

A Ch-47 Chinook helicopter emerges from a cloud of snow while performing maneuvers over a runway Wednesday at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in Pendleton.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris



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PENDLETON



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A Boutique Air flight from Portland taxis to a stop on the tarmac Thursday at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in Pendleton.

On board with Boutique

Pendleton welcomes new airline with ribbon cutting ceremony

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

It might have been one of the biggest welcoming parties for a commercial flight in Pendleton airport history.

A few dozen local officials and members of the public crammed into the former Transportation Security Administration screening room to greet the mid-afternoon flight on Wednesday.

Four weeks after Boutique started providing air service between Pendleton and Portland, the city and the San Francisco company celebrated the latter's arrival with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

One of those arriving on the flight was Boutique director of operations Mat Butcher, who told the assembled crowd about his familiarity with Pendleton.

See BOUTIQUE/8A



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Boutique Air director of operations Mat Butcher gestures while speaking during a grand opening ceremony Wednesday at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in Pendleton.

Two proposed bills take aim at reducing PERS liabilities

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
Capital Bureau

SALEM — As lawmakers head into the 2017 legislative session, at least two proposed bills plan to address oft-tread territory: the state's pension system.

In 2013, the Legislature approved a slew of changes to the system, referred to as PERS, only to have many of them rejected by the Oregon Supreme Court in 2015.

This time around, those legislators who have called for reforms

to PERS — including members of an informal work group — say the Legislature needs to address the system's \$22 billion unfunded liability while meeting legal requirements.

Two proposals that have emerged thus far have co-opted some ideas floated at that work group, which is led by Sens. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, and Tim Knopp, R-Bend.

SB 559 would increase the number of years used in calculating final average salary of public employees to prevent end-of-career spikes; and

"We don't want to propose anything that we don't think would survive a legal challenge because it would be a waste of time."

— Sen. Jeff Kruse, R-Roseburg

SB 560 would redirect employee contributions from an individual account program to the pension fund and cap the final salary used in the benefits calculation at \$100,000 starting Jan. 1, 2018.

See PERS/8A

BOARDMAN

Opponents call foul on mega-dairy construction

By GEORGE PLAVERN
East Oregonian

While it remains unclear whether state agencies will sign off on a controversial 30,000-cow dairy farm in Morrow County, that hasn't stopped construction from moving quickly ahead.

The question now is whether Lost Valley Ranch broke the law by breaking ground well before it secured the necessary permits.

A coalition of health and environmental groups is calling on both the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Department of Environmental Quality to investigate, and plans to meet face-to-face with regulators Friday in Portland.

ODA and DEQ are jointly responsible for issuing what's known as a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit, which outlines how Lost Valley will manage the roughly 187 million gallons of liquid manure generated each year and protect against groundwater contamination.

To date, the agencies have not issued a permit for Lost Valley. The proposed mega-dairy also has not received a construction stormwater permit, according to the coalition.

See DAIRY/8A

MILTON-FREEWATER

State's largest orchard sells to Washington fruit grower

Brown family will remain in place at orchard, vineyard

By GEORGE PLAVERN
East Oregonian

Earl Brown & Sons, Oregon's largest grower and packer of fresh apples, has sold to another family-owned fruit enterprise in Wenatchee, Washington.

Members of the Foreman Fruit Company purchased Earl Brown & Sons in October, though the deal keeps the Browns in place to manage local operations on more than 1,000 acres of apples and 115 acres of wine grapes.

Ron Brown, whose father Earl started Earl Brown & Sons 40 years ago, said the families worked out a partnership that allows the business to retain its name and employees.

"Nobody lost their jobs. We're moving along just like we did before," Brown said.

The biggest difference, Brown said, is Foreman Fruit will provide additional capital for continued growth. The company is actively planting another 60 acres of apples and 10 more acres of grapes.

"We've already taken on leasing more ground than we had," Brown said.

Financial terms of the sale were not disclosed. Earl Brown & Sons has also spun off several other businesses, including Blue Mountain

See FRUIT/8A



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