

TOLLGATE: Bigfoot cast in animal collection

Continued from 1A

Dylan Van Dyke. While Van Dyke remains in California, Pinsker has been running the place by himself, doing everything from making coffee and flipping burgers to stocking shelves and plowing snow from the parking lot.

Though customers tend to come and go based on the weather, Pinsker said operating the store is too much for one guy.

"I'm responsible for every single thing," he said. "It's too much pressure, too much stress."

Pinsker keeps the store open five days a week, closing on Monday to do banking and Thursday to shop for inventory. The store shelves are stocked with basics like chips, candy, soda, crackers and hot cocoa mix. Behind the counter, Pinsker also sells Sno-Park and firewood permits, depending on the season.

With the recent decision by neighboring Spout Springs Ski Area to close for the season, the Tollgate Store is now the only business around for food and services — primarily burgers and pizza in the restaurant. The store hasn't sold gas for at least three or four years, after Pinsker said he was unable to break even.

"It all comes down to money," he said. "We cannot handle that financial responsibility. Right now, my money goes to food."

Tollgate has had a general store since the 1970s when it was a little one-room shack, Pinsker said. The current store was built in 1984, according to Umatilla County records. The restaurant is decorated with antler mounts on the walls, and photos of local wildlife including deer, elk, bears and cougars



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Tollgate Store proprietor Jeff Pinsker holds a copy of a Bigfoot cast that was given to him by Clifford Barackman, star of the Animal Planet show "Finding Bigfoot", at his store in Tollgate.

captured on game cameras.

Another wall is adorned with a line of original Bigfoot casts, the oldest dated 1986. In fact, the Animal Planet television series "Finding Bigfoot" visited the store while filming a 2014 episode, though Pinsker said none of their footage made the final cut.

Pinsker said he will not close the store before he is able to sell.

"Whether we're busy or not, we have to keep it going," he said. "It's worth it to me to put in the time."

Ron Briggs, who works in Hermiston but has lived at Tollgate full time since 1995, said he feels there is potential for the store, as the area pulls in not only sportsmen but also families from neighboring cities.

"It's just a good place to congregate," Briggs said. "I foresee this getting better."

Dottie Carrell, who serves as secretary for the Tollgate Trail Finders Snowmobile Club, said she could "just about guarantee business" for the store from club members. One thing both she and Berry agreed they would like to see, however, is gasoline brought back so they can gas up their snowmobiles without having to drive into town.

"That's a big deal to snowmobilers," Carrell said.

Pinsker said he will continue to live in Tollgate even after the store is sold.

"I'm doing as well as one person can do. It's time for somebody else to grab it and run with it."

SNOW DAYS: Hermiston graduation pushed back

Continued from 1A

weeks, Pendleton's schedule left little room for cancellations.

Although district staff had originally suggested turning one of the spring student-teacher conference days into an instruction day, Bixler said that won't accomplish much because they have missed out on so many days.

While he's heard of other

districts petitioning the state, Bixler said Pendleton isn't ready to commit to an approach, especially since there could be more inclement weather to come.

Bixler said Pendleton's remaining schedule could be a topic of discussion at the school board's next meeting on Tuesday, although he's unsure if any action will be taken.

As of Thursday, the district's school calendar

wasn't listed as an item on the school board's agenda.

Hermiston has a more solid plan.

After the first snow day in December, the Hermiston School District announced it would designate five inclement weather make-up days at the end of the year, pushing graduation from June 3 to June 10 and the last day of school for other students from June 7 to as late as June 14.

Since then, the district has canceled school four more times and needed a two-hour delay, and has not yet decided how to handle any additional snow days that may occur.

"The district is consulting with the Oregon Department of Education," said Hermiston School District Communications Officer Maria Duron. "Many school districts have the same dilemma."

MENTAL HEALTH: Governor says closure would save state \$34 million a year

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David Nelson (R-Pendleton) used the Oregon Health Authority's own numbers to show that "cost per client at BMRC was less than the cost per client at the State Hospital and the Portland campus, too." The decision to shutter the Pendleton hospital and open one in Junction City seemed to be driven more by politics than good sense.

"It was kind of a painful battle we fought," he said.

The 11th hour save always came, but finally in 2014 the hospital closed for good and the palatial building was razed. The hospital's diehard supporters went on with life, though they kept an eye on Junction City, which opened in mid-2015. When the governor announced intentions to close that facility, Bob Jenson experienced some of his previous biennial déjà vu.

"However," he said, "whether or not this is truly the governor's goal and whether she'll push hard is another question."

The 174-bed hospital currently houses 81 individuals. Residents come to the

hospital by falling into one of three classifications. Some have been found by a court to be guilty except for insanity. Others have been committed civilly after a judge found them to be a danger to themselves or others or that they couldn't provide for their own basic needs. The last group consists of individuals who have been arrested but can't participate in their own defense because of mental illness.

Gov. Brown said the closure, which would cut more than 400 jobs, would save the state more than \$34 million a year. She expressed her belief that mental health care ideally should happen in independent settings.

Rep. Greg Smith (R-Heppner), as co-vice chair of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, will be involved in budget discussions with Gov. Brown. He said the budget item sends a mixed message.

"That Junction City is slated for closure has people scratching their heads and asking, 'Are we really serious about mental health?'" Smith said.

He understands the governor being in a pinch, though.

"She has really, really tough choices," he said. "She's prioritized the Oregon Health Plan over all other elements of the budget. Her number one priority is to ensure that all Oregonians have health coverage. The dollars have to come from somewhere."

Eastern Oregon mental health administrator Kimberly Lindsey doesn't necessarily believe the closure is a bad thing, but the timing might not be right.

Lindsey, as executive director of Community Counseling Solutions based in Heppner, serves as mental health director for four Eastern Oregon counties. She generally favors caring for mentally ill people in community settings versus big mental hospitals, but can't yet endorse the proposed closure of the hospital in Junction City.

Lindsey explained her hesitation. The pendulum, she said, has swung hard away from the days when people with mental illness

were warehoused in overcrowded institutions. A century ago, at the Eastern Oregon State Hospital, people arrived usually by train and lived out their days at the mental hospital. The reason for admission was often questionable. In the 1880s at the State Hospital in Salem, common reasons for admission included alcoholism for men and menopause for women. Even into the '30s at the Pendleton hospital, adolescence, occult study, senility, epilepsy, moonshine drinking and syphilis remained reasons for committing someone into state care. Psychiatrists treated patients with chemically induced seizures, hydrotherapy, lobotomy and other methods that eventually fell out of favor.

The pendulum started swinging the other way, leading to eventual closure of about 95 percent of state

hospitals in the United States and the shifting of care to community settings. Deinstitutionalization has a lot of merit, Lindsey said, but the vision hasn't yet been realized in the United States as it has in some other countries. Many of dollars that should have gone to paying for community-based treatment were diverted for tax relief or for other programs. Thousands of people with mental illness end up in prisons, jails or on the streets instead of community mental health facilities.

"I don't necessarily believe you have to have hospitals to be successful, but in the absence of enough community infrastructure, we need hospitals," Lindsey said.

To house a state hospital patient, the community facility needs to be secured. Small, secured facilities include Lakeview Heights

legislation that would remove restrictions on owning suppressors or silencers, the device that fits on the end of a gun barrel to reduce the noise of a shot. Republican Reps. Jeff Duncan of South Carolina and John Carter of Texas on Monday introduced the "Hearing Protection Act," which would end the \$200 federal tax and months-long wait to own a suppressor with the National Instant Criminal Background Check. Broadfoot called the proposal a good idea because it eliminates red tape and saves a shooter's hearing whether on the range or in the forest.

Each panelist will have up to 15 minutes to speak, then moderator David Nelson, former state senator, will open the discussion to questions and answers.

The Eastern Oregon Forum is Tuesday at 7 p.m. at Blue Mountain Community College, Pendleton, in the Science and Technology Building, room 200. The forum is open to the public and tickets are \$6 at the door but free for students. You can purchase a \$20 membership for admission to all four forums (the others are on Feb. 21, March 21 and April 18).

The Eastern Oregon Forum is a collaborative effort between Blue Mountain Community College, the InterMountain Education Service District, the East Oregonian, American Association of University Women and Harriet Isom, a former United States ambassador. The forum is part of BMCC's annual Arts and Culture Festival.

For more information on the forum, contact Karen Parker at 541-966-3177 at the education service district.

Contact Phil Wright at pwright@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0833.

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