

HOUK: Recruited Turner to succeed him in office

Continued from 1A

filtration system, the city's solarization program, the Pendleton Aquatic Center, the Rudy Rada Skate Park, the Westgate overpass, the series of bronzes on Main Street, the Bedford Bridge and the downtown areas revitalization, among many others.

"Every one of these were hard," he said. "Every one of them have a story and involved a lot of people to bring them together."

Houk grew up in Enterprise, one of eight children and the son of a single mother.

He moved to Pendleton in 1978 to study at Blue Mountain Community College, a school that would eventually mark the start of his political career when he became a member of the BMCC Board of Education.

He met his wife, Kathy, in 1981 while both were teaching exercise classes at BMCC. They married three weeks later and had two daughters.

Houk was appointed to the city council on Jan. 4, 1994 to fill out a vacated seat, beating out five other applicants.

"If you look at the history of Pendleton, economic development has been pretty stagnant," Houk told the council in his interview at the time, sounding not unlike some of the council's modern day critics. "We've brought in as much as we lost. And we are not keeping up with other areas of Eastern Oregon."

Houk rarely faced electoral opposition in his two decades in office, the lone exception being his first run for mayor in 2004.

At the end of a contentious campaign between Houk and former city councilor Gary Tague, Tague actually took home more votes in the May election.

But a lesser known third candidate, Jo Ann Thompson, kept either councilor from clearing 50 percent of the vote, forcing a November runoff that Houk would win by 71 votes.

Twelve years later, Houk said he believes the city's investments in infrastructure and industry have put the city in a better place than when he started.

Despite these advancements, Pendleton has not gone without loss in those years.

Once top employers in the region, Blue Mountain Recovery Center and Pendleton Grain Growers closed their doors during his tenure. The millions spent on Airport Road have thus far been for naught.

After voters approved bonds funding the city hall renovation and aquatic center construction in back-to-back years in the mid-1990s, voter support for ballot measures has dried up in recent years. The same night Houk was elected mayor in 2004, voters rejected a capital improvement bond and when the council tried to refer the issue to voters again in 2014,



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Outgoing Mayor Phillip Houk stands in the Pendleton City Council chambers where he spent the last 12 years leading city government.



Contributed photo
Phillip Houk takes the oath of office as his first term begins as his wife Kathy and daughters Chelcie and Kacie look on.

it never made it to the ballot because city staff missed an advertising deadline.

Although voters supported temporary gas taxes for the Westgate overpass and the Airport Road extension, a longterm fuel tax for road maintenance was defeated twice at the ballot box.

"That's the tough part about managing all of this," Houk said about getting residents to approve new taxes. "Trying to find the balance where you have the right amount of tax and figuring out who should be paying it so that it benefits everyone."

Voters are still waiting for the industrial jobs promised from the last gas tax that was approved, with the only company that's publicly stated interest still looking at energy options.

Houk said there were a couple of companies on the verge of locating in Pendleton because of Airport Road, only to back off at the last minute.

Despite these setbacks, Houk is still confident the Airport Road extension will be vindicated, pointing to the land the city bought for development and the city's efforts to extend utilities there.

Houk's tenure also marked the end of the road for Larry Lehman, who served as Pendleton city manager for 18 years.

After disputes between the city's union and Lehman went public in 2007, Houk and Lehman's relationship

they entered Hamley Steakhouse, the same place Houk launched his last two re-election campaigns, the farewell party featured mayors, councilors and local dignitaries celebrating Houk's career.

The emcee, Redmond Mayor George Endicott, offered an open mic for anyone willing to say a few words about the outgoing mayor.

"When we get to heaven, I believe that everything is revealed," Corbett said when he stepped to the microphone. "And everything that's due to you will come to fruition."

Houk later told the audience that he also personally recruited John Turner, the former BMCC president, to take over as mayor.

Houk said he asked Turner three times before he agreed to run.

"The first time, it was not only no, it was hell no," Houk said.

Houk said he has supported Turner ever since the BMCC board voted to promote him to president and thinks he'll help bring some of Pendleton's long term goals to fruition.

Houk decided to retire from political life because of the increasing demands from his day job as a risk manager for the Union Pacific Railroad Co.

Even with those demands, Houk said he would have sought another term if he couldn't convince Turner to run.

Instead, Houk will turn over his mayor's gavel at the next city council meeting, officially marking the end of Houk's time in city politics.

While Houk's name has been floated before for higher office, he isn't sure if he will ever re-enter politics. In the meantime, Houk could play an unfamiliar role — the outside observer.

"It might be nice to enjoy the fruits while someone else does the work," he said.

became strained when Houk told the *East Oregonian* that the problems would go away if Lehman left his position.

Although Houk and the council eventually expressed confidence in Lehman and kept him on for years, the council unexpectedly declined to renew his contract in 2009.

Houk said he was surprised by the council's decision and would have voted to retain him if the council had a split vote.

Houk said Lehman did a lot of good for the city during his time as city manager, but he saved many of his plaudits for Lehman's replacement, Robb Corbett, who still holds the position.

Houk met Corbett before he was hired as Pendleton's chief executive, while they were both in Central Oregon for a League of Oregon Cities conference.

Corbett was escorting him to an event and the two hit it off enough that Corbett asked Houk to keep him in mind if a job ever opened up in Pendleton.

When Corbett applied for the city manager position in 2009, Houk said he strongly advocated for him during the deliberations process.

At a Nov 5 retirement party, Corbett said that he was strong advocate for Houk as well.

Complete with a commemorative coin handed out to attendees as

RUSSIA: New sanctions unlikely to have a major impact on spy operations

Continued from 1A

included the cyberattacks on the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman.

It was the strongest action the Obama administration has taken to date to retaliate for a cyberattack, and more comprehensive than last year's sanctions on North Korea after it hacked Sony Pictures Entertainment. The new penalties add to existing U.S. sanctions over Russia's actions in Ukraine, which have impaired Russia's economy but had limited impact on President Vladimir Putin's behavior.

Russia, which denied the hacking allegations, called the penalties a clumsy yet aggressive attempt to "harm Russian-American ties." Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia would take into account the fact that Trump will soon replace Obama as it drafts retaliatory measures.

The day marked a low point for U.S. relations with Russia, which have suffered during Obama's years as he and Putin tussled over Ukraine, Edward Snowden and Russia's support for Syrian President Bashar Assad. Maria Zakharova, a Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman, took to Facebook to call the Obama administration "a group of foreign policy losers, angry and ignorant."

It was unlikely the new sanctions, while symbolically significant, would have a major impact on Russian spy operations. The sanctions freeze any U.S. assets and block Americans from doing business with them. But Russian law bars the spy agencies from having assets in the U.S., and any activities they undertake would likely be covert and hard to identify.

"On its face, this is more than a slap on the wrists, but hardly an appropriate response to an unprecedented attack on our electoral system," said Stewart Baker, a cybersecurity lawyer and former National Security Agency and Homeland Security Agency official.

Indeed, senior Obama administration officials said that even with the penalties, the U.S. had reason to believe Russia would keep hacking other nations' elections and might well try to hack American elections again in 2018 or 2020. The officials briefed reporters on

a conference call on condition of anonymity.

Though the FBI and Homeland Security Department issued a joint report on "Russian malicious cyber activity" — replete with examples of malware code used by the Russians — it still has not released a broader report Obama has promised detailing Russia's efforts to interfere with U.S. elections.

The report has been eagerly anticipated by those hoping to make it politically untenable for Trump to continue questioning whether Russia was really involved. But U.S. officials said those seeking more detail about who the U.S. has determined did the hacking need look only to the list of sanctions targets, which includes the GRU head, his three deputies, and two Russian nationals wanted by the FBI for cybercrimes.

The move puts Trump in the position of having to decide whether to roll back the measures once in office, and U.S. officials acknowledged that Trump could use his executive authorities to do so. Still, they suggested that building the case against Russia now would make it harder for Trump to justify easing up.

U.S. allegations of hacking have ignited a heated debate over Trump's approach to Russia and his refusal to accept the assessment of U.S. intelligence agencies that Russia's government was responsible and wanted to help him win. Though U.S. lawmakers have long called for Obama to be tougher on Russia, some Republicans have found that position less tenable now that Trump is floating the possibility of closer ties to Moscow.

"While today's action by the administration is overdue, it is an appropriate way to end eight years of failed policy with Russia," said House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis.

U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that Russia was trying to help Trump win when hackers connected to the government breached Democratic Party computers and stole tens of thousands of emails that were then posted on WikiLeaks, some containing embarrassing information for Democrats. Clinton aide John Podesta's emails were also stolen and released publicly in the final weeks of the campaign.

CHEN: Family plans to open another restaurant in Walla Walla

Continued from 1A

serving tables and Kevin making sushi behind the counter. "The restaurant belongs to everyone in the family."

Chen said while he didn't have any family already in Hermiston, he had visited the community before and liked the area.

"I looked, and they didn't have any sushi restaurants at all, so I decided to bring something new to try," he said.

Chen said he misses Portland a little — but never for very long.

"I go back a lot — once a week," he said. "They don't deliver fresh fish here, so I go pick it up myself."

Chen said his family plans to open another restaurant in Walla Walla in the future, but they're enjoying being in Hermiston, too.

"We love it. The people are so nice," he said. He added that customers have been patient with them, too.

"One night, our credit card machine was having issues, but people went next door and got cash to pay for their food," he said.

WAGE: Will also increase this weekend in 22 cities, counties

Continued from 1A

food workers and other low wage workers around the country. "The price of food has gone up. Rent has gone up. Everything has gone up. ... This will make a difference for so many people."

Voters in Arizona, Maine, Colorado and Washington approved increases in this year's election. Seven other states, Alaska, Florida, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, Ohio and South Dakota, are automatically raising the wage based on indexing. The other states seeing increases are Arkansas, Connecticut, Hawaii, Michigan and Vermont.

Additional increases are slated for later in the year in Oregon, Washington, D.C., and Maryland.

In Arizona, the state Chamber of Commerce and Industry filed a lawsuit challenging the increase, which will raise the minimum wage from \$8.05 to \$10. On Thursday, the Arizona Supreme Court refused to temporarily block the raise. Workers and labor advo-

cates argue the increases will help low-wage workers now barely making ends meet and boost the economy by giving some consumers more money to spend. But many business owners opposed the higher wages, saying they would lead to higher prices and greater automation.

Some restaurant owners may consider reducing portion sizes or charging for side dishes that were once included in the price of a meal to absorb the increase, according to Melissa Fleischut, president of the New York State Restaurant Association.

"I'm sure prices will go up where they can, but restaurants want to avoid sticker shock," she said. "They're going to have to get creative."

The adjustments in New York, California and several other states are part of a series of gradual increases to a \$12 or \$15 hourly wage.

The minimum wage will also go up this weekend in 22 cities and counties, including San Diego, San Jose and Seattle.

The high number of states and localities raising the

wage this year reflects the successful work of fast-food workers and organized labor, according to Tsedeye Gebreselassie, senior staff attorney at the National Employment Law Project, as well as federal inaction on the wage.

The national minimum was last raised, to \$7.25, in 2009.

"These aren't only teens trying to make some pocket money," she said. "Increasingly it's adults who are using this money to support their families."

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