

Wheelchair charging station first at state capitol

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

The ribbon cutting Monday at the Oregon State Capitol won't celebrate a new business or building, but rather a gray, metal box mounted to the wall.

A blue sign above the box explains all in large block print — "WHEELCHAIR CHARGING STATION" — illustrated with the symbol of a person in a wheelchair and an electrical plug.

Two Umatilla County residents — Darrin Umbarger and Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena — championed the charging station. Umbarger, the unit's inventor, will participate in the ribbon cutting from his power wheelchair with Hansell at his side.

The two men say the station is the first installed in a capitol building anywhere in the country. Umbarger, whose multiple sclerosis keeps him in a wheelchair, is downright giddy. The Pendleton man knows personally about the fear of losing power. He navigates the world in an iBot wheelchair capable of climbing stairs and cruising uneven forest trails. When the battery dies, however, he is stuck.

"The number one fear that people using wheelchairs have is running out of juice," Umbarger said. "We are limited to the life of our battery. When the battery goes dead, we can't get up and walk away."

He said a brand-new battery allows for about 20 miles of power, but the distance dwindles with the



Contributed photo
Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, holds a sign just before it was installed above a wheelchair charging station at the Oregon State Capitol. Hansell pushed for installation of the charging station, which was invented by Darrin Umbarger of Pendleton.

battery's age.

Funded by an \$18,000 state grant in 2015, Umbarger and his wife, Carol, created a five-amp unit with air cooling that could recharge both wheelchairs needing a 24-volt charger and also those with onboard chargers that simply require an outlet and extension cord. The couple runs Clearview Mediation and Disability Medical Center, which

has the mission of helping people with disabilities live a more complete life. Eight of the Umbarger's charging stations found homes last year in various Pendleton parks. The city soon will install two additional units at the town's aquatic center.

"We were the first in the nation to put charging stations in our parks," said Pendleton Parks Superintendent Donnie Cook.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Darrin Umbarger plugs a charging cable into his wheelchair at a recharging station in February 2016 at Community Park in Pendleton, the first public wheelchair charging station in town.

While visiting Umbarger about a month ago, Hansell wondered about the possibility of installing one of Umbarger's units at the Capitol.

"I told him, 'I want Oregon to be the first capitol in the United States with a wheelchair charging station,'" Hansell said.

Umbarger, who often travels to Salem to testify for disability-related bills, loved the idea. He has already sold charging stations, retailing at \$350 each, to a county in Ohio, which placed units in county buildings. Hansell, armed with photos, arranged a meeting with the facilities director at the Oregon State Capitol. Questions arose about whether using Umbarger's

charging stations would put wheelchair warranties in jeopardy, but since the unit is composed of unmodified, pre-made components, the concern was quashed. The Ohio county already using the unit provided positive reviews. Senate President Peter Courtney agreed to fund the station and install it near his second-floor office. The charging process takes 15-20 minutes.

Hansell said he has already gotten positive feedback from a disabled lobbyist who recharged her wheelchair battery at the station.

"She said the last time she was here, she barely made it home," Hansell said. "Now we have the ability for her to recharge here."

The senator said he believes people who depend on wheelchairs will be more inclined to visit the Capitol.

"It gives those citizens an opportunity to participate in state government," he said.

Umbarger hopes the charging stations catch on and pop up in shopping malls, stadiums, theaters, amusement parks, courthouses and other places. He said the peace of mind experienced by people who depend on wheelchairs is priceless.

"It takes fear away," Umbarger said. "People will get out of the house."

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.

HERMISTON

Mark Gomolski to join school board

Chicago transplant quickly involved in community

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

Come July 1, the Hermiston School Board will have one new face. Mark Gomolski won his write-in campaign to the vacant seat with 14 votes, and will join six other board members as they prepare for a year of big decisions.

Gomolski said he became interested in the position after attending several sessions this spring about the bond issue, and coming away with more questions than answers.

"When I got my ballot, I noticed position 3 was vacant. I thought, maybe I can help out, figure out what's really going on," he said.

Gomolski said he wants to support schools in any way he can, but did not vote in favor of the bond.

"I'm very pro-education," he said. "But I want to make sure the money is going to the right place."

He said one of his concerns was when the district discussed the increased

capacity new schools would provide. Each of the existing schools the district had planned to rebuild were scheduled to be increased by a certain capacity, but Gomolski said he was interested in finding out why the district wanted to build new buildings for existing schools, rather than building a larger school on the new Theater Lane property.

He also said he was concerned about maintenance issues at the school.

"I understand Milton-Freewater just got a new bond to replace a school close to 100 years old," he said. "Why is maintenance not keeping up with schools only 30 to 50 years old?"

He said he was aware that there were likely other factors, but said more than anything else, he'd just like to find out some answers.

"I'm sure I'm not alone," he said. "Maybe I can find out and share."

He said while on the board, he also looks forward to learning more about Hermiston's graduation rates, and the alternative school program that was recently absorbed into the

high school. He said he also wants to discuss more career-based classes for students.

"A lot of students may not be looking for higher education, but maybe vocational schools. There's a need for trades across the country, and even here."

He noted the student-built homes on Angus Court.

"Those are great opportunities for kids," he said.

Though this is Gomolski's first time holding elected office, he has worked in public service for many years. He moved to Hermiston three years ago, after spending most of his life in Chicago. He worked under the Cook County commissioners and found himself in Hermiston in 2008, when he was part of a team seeking candidates for their police force. Several officers from Hermiston applied, and Gomolski came out to interview them. While here, he made friends and fell in love with the area.

"When it came time to plan my retirement, this was where I wanted to come," he said.



Gomolski

"I look forward to doing all I can to help. Maybe bringing fresh ideas or a different perspective."

— Mark Gomolski, elected Hermiston School Board member

He has wasted no time in getting involved locally. He volunteers at a book club at the high school, and for the Our Lady of Angels soup kitchen. He's a member of Rotary, Hispanic Advisory Committee, the Chamber of Commerce and the Knights of Columbus. He also ran for city council last year, a bid he lost. But he said he's open to trying again.

"I believe in citizen participation," he said.

Gomolski said he looks forward to working with the board, and anyone else in the public.

"I look forward to doing all I can to help," he said. "Maybe bringing fresh ideas or a different perspective."

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

BRIEFLY

Stanfield offers ala carte breakfast

STANFIELD — Have the breakfast items of your choice during the monthly community breakfast at the Stanfield Community Center.

Served ala carte, guests can pay for a breakfast combination of their choosing. Open to all ages, breakfast is served Saturday from 7-10 a.m. at 225 W. Roosevelt.

For more information, call 541-449-1332.

Birding field trip includes potluck picnic

PENDLETON — The annual picnic of the Pendleton Bird Club is this weekend.

A birding field trip is planned before the meal. Those interested in participating are invited to meet Saturday at 8 a.m. in the parking lot at Safeway, 203 S.W. 20th St., Pendleton. Anyone with an interest in birding is invited to attend the field trip and/or potluck picnic.

Those who only plan to attend the picnic can meet at noon at Battle Mountain State Park, which is located approximately 25 miles southwest of Pilot Rock. People need to bring their choice of meat to barbecue (and buns or condiments, if required), beverages and all table service. Ice water will be provided. Also, those attending are asked to bring a salad, dessert or other

food items to share.

For more information, contact Jack Simons at 541-276-8566, pendletonbirdclub@gmail.com or visit www.pendletonbirders.org.

Car show cruises into downtown Pendleton

PENDLETON — An annual car show cruises into town to benefit Washington Elementary School.

June Cruisin' is Saturday with registration from 8-10 a.m. on Main Street in downtown Pendleton. The vehicles are on display from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. There is no fee for spectators.

Presented by Premium Tire and Lube and Olsen's Auto Parts, the event was originally organized by Chris Roop, a former educator at Washington School.

The vehicle entrance fee is \$20 and the first 150 registered will receive a dash plaque. Other activities include a poker walk (10 a.m. to noon), \$100 roll (noon to 1 p.m.), a marshmallow spitting contest, a hubcap toss (1-2 p.m.) and prizes will be awarded at 3 p.m. Spectators can vote for the people's choice, which is due by 2 p.m.

Registration forms are available at www.premiumtireandlube.com/june-cruisin-car-show. For questions, call 541-429-8784 or Premium Tire and Lube at 541-276-2443.

PENDLETON

Car chase leads to round up of three local offenders

East Oregonian

Three local offenders ended up in the Umatilla County Jail after trying to get away from police.

Oregon State Police reported trooper Ryan Sharp was northbound on Highway 37 outside Pendleton around 10 p.m. when he saw a teal Acura Integra heading south near milepost 28. The Acura went out of sight, and Sharp made a U-turn to follow.

"When I could see the vehicle again, it was significantly faster than before," Sharpe noted in the written statement. "I attempted to overtake it and was able to overtake a speed reading of 99 mph."

Sharp hit his lights and punched the gas to catch the Acura, which entered Pendleton, turned right and headed toward the campus of Blue Mountain Community

College. Sharp saw the car pull into the parking lot of the Mountain View Apartments, 2410 N.W. Carden Ave., and four people got out and fled.

Sharp caught one passenger, Amos Mitchell Burton, 28, of Pendleton, and called his probation officer. Burton, according to Umatilla County Circuit Court records, is serving two years probation after pleading guilty last September to third-degree robbery.

Officers from the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office and Pendleton Police Department helped find the others.

Deputies found one person on Northwest Gilliam Avenue, and Sharp identified him as the driver, David Nicholas Johnson, 24, of Hermiston.

"He told me he just panicked," Sharp reported, "I also observed indicators of

impairment. He admitted to drinking and smoking meth 'for the first time.'"

Sharp arrested Johnson on a warrant as well as for felony and misdemeanor attempt to elude, reckless driving and driving under the

influence of intoxicants.

And Pendleton police later found another passenger, Joseph William Johnson, 22, the driver's brother, and arrested him for possession of meth and contempt of court.

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FRIDAY JUNE 2ND 6:30 P.M. - Memorial Hall • Queen's Coronation • Grand Marshall Introduction	10:00 A.M. on Water St • Main Parade 11:00 A.M. at Elliott Park • BBQ Beef Lunch (Served until 1:30 P.M. or sold out) • Queen & Grand Marshall Presentation (At the park pavilion)	6:30 P.M. Memorial Hall • Alumni Dinner
SATURDAY JUNE 3RD 5:30-9:30 A.M. at Elliott Park • Fireman's Breakfast 9:45 A.M. on Water St • Kid's Parade	11:00 A.M.-4:00 P.M. • Car Show (On Water St. in front of the park)	ELLIOTT PARK EVENTS 9:00 A.M.-5:00 P.M. • Vendors & Concessions • Live Entertainment on stage • BBQ Cook Off • Kid's Games & Activities

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