



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Students and educators at the Weston Middle School yell "Don't Quit" in unison while being videoed Wednesday at Weston Middle School. The phrase is a slogan of the National Foundation for Governors' Fitness Council fitness campaign.

## WESTON: May open the space to community members

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Steinfeld told the assembly that regular exercise would not only make them healthier, but improve their performance in school and keep them away from drugs and gangs.

He said that only three schools in Oregon received the foundation's grant, with Weston's video application being one of the best he's seen.

"Watch out Cannes (Film) Festival," Vescio said. "You've got two new filmmakers coming your way."

Made by middle school students Josh McDowell and Peyton Sinclear, the video shows the pair of eighth graders in various locations around the school and town, emphasizing that they live in "the middle of nowhere."

The duo compared Weston's current gym equipment (or lack thereof) unfavorably to national fitness center chains. For instance, Weston had "Old's Gym" instead of Gold's Gym and "24 Hour Fatness" instead of 24 Hour Fitness.

Josh and Peyton joked that they had to bench press fourth graders to stay fit, but there were real deficiencies to Weston's

physical education program. The Weston-McEwen High School weight room is open to middle school students, but not every student can make the trip to Athena.

Following assembly, more than 30 students cut the ribbon and made their way into the new fitness center, vigorously exercising on the ellipticals, exercise bikes and other workout equipment the grant had purchased.

Justin Funderburk, the middle school physical education teacher and a Crystal Apple award winner, passed out bottled water as the kids began to work up a sweat.

Funderburk was in the middle of a wheat field near Pendleton helping out with harvest over the summer when he got the call that Weston had won the grant. He said he was overcome with emotion.

"Kid don't know this stuff because they're not exposed," he said.

In lieu of exercise equipment, he said his gym classes had been relying on push-ups, sit-ups and other body weight exercises for P.E. classes.

The new fitness center opens up more possibilities, in addition to the other investments the Athena-Weston

School District has made into physical education.

A state grant gave the district the money to hire a P.E. teacher for Athena Elementary School, allowing Funderburk to stay at the middle school full-time instead of splitting his time between facilities.

With the additional teacher, the middle school offers fourth through eighth graders 45 minutes of P.E. per day while K-3 students at the elementary school gives kids 30 minutes per day.

Those figures meet the state minimum for P.E. time, a benchmark other districts struggle to meet.

In 2007, the state set a mandate that every K-5 student have 150 minutes of physical education per week and 6-8 get 225 minutes by 2017.

According to an Oregon Department of Education report, only 10 percent of schools statewide were meeting the mandate by the 2015-2016 school year. The Legislature ended up extending the elementary school deadline to 2021-2022 and the middle school deadline to 2022-2023.

Athena-Weston Superintendent Laure Quaresma said the district is also implementing an aerobic capacity

test and creating a fitness and wellness committee.

Quaresma said the district is in a good position to expand its physical education offerings because all three of its school facilities have their own gyms, something not every small school district can claim.

"They're the pride of our communities," she said.

Students might not be the only group that will benefit from the new fitness center. The district is interested in working with the city of Weston on opening up the space for community members.

Jennifer Spurgeon, the mayor of Weston and the vice-chair of the Athena-Weston School Board, said details still need to be worked out including staffing and security.

But if an agreement is made for wider community, use it will add an amenity in a town that's in need of them.

If an Athena or Weston residents wants access to a commercial gym, they currently need to drive either a half-hour southwest to Pendleton or a half-hour north to Walla Walla.

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## JUNIPER: 105 acres enough to feed the mill for 21 years

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of Oregon researchers are calling the "new natural resource economy" in Eastern Oregon, where entrepreneurs and small businesses are finding innovative ways to complement traditional farming and timber production.

A new study by the University of Oregon Community Service Center and School of Planning, Public Policy and Management details how natural resource industries are changing in Eastern Oregon, and how economic development groups — such as the Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation and Northeast Oregon Economic Development District — can support the sector moving forward.

The study lumps this subset of the economy into one of four general categories: agriculture, forest products, tourism and recreation. Businesses tend to be very small, and create non-traditional products such as biomass fuel and lumber from alternative sources like juniper.

Over the course of a year, researchers interviewed 42 businesses to gauge their needs and goals. The study area spanned 10 Eastern Oregon counties, including Umatilla, Morrow, Union, Wallowa, Gilliam, Wheeler, Grant, Baker, Harney and Malheur counties.

On Tuesday, members of the research team met with a group of about 20 people at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in Pendleton to discuss their findings. Susan Lurie, a research associate at the University of Oregon's Institute for a Sustainable Environment, said the study was an opportunity to expand their understanding of what has happened to traditional Eastern Oregon industries, and define where the new natural resource economy is heading.

"It's both defining it, and figuring out what these businesses need to thrive," Lurie said.



Photo contributed by Eric Sines

Caleb Morris with the Ritter Land Management Team runs the first juniper log through a portable sawmill, which was delivered to the nonprofit group earlier this month.

Businesses raised a number of concerns in the study, ranging from complex government regulations to a lack of skilled and reliable workers. Participants at Tuesday's meeting brainstormed ways to overcome those challenges locally, including pilot programs to engage students and compiling resources to navigate regulatory hurdles.

Susan Christensen, executive director of the Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation, said she sees collaboration as the key to success.

"To me, that means getting together partners that might not be the most obvious partners," Christensen said. "The only way people learn about what the other person is doing is through communication and networking."

The project in Ritter first

took shape in 2013 when a group of about 30 landowners formed the Ritter Land Management Team, promoting sustainable development and environmental stewardship. Landowners soon identified the spread of Western juniper as one of the biggest threats to their farms and ranches.

Fully grown Western juniper can consume as much as 30 gallons of water a day, taking over rangeland and cutting into native forage. The trees are also susceptible to wildfire, exacerbating fire conditions on the range.

"It's not just a range issue. It's a forest health issue as well," said Hudson with the Ritter Land Management Team. She noted that Western juniper can grow 30-40 feet tall in stands of ponderosa pine.

Last year, the team

reached out to a consulting company based in California to determine if a juniper sawmill would be feasible. The final report showed that, within the total 105.650-acre study area, the group had enough juniper to feed the mill for 21 years.

The team was then able to tap into the Western Juniper Industry Fund, which was made available by the 2015 Legislature. The Oregon Community Foundation stepped up with matching funds, and a sawmill was finally delivered to Ritter about three weeks ago.

The mill is currently set up on the property of rancher Caleb Morris until they can find it a permanent home.

"We knew we had a lot of juniper, but we weren't sure we had enough to keep the mill going," Morris said. "But the study showed there's at least a 20-year supply here, and more if we expand beyond the Ritter area."

Hudson said juniper markets appear promising. Juniper wood is harder than ponderosa pine and highly resistant to rotting, which makes it ideal for landscaping.

Ryan Temple, president of Sustainable Northwest Wood, said they are looking forward to collaborating with the Ritter mill.

"Our customers will enjoy supporting the group's rangeland restoration projects through the purchase of this lumber," Temple said.

The biggest challenge, Hudson said, will be finding additional wood markets to ensure the mill can remain profitable.

"Everybody's interested in juniper. A lot of people want it," she said. "But we have to have a bigger market."

However, she said the market is there and they are ready and willing to begin supplying logs.

"We're optimistic we can make this work," she said.

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## ALVAREZ: Not yet decided where he will serve his sentence

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Nelson said. "Mr. Alvarez said he didn't try to collect it, but I don't believe that's true."

Nelson said there was some evidence that Salas, an Irriagon resident, had purchase between \$50 and \$70 worth of drugs from Alvarez, and that they believed it to be methamphetamine.

"That was part of our search warrant," he said. "There is a drug record belonging to Mr. Alvarez."

Nelson said nothing can be 100 percent confirmed in this case, but they believe Alvarez, who has a California address, may have been bringing drugs to the area.

He said it has not yet been decided where Alvarez will serve his sentence.

Nelson also released a statement detailing some of the information that had come out during the investigation, and explaining why the state agreed to a settlement.

He said the passenger in Salas' vehicle when he was shot was not forthcoming with information, and changed his story several times in different interviews. The passenger, Jose Longoria, Jr., was an acquaintance of Salas.

"During the first interview, the witness indicated that someone just ran up to the car and shot the driver, and he had no knowledge of who the individual was or anything else," Nelson's statement said.

"During the fourth interview, the witness admitted that the victim had requested the witness come with him to confront David Alvarez at (his) residence. The victim had indicated that Mr. Alvarez had punched the victim in front of his daughter earlier in the day based upon a debt that the victim owed Mr. Alvarez."

Nelson said Alvarez punched Salas and caused a cut to his eye after Salas indicated he would not pay back Alvarez's money. Salas' daughter, who saw the incident, was seven years old at the time.

Nelson said they discovered that Salas also requested that Longoria bring a handgun since he knew Alvarez would be carrying a firearm and had threatened him in the past.

Nelson said after the shooting, Salas quickly went unconscious and floored the gas pedal, and

Longoria reached over and steered the truck until it crashed into a field near the mobile home park. Someone at the mobile home park called in the shooting and a Boardman police officer was on scene right away.

Longoria also informed officers that after the shooting and crash, he hid the firearm, methamphetamines and drug paraphernalia behind the glove box in Salas' truck. Officers found all these items during a second search of the vehicle.

Nelson also noted some disparities between Alvarez's and the Longoria's accounts of the shooting. He said Alvarez claimed he shot Salas only after Salas asked for, and was given, the gun by the witness. Longoria said he never handed a gun to Salas, and had it between his legs the whole time.

Nelson said in considering the case, the state knew Alvarez's self-defense claim could be disputed, but that Salas' apparent request for a witness to accompany him, as well as his decision to go to Alvarez's house to confront him, would be difficult for a jury.

"Taking into account these and other strengths and weaknesses of the case, the State believed that resolution of the case with this sentence was in the best interest of justice," Nelson said.

Nelson said his staff met with Salas' family members, and that 15 of them attended and participated in the settlement conference. He said that Salas' mother and sister asked for statements to be read to the court.

Salas' mother, Alida Birrueta, said she hoped Alvarez knew that his hate toward her son had robbed the family of seeing him ever again.

"I hope you can rest easy as you have taken a father away from his child," she said.

His sister, Janet Salgado, said the family had been suffering, and that things would not get better.

"His life to you was worth a couple of dollars, but to us he was worth more than that, and we hope your life never gets to have a price."

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## PENDLETON: Approved \$1.1M bond to replace multiple water lines

Continued from 1A

ally, the Quezadas must apply for a certificate of occupancy by Sept. 1, 2018.

If the owners fail to meet that criteria, the city can foreclose on an approximately \$26,000 lien it obtained through the settlement, resume fining them \$500 for violating the nuisance ordinance, or both.

Before meeting behind closed doors, Charles Denight, associate director of the Pendleton Development Commission, said the Quezadas are looking at bids for new windows.

Other council business included:

- The council approved a \$1.1 million bond from Culbert Construction to replace water lines under Southeast Third Street, South Main Street and Southeast Goodwin Avenue.

The Third Street line, installed in 1911, is the primary line between the South Hill and North Hill reservoirs and the production wells in Stillman and Kiwanis parks.

According to a report from City Engineer Tim Simons, the Third Street line was shut down over the summer after the city discovered a leak under the railroad track, causing

concern that it would create a "soft spot" under the tracks.

During the master planning process, consultant Murraysmith discovered that other water lines near the Third Street line also needed replacement, leading to the Goodwin and Main Street projects.

The city will pay for the water line projects through the water utility rate hikes and a \$14.9 million dollar loan from the state.

- The council unanimously approved a cost-share agreement with the Oregon Department of Transportation for the first phase of an Interstate Exit 209 interchange realignment.

If the council applies for a \$1 million federal grant with ODOT for engineering work, it would cover 30 percent of the cost.

- The Oregon State University Extension Service took another step toward putting a taxing district on the May ballot.

The council unanimously approved a resolution that includes Pendleton in the proposed district. Hermiston approved a similar resolution in August.

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