



**PENDLETON  
DOMINATES  
THE DALLES**  
SPORTS/1B



**WEEKEND EDITION**  
**A MEMORIAL FOR PEACE**  
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**LISTENING  
TO OUR  
SOLDIERS'  
STORIES**  
REGION/3A

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## BOARDMAN



A group of women for the Oregon and Washington potato commissions tours the SAGE Center on Wednesday. Staff photo by E.J. Harris

# Growing a museum

SAGE Center enters fourth year still finding its footing

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
East Oregonian

The story of agriculture and energy production in Eastern Oregon is an increasingly high-tech narrative, replete with GPS-driven tractors, wind and solar power and irrigation pivots powered by the touch of a smartphone.

So when the Port of Morrow set out to highlight these industries, it devised a modern museum with interactive features to show visitors where their food and electricity comes from.

Three years later, the Sustainable Agriculture and Energy — or SAGE — Center continues to find its footing as a tourist destination along Interstate 84, advertising as far as Portland and the Tri-Cities while also hosting local job fairs and community events.

Kalie Davis, SAGE Center manager, said they are seeing signs of progress: last year's Morrow County Harvest Festival drew more than 1,000 people in a single day, and new television commercials boosted general admission by about



The SAGE Center opened its doors on June 1, 2013, and is averaging 19,507 visitors a year. Staff photo by E.J. Harris

14 visitors per day during the month of June.

Annual visitation, however, has been mostly flat, averaging 19,507 people with no year-to-year increase. By comparison, the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center in The Dalles had 27,795 visitors (not including tour groups from Columbia River cruise lines), and the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in Baker City had 41,221 visitors.

Looking ahead, Davis said the SAGE Center will continue marketing to the Portland metro area and Tri-Cities, with another round of ads to begin in March. Davis also plans to attend this year's Oregon Ag Fest at the State Fairgrounds in April.

It is important, Davis said, for people to understand how their food is made, processed and shipped. That's what the SAGE Center offers, through exhibits such as a video

### By the numbers

Here is a look at the number of annual visitors, compared to other museums in the area.

**SAGE Center, Boardman**  
2013-14: 22,314  
2014-15: 18,166  
2015-16: 18,041

**National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, Baker City**  
2014: 36,132  
2015: 36,871  
2016: 41,221

**Columbia Gorge Discovery Center, The Dalles\***  
2014: 34,088  
2015: 38,130  
2016: 38,399

\* includes cruise line visitors

tractor game, mock french fry processing line and video board that displays where products are exported around the world.

"People who come in are typically very confused about what they're going to see," Davis said. "As they go through, they're just wowed by all these industries located in such a small region."

Visitors normally would not be able to tour these facilities,

See SAGE/10A

## PENDLETON

# Standoff suspect spoke for hours with police, family

Had an AK-47, three hand guns, multiple magazines of ammunition

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
East Oregonian

A nearly eight-hour standoff on Wednesday between a Washington man armed with an assault rifle and other guns ended in Pendleton with a suicide. But its origin starts 333 miles away in Shelton, Washington.

That's where the Mason County Sheriff's Office found the bodies of Tara M. Abernathy, 32, and Kenneth E. Koonrad, 34, on Tuesday.

According to *The Olympian* newspaper, Tara M. Abernathy's ex-husband, Jared Abernathy, was the sheriff's only suspect.

Law enforcement couldn't immediately locate Abernathy and sent out a notice to other police agencies with information about the suspect and his vehicle, a 2006 Chevrolet Equinox.

Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts said his department received the information and shared it during a daily briefing.

Just before 1 p.m., Roberts said a Pendleton police officer spotted Abernathy's 2006 Chevrolet Equinox in the Motel 6 parking lot at 325 S.E. Nye Ave.

As they contacted the Mason County Sheriff's Office and other authorities, Pendleton police in plain clothes and unmarked cars went to the area and started monitoring Abernathy's room, which was on the second floor and faced north.

Authorities set up an emergency command center at the nearby Red Lion Hotel, where Pendleton police, Oregon State Police, the Mason County Sheriff's Office, a U.S. Marshals task force from Washington and other law enforcement agencies began sharing information and planning how to approach the situation.

Police soon started calling Abernathy on both his cell phone and the landline in his motel room, but he didn't call them back until around 3 p.m. when he briefly opened his hotel room door, noticed the police presence outside and retreated back into the room.

Roberts said authorities approached him with caution because they knew he possessed an AK-47 assault rifle and three hand guns with multiple magazines of ammunition.

"If he wanted to engage, he could have sent out a lot of fire into the community," Roberts said.

During the early stages of police's communication with Abernathy, Roberts said he could

**"If he wanted to engage, he could have sent out a lot of fire into the community."**

— **Stuart Roberts**, Pendleton Police Chief

See STANDOFF/10A

## UMATILLA COUNTY DEVELOPMENT FUND

# Days of 'frittering away' funds are over

County looks for long-term investment out of state lottery money

By **PHIL WRIGHT**  
East Oregonian

Umatilla County granted local organizations and projects \$216,268 in economic and community development money since July 2015.

The total includes \$300 to Girl Scouts of America for its Me and My Prince Victorian Ball, \$50 to a charity auction,

and \$1,000 to the Milton-Freewater Chamber of Commerce for general project support.

Those are the kinds of projects the county will no longer fund, said commissioner Bill Elfering, instead focusing on long-term investments with the potential for economic returns.

The *East Oregonian* obtained the list of grants via a public records request to the county.

The county receives about \$300,000 a year from Oregon Lottery revenue for economic

See FUNDS/10A



Guests enjoy the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce's First Citizens Banquet recently at Wildhorse Resort & Casino in Mission. The Umatilla County will no longer provide grants for events. Staff photo by E.J. Harris



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