City Manager Robb Corbett, who also acts as the commission's executive director, said a letter would be sent to the owners detailing the nuisance ordinance process within the next few days.

An internal explosion caused by illegal fireworks rocked old city hall July 21, 2015, killing 25-year-old Eduardo Quezada and completely destroying the building's roof and windows. The building is owned by Jose Quezada, Eduardo's father, and his family.

See CITY HALL/8A

Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Eastside Market owner Joe Thompson stands by some of the local athletics photos on display at the market.

HERMISTON

Thompson set to retire, sell Eastside Market

Bulldogs announcer not planning to leave community

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

After 30 years running Eastside Market in downtown Hermiston, Joe Thompson is retiring.

He plans to finalize sale of the business and step down at the end of next week. Thompson said he and his wife Sherry plan to stick around Hermiston, so people will still see him — or "hear" him — as he announces Hermiston High School football games and other local events.

"I think oftentimes Hermiston doesn't get the reputation it deserves as a top-notch town with a special group of citizens," he said.

Even though he plans to stay involved with the community through local sports, he said he will miss the people of the Eastside Market most, from regular customers to employees. All sorts of people have started their day or whiled away an afternoon over cups of coffee at the tables in the front corner of the market.

Overlooking those tables are two walls of photos and plaques from local athletes. Some, like former shot-putting standout Mykael Bothum, are Hermiston residents Thompson watched

See EASTSIDE/8A

7 29467 10001 5