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BOARDMAN

Biomass test day delayed at coal facility

Cold weather deters alternative fuel trial

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

A major step toward determining whether the Boardman Coal Plant can run entirely on biomass will have to wait until after the new year.

Portland General Electric had planned to conduct a full-day test burn at the plant using nothing but woody debris by the end of December. However, as winter weather had Oregonians cranking up the heat, PGE needed all resources on deck to keep up with the surge in electricity demand.

Steve Corson, PGE spokesman, said the biomass trial at Boardman will instead be held sometime during the first quarter of 2017.

"We were in the midst of the coldest weather we've had this month, and we needed that power generation at the coal plant," Corson said.

Workers at the plant did use a partial mix of coal and biomass for three days — Dec. 6, 8 and 12 — which Corson said provided further information about how the material behaves with the facility's pulverizers.

"It is similar to coal, but there are distinctions," Corson said.

PGE has until 2020 to decide what to do with the Boardman facility, the state's

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Enjoy a free peppermint mocha at Bloomz Coffee Bar in Hermiston



TOP STORIES OF 2016



AP file photo

Duane Ehmer of Irrigon, a supporter of the group occupying the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, walks his horse Hellboy near Burns on Jan. 7, 2016.

East Oregonian

1. Standoff at the wildlife refuge

Ammon Bundy, joined by his brother Ryan and a small band of followers, took a "hard stand" against federal control of Western lands and the imprisonment of two ranchers. They seized the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in Harney County and spent weeks in a slow-motion standoff with authorities.

For 41 days the state's attention was on the remote bird sanctuary, and the nearby town of Burns was divided between those standing by the occupiers and those demanding the out-of-state armed protesters to leave.

The Bundys were arrested in a Jan. 26 traffic stop that included the fatal shooting by police of occupation spokesman Robert "LaVoy" Finicum as he exited his vehicle at a road block and attempted to draw his gun. Two vehicles were headed north on their way to a public meeting in John Day, where a mostly sympathetic crowd had gathered at the community center.

After Bundy's arrest and Finicum's death, many of the remaining protesters left the refuge, but four holdouts remained until a tense standoff Feb. 11 that ended peacefully.

The occupation, which lasted 41 days, heightened the debate over public land management in Western states.

Eleven men pleaded guilty ahead



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Braelyn Cragun, 10, lights a candle during a vigil for James "JJ" Hurtado and Ken Valdez on August 24, 2016 in Hermiston.

of a fall trial that ended with the surprise acquittals of the Bundy brothers and five co-defendants. In an explosive ending, a team of federal marshals tackled defense lawyer Marcus Mumford as he yelled at the judge. Paperwork flew as Ammon Bundy's attorney writhed on the ground, screaming.

The year closed with some defendants trying to withdraw their guilty pleas and government prosecutors pressing ahead with a February 2017 trial for seven remaining defendants.

2. Murder-suicide shocks Hermiston

Hermiston was shaken by a brutal crime that claimed three lives and left

another person wounded in August.

On Aug. 18, Jason Huston, 45, killed 14-year-old James "JJ" Hurtado at a remote location near the Umatilla River outside of Hermiston before driving into town and kicking in the door of high school friend and fellow wrestling coach Kenneth Valdez, also 45. He entered the bedroom, killed Valdez and wounded Hurtado's mother Andria Bye before calling 9-1-1 to report the shooting and then turning the gun on himself.

Police, friends and family — knowing only that Hurtado had last been seen with Huston — searched desperately for the teenager, who had been set to begin his freshman year at Hermiston High School, over the course of several hours before

From stories that captured national headlines (the Malheur occupation, Hermiston murder-suicide, naked intruder caught in a tree) to hyper-local milestones (completion of the EOTEC event center and two new Pendleton schools), 2016 kept us busy.

What follows is our selection of the biggest news stories of the year in the pages of the *East Oregonian*, based on regional relevance, historic significance and reader interest.



Contributed photo

James "JJ" Hurtado (left) and Ken Valdez (right).

finding his body.

Huston and Bye had previously dated and Huston had remained a father figure to Hurtado, but Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said it is likely no one will ever know for sure Huston's motives that day.

After the shootings hundreds of people attended a candlelight vigil for Hurtado and Valdez at McKenzie Park, while others started a scholarship in Hurtado's name, collected donations for the families and started the "I Love My City" campaign to perform positive acts of service in the community.

3. Boardman tree farm felled

The Boardman Tree Farm is getting the ax to make way for more conventional crops and, possibly, a second mega-dairy in Morrow County.

GreenWood Resources, which has owned the 25,000-acre poplar tree farm since 2007, agreed in January to

See **2016/12A**



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Qualified Mental Health Professional crisis supervisor Dan Wilcox works long and often erratic hours due to staffing shortages at the Westgate crisis center in Pendleton. Workforce availability is an issue in staffing mental health facilities in the state.

Region struggles to draw high-level therapists

By **KATHY ANEY**
East Oregonian

When it comes to providing mental health care in rural Oregon, money isn't the issue — rather, the determining factors are manpower and the rising number of mentally ill.

A recent Mental Health America ranking placed Oregon 51st as far as prevalence of mental illness in the state and 49th overall when including other factors such as workforce availability.

Lifeways administrators Sandy Shelton and Carol Eck must fill vacancies when they come open at the company. It's not easy to lure therapists



and psychiatrists from the city. Shelton, Lifeways' chief clinical officer, said she dreams of a busload of masters-level therapists moving to Pendleton.

"That would be the best day ever for

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