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One dollar

Water project crumbles for Westland

Irrigation district drains years of work due to suit

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

The Westland Irrigation District is abandoning years of work to secure additional water from the Columbia River in order to defend

a lawsuit filed by patrons alleging "massive misappropriation" of senior water rights. Farmers reacted with surprise and disappointment Monday during a special district board meeting, where

members voted unanimously to back out of the Central Project — one of three proposals to pump mitigated Columbia River irrigation water in Umatilla and Morrow counties. Unlike the neighboring Stanfield and Hermiston irrigation districts, Westland does not have the ability to switch over to Columbia River water when flows from the Umatilla River

drop below a certain point in the summer. That means the district depends entirely on Mother Nature, as well as stored water in McKay Reservoir. Riding the momentum of a regional effort led by the Northeast Oregon Water Association, or NOWA, Westland had sought to tap into the Columbia and guarantee a full irrigation season for producers. It even

appeared the district was on the verge of a deal, holding weekly meetings with patrons to iron out legal and logistical details moving forward. Instead, the Central Project fell apart over a lawsuit accusing Westland of systematically cheating small farmers out of their senior water rights for the benefit of a few larger farms with junior rights. The case, which was originally tossed from

federal court, will proceed in Umatilla County Circuit Court after Judge Michael Gillespie denied the district's motion to dismiss last week. A trial will likely be scheduled in the next six to nine months, according to Westland board chairman Bob Levy. And though Levy said he is confident the district will prevail, he felt it was unfair

See WATER/10A

BMCC pool could close for good on June 2

By *East Oregonian*

A large leak in Blue Mountain Community College's swimming pool may force the college to permanently close the pool a year early.

The college considered closing the ailing pool in the spring 2016, but after gathering public input and working with local swim teams agreed to keep it open through 2018. But vice president of communications Casey White-Zollman said a "significant leak" has been discovered that could be too costly to repair.

The college drains the pool for maintenance each summer after the high schools and the Pendleton Swim Association finish their season. This year's closure is set for June 2. White-Zollman said at that point a contractor will be able to fully assess the leak and give the college an estimate on repairs.

The agreement between BMCC, Hermiston High School, Pendleton High School and Pendleton Swim Association included \$25,000 from the college and \$25,000 split between the other swim teams for maintenance over the two extra years of operation. But White-Zollman said a clause in the agreement would allow the college to close the pool early if needed repairs exceed that amount.

She said BMCC has kept all three swim teams apprised of the latest development and they will know more after the pool is drained June 2. The college is not currently scheduling swim classes for the fall.



Ken and Stacey Jacobs of Pendleton portray the letters Q and U in a marriage ceremony on Tuesday at the Pendleton Early Learning Center. The learning center hosted the wedding to teach students the spelling rule involving the two letters.

I, Q, take you U

Students hold quaint wedding ceremony for two letters that love to couple up

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

It was a love for the ages. Having known each other for millennia, the letters Q and U have been frequent partners since they were incorporated into the English alphabet during the Middle Ages.

But it took the work of the Pendleton Early Learning Center to bring them together in wedded bliss Tuesday morning.

Jan Levy, one of the wedding planners and a kindergarten teacher,

said she and a few colleagues got the idea to hold nuptials for Q and U from a kindergarten blog they frequented.

They held a small ceremony for the letters in their classrooms last year before deciding this year to make it a school-wide event, part of an alphabetic countdown to the last day of school.

Q — portrayed by Ken Jacobs — wore a blue shirt, slacks, and sneakers. U — portrayed by Ken's

See WEDDING/10A



Ken and Stacey Jacobs do the "Chicken Dance" with kindergartners on Tuesday at the Pendleton Early Learning Center.



Umatilla senior Steven Ebker holds up a sign declaring his intentions to attend Oregon State University, during a signing day ceremony for all seniors attending post-high school education on Tuesday at Umatilla High School.

Inking out a plan

Students celebrate higher education with signing day

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
East Oregonian

Students from Umatilla High School got a glimpse of what the future can look like during the second annual "signing day," honoring its graduating seniors who will pursue higher education.

All of Umatilla's seniors who will attend college, trade school or the enlist in the military were acknowledged, with each introducing themselves and telling the

school what their plans were for next year.

As they did, the rest of the student body as well as seventh and eighth graders listened, and were encouraged to think about what they will say to the school when their turn comes.

"This is the culmination of the long-term approach to student success post-high school," said Umatilla Superintendent Heidi Sipe.

Sipe said last year 41 percent of Umatilla's graduates pursued higher education, and the previous few years saw numbers in the low 40s as well.

"This is a tremendous group,"

See SCHOOL/10A

