

HERMISTON

Alternative school merges with high school

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

The Innovative Learning Center, the Hermiston School District's alternative school since 2011, officially dissolved after the spring of 2016 and is now operating under the umbrella of Hermiston High School.

According to administrators, little else has changed.

"We'll still call it the Innovative Learning Center," said Hermiston High School Principal Tom Spoo. "But those kids are officially Hermiston High School students again."

The primary reason for the change, Spoo said, is that the state has an attendance requirement — approximately 80 percent of students have to be attending classes full-time. Many of the students in the ILC program are there because they can't attend school full-time, or split their time between Hermiston High School and the alternative program.

"We'll never come close to meeting that (attendance requirement)," Spoo said. "That was the driving force behind closing it."

Administrators said the change will affect Hermiston High School attendance and graduation rates, but they are happy to be able to continue providing the alternative program in some capacity. For the 2015-2016 school year, the graduation rate for the entire district, which includes the ILC, was 65.7 percent. For Hermiston High School the same year, the rate was 87.6 percent.

"It's positive that we're giving kids an opportunity that many other high schools don't give them," said assistant superintendent Bryn Browning.

Assistant Principal Scott Depew said the program has undergone small changes since its adoption, but its primary goal is to target students with attendance gaps or other barriers to success in a traditional high school setting. Increasingly, he said, those barriers are related to attendance rather than to behavioral issues.

Depew said most things about the program will not change — it will still offer a blend of online classes and instructor-led courses. The ILC will no longer offer a night school, but staff will

remain the same, and it will still be held in the same location. Kids and parents, he said, do not appear to have noticed any changes.

Depew said about 85 percent of the students in the alternative program are working toward a GED certificate.

Spoo said students are encouraged to stay with the traditional high school program, unless it's not feasible.

"We need to do everything possible before we're going to shift a kid down that road," he said. "When a kid goes down that path, it makes it that much more difficult to graduate. We try to do everything possible to get that student to succeed at a traditional level."

Part of that effort, he said, includes catching struggling students early in high school.

"There are no freshman in (the ILC)," Depew said. "Primarily what gets kids in there is — a junior with four credits, or a senior with five credits."

Teachers and administrators check in with freshmen and sophomores, Depew said, and try to fix problems early — with programs like

summer school and Saturday school.

"No longer can we just wait until the end to fix things, because students fall too far behind," he said.

For some students, though, a non-traditional path to high school completion is the best one.

"Obviously, we want all kids to get a high school diploma, but does that mean getting a GED is bad? Absolutely not," Spoo said.

"We want to be realistic and give kids options. If we don't provide for those kids, they're a dropout, and we'll lose those kids."

"A diploma is not the goal for all," Depew said. "Graduation rates only reflect regular diplomas and modified diplomas."

Depew said the rates leave out things like extended diplomas, GEDs, and five-year completion rates.

"I'm looking at ways to discourage kids from GEDs — I want more diplomas," he said. "But 34 GEDs means 34 less dropouts."

Contact Jayati Ramakrishnan at 541-564-4534 or jramakrishnan@eastoregonian.com.

HERMISTON

County holds off on paying EOTEC

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center is going to have to wait to get another chunk of taxpayer money from Umatilla County.

EOTEC billed the county \$45,190 to cover operations for fiscal year 2016-17. The county, along with the city of Hermiston, had previously agreed to pay just \$25,000 annually to the event center for its first three years of operation. Both local governments later agreed to split the amount of EOTEC's shortfall in each of those years, whatever the amount.

County commissioners took up the matter at their meeting Wednesday in Pendleton, and the three questioned what the \$45,190 bill would cover. Robert Pahl, chief fiscal officer for the county, said the funds would pay for operations and any budget gap to date.

Pahl also said the county would not know the full extent of any shortfall until the end of June or sometime in July.

Commissioner Larry Givens, who serves on the event center board, said EOTEC's success remains a question.

Commissioner George Murdock said he would not want to approve the amount if it wasn't what the county agreed to in the budget, or if wouldn't completely cover the county's portion of EOTEC's deficit.

"We pay this and they put it in their budget and spend it," he said. "And at the end of the year, if there's a \$50,000 shortfall we're out another \$25,000. Right?"

"That's correct," Givens responded.

The event center's board is going to approve a new management plan designed to increase revenue, Givens added, which came out of a joint meeting between Umatilla County and Hermiston officials. Murdock said Hermiston has the same concerns as the county about putting more taxpayer money into EOTEC, and he asked Givens if the EOTEC board was aware of those conversations.

"They are now," Givens said. "That was brought up at the last meeting with a little bit of angst with some of it."

Givens, Murdock and commissioner Bill Elfering unanimously agreed to delay approving the payment until there is a better idea of the actual cost to the county.

LANDFILL: Handles 2M tons of trash every year

Continued from 1A

Landfill was originally born out of necessity. By the late 1980s, Metro found itself in a bind with the St. Johns Landfill in Portland filling up and nowhere else to turn for landfill space.

Waste Management, which had already built a hazardous waste disposal site south of Arlington, proposed a second dump in Gilliam County. The proposal won over locals, who proudly wore buttons reading "Portland's trash is Gilliam County's cash" to public meetings.

But in order for Waste Management to invest in a new facility, it needed a major commitment from Metro, which promised 90 percent of its solid waste to Columbia Ridge for 20 years. The contract was later extended to 30 years.

"Metro needed a partner," said Jackie Lang, spokeswoman for Waste Management. "Gilliam County and Waste Management stepped up together to meet Metro's needs."

Since then, Lang said the landscape for landfills has changed dramatically. There are far more options for Metro to consider, including Finley Buttes Landfill in Morrow County and the Roosevelt Regional Landfill in Washington, just across the Columbia River from Arlington.

Waste Management is working to convince Metro that Columbia Ridge is still the best place for Portland's trash in 2019 and beyond, Lang said.

"This is a state-of-the-art facility," she said. "What you get is a local employer that invests in its employees, and is very much poised for innovation."

Columbia Ridge handles 2 million tons of trash every year, and has the capacity to continue operating for another 116 years, according to Waste Management. Though Metro is the landfill's single biggest customer, it isn't the only one — garbage is also hauled in by train from Seattle.

Host fees are paid to Gilliam County per ton, with the income generating between \$2 million and \$3 million each year. In 1991, the county passed an ordinance directing how and where the money is distributed. County Judge Steve Shaffer said the ordinance is routinely updated every five years.



Photo contributed by Waste Management

The Columbia Ridge Landfill and Recycling Center is located south of Arlington in Gilliam County and directly employs 90 people.

Some of the money goes to the cities of Arlington and Condon. Some goes to the county roads department and bridge fund. Some is paid out to businesses for development loans, and some is set aside to help homeowners offset the cost of property taxes.

"I think we've done a really good job of spreading out the money to different entities," Shaffer said.

Between local jobs and tax revenue, Shaffer said Columbia Ridge is one of the county's most valuable assets. Gilliam County Commissioner Michael Weimar agreed, saying the host fees have been used extensively to bolster county services and diversify the economy.

"It was a huge boost to the county, having this landfill," Weimar said. "It's hard to imagine how we would have operated without the host fees."

Weimar recalled how the fees were used in part to help develop the Shutler Station Industrial Park near Arlington, and the Summit Springs Village assisted living community in Condon.

"We've tried to make our communities more livable," Weimar said.

Back at Metro, Ehinger said the council is not only examining other landfill sites, but looking into new

technology that would allow them to burn trash for energy.

"We look at solid waste more as a resource rather than something you bury in the ground," Ehinger said. "We're trying to get the value in our waste stream out of the waste stream."

While that technology continues to mature, Ehinger said landfills are going to remain in the fold for a long time.

"The question is how much it will be needed, and where it will be," he said.

Nobody knows Portland trash better than Columbia Ridge, Lang said. As for capturing value out of the waste stream, there is a landfill gas power plant at Columbia Ridge that was expanded in 2014 to generate 12.8 megawatts of electricity.

Another 10,000 acres at Columbia Ridge is managed as a wildlife buffer, and other land is leased to two different wind farms with a total of 93 turbines.

Paul Burns, Waste Management's disposal operation director for the Pacific Northwest, said the company absolutely intends

to bid for the Metro contract in 2019 but is pursuing other solid waste contracts in case Metro opts against Columbia Ridge.

"We've never failed to deliver for Portland," Burns said. "We're in a community in Arlington that is very supportive, and wants to provide long-term service to Metro."

Shafer said he hopes the Metro council takes into account its relationship with the county when the council makes its final decision.

"Gilliam County stepped up at a time when (Metro) had their backs to the wall," he said. "We're hoping they consider that with an awful lot of weight."

Ehinger said the current contract review doesn't reflect poorly on the county or Waste Management. They are simply intent on exploring their options.

"We've been fortunate to be dealing with a very good company, and very good people in Arlington," he said. "We'll see what the future holds."

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

BRIEFLY

Rep. Walden invites Oregonians to live telephone town hall

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, R-Hood River, announced he will host a live telephone town hall at 10:45 a.m. Monday from his office in the nation's capital.

Walden plans to discuss his recent efforts in Congress to grow the economy and solve the issues confronting Oregonians, according to the announcement from his staff. He also will take questions from participants.

"Telephone town halls are a great way to communicate with people in the comfort of their own homes, and allows me to connect with Oregonians who are unable to travel long distances to attend the town halls and other meetings I hold throughout our district," Walden said in the statement.

Monday's telephone town hall is Walden's first of 2017. He recently held an in-person town hall in Lake County, which marked his 130th town hall since 2012.

To participate in the Monday telephone town hall, visit Walden's website at www.walden.house.gov for links to sign up.

Crash in Washington kills two local men

PATERSON, Washington — A crash Wednesday morning near Paterson, Washington, killed two Umatilla County men.

Washington State Patrol reported Ramiro Valdez-Galvez, 29, of Umatilla, and Pedro Santiago-Menchu, 37, of Hermiston, died at the scene.

They were in passengers in a 2000 Chrysler minivan heading west on State Route 14. The driver, Alfredo B. Perez, 48, of Umatilla, at 5:45 a.m. tried to pass another westbound vehicle and struck an oncoming 2014 Kenworth semitrailer in the eastbound lane.

An ambulance took Perez to Kadlec Regional Medical Center, Richland, according to Washington State Patrol. The driver of the semi, Abel M. Garcia, 37, of Toppenish, Washington, was not injured.

Police also reported Perez and Garcia wore seat belts but do not know if Valdez-Galvez and Santiago-Menchu did.

Drugs or alcohol were not involved, according to the state patrol, and the crash remains under investigation with charges pending.

Briefs are compiled from staff and wire reports, and press releases. Email press releases to news@eastoregonian.com

Live Music 9:00 PM

FRIDAY, FEB. 3
QUINELL
 8 S.E. COURT, PENDLETON • 541.278.1100

Whitney Minthorn
 at the Pendleton Center for the Arts
 Join us for a reception with the artist
Thurs., Feb. 9
5:30 - 7:00 pm
 Made possible through the support of Cayuse Technologies

PART-TIME DRIVER
 Part-time driver needed to deliver East Oregonian publications throughout Eastern Oregon. Must be able to lift up to 50 pounds, have a valid driver's license and a good driving record. Shifts vary but will regularly include Tuesday nights. Duties may include non-driving work if extra hours are desired. Drug test, driving record and criminal background checks will be completed before hire.
 Pick up an application at 211 SE Byers, Pendleton or e-mail resume and cover letter to hr@eomediagroup.com