

VERT: The city has no current staffing capacity to further promote the building

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was worse — the auditorium was rented for just 24 days.

As an individual facility, the Vert Club Room was actually rented at a higher rate — 43 days in 2015 and 48 days in 2016. Those numbers grow when adding in people or organizations that rented the club room and little theater as a package.

The Vert has no section or line item in the city's budget, but Facilities Manager Glenn Graham said he budgets about \$60,000 to cover operational costs at the complex each year.

That money mostly goes toward utilities, which are used frugally to keep costs down. Unless there's an event, Graham said the auditorium's thermostat is set to 50 degrees, just high enough to keep the facility from freezing during the winter.

The Vert's annual budget doesn't address the \$1.6 million in deferred maintenance on the complex, the highest amount of any city-owned facility.

Graham said the building needs include new electrical work, heating and air conditioning, doors, and an elevator to the balcony for patrons with disabilities. But any significant remodeling would require the facility meet current fire codes, which means expenditures would have to include money for fire suppression sprinklers and a modern fire alarm system.

"This ol' girl needs some help," he said.

Aid for the Vert has been discussed in fits and starts, but nothing has come to fruition so far.

The Pendleton City Council considered adding Vert renovations to a 2014 facilities bond proposal, but a missed advertising deadline meant the question never made it to the voters.

At the urging of former Pendleton Convention Center Manager Pat Kennedy, the council agreed to pay a consultant \$12,000 to bring six new shows to the Vert in 2016.

But the contract was never carried out due to Kennedy's retirement. The position experienced some turnover, and the city never finalized the deal. The consultant was never paid and the shows never happened.

The city hired Pat Beard to helm the convention center in July, and although he sees some crossover between managing the former Oregon National Guard Armory and the Vert, Corbett didn't want to saddle him with an extra responsibility.

Corbett said there's no current staffing capacity to further promote the Vert and the city's budget is stretched thin to cover Pendleton's other infrastructure needs like water, sewer and streets.

"We're not ignoring it," he said. "We're just not talking about it right now."

If the Vert was to see a large influx of activity, Corbett said he would be worried about how it would affect the facility's current programming.

Corbett referenced the Pendleton Recreation Center, which caused some consternation earlier this year when REACH Pendleton, a youth outreach nonprofit, forced some recreation programs out of the rec center.

Ironically, the move benefited Vert Little Theater, which took on the gymnastics program during the rec center shuffle.

Although REACH has since moved out of the rec center, gymnastics is staying in the room until further notice.

Vert won't long be the only theatre in town.

After seven years of planning and campaigning, the Rivoli Theater is ready to begin its transformation into a modern day performing arts center.

Andrew Picken, the president of the Rivoli Restoration Coalition, spoke to a small assembly of people on Friday as the coalition celebrated the beginning of the first phase of construction at the old movie theater with a ribbon cutting ceremony on Main Street.

"What's different now is that we're not talking about what we're going to do ... we're talking about what's happening," he said.

Work crews with Kirby Nagelhout Construction have already set up a construction entrance and are starting work on disassembling the balcony and other wooden platforms in the nearly century-old building, excavating the floor to create more space and installing addi-

tional support elements. The first phase of construction is expected to happen over the next three years.

Mary Jo Price was a ribbon cutting attendee with intimate knowledge of the venue. In the 1950s, a teenage Price was an usher and candy shop clerk for the original Rivoli.

Seeing the stage and balcony brought back memories for Price, and she was excited to see the renovation commence.

Coalition member J.D. Kindle wasn't able to attend to the ribbon cutting, but he's familiar with both the Rivoli and the Vert.

As the executive director of the Oregon East Symphony, the Vert's only permanent tenant, Kindle has taken the symphony's board members on tours of the Rivoli.

The Vert Auditorium is an imperfect venue for the symphony — the manual lighting system is a hassle, the acoustics push stage sound toward the rafters and the outdated heating and cooling system cause the symphony's piano to go out of tune.

But that doesn't mean the symphony is packing its strings and woodwinds for the Rivoli. The Vert provides office space to the symphony, and although Kindle said a chamber orchestra could fit, a full symphonic band is "nigh impossible" on the Rivoli's smaller stage.

Picken declined to answer a question on whether a completed 361-seat Rivoli would vie for events with the Vert, but Corbett pondered the possibility.

When he was hired in 2013, the prospect of a Rivoli-Vert competition was a hot topic as the city considered buying the Rivoli on behalf of the Vert.

The topic has continued to come up as the city has donated more than \$165,000 through the Pendleton Development Commission toward the Rivoli.

But Corbett said he doesn't know what the future will bring once the Rivoli is completed. His hope is that the symphony, the Pendleton School District and other frequent renters will remain at the Vert.

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COUNTIES: Both boards stressed the need to pull more water from the Columbia River

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said — but there have to be houses to buy.

The Great Recession forced much of the skilled labor that builds homes to leave the two counties, he continued, and without local homes they will likely look elsewhere, perhaps in the Tri-Cities region of Washington.

Murdock said data technicians are already entering Blue Mountain Community College's tech training center in Boardman and getting hired before they finish the program. The need for those jobs is only going to increase, he said, as more data centers come online in the area.

Russell said the new 240-unit apartment complex under construction in Boardman could alleviate some of the coming housing crunch, but housing incentives also could play a role — programs Elfering expressed interest in. Russell said the county has a deal to pay workers of Tillamook Cheese roughly \$7,000 for buying a new home in the county. Lindsay said the program boosted the tax base, particularly in the south of the county.

She also said enticing people to live where they work goes beyond a good job and home. They also want conveniences that include nearby shopping and restaurants, and Doherty added that mass transit would be a benefit.

Meeting all these infrastructure needs is critical, Lindsay said, while at the same time making sure land use is not pushing people out.

"We don't have to do it like Portland," she said.

The two boards moved on to discussion about water issues and irrigation, and commissioners from both counties stressed the need to pull more water from the Columbia River to boost local agriculture production and the economy.

Russell said Idaho already takes 6 percent of the river's water, and Washington takes 4 percent, while Oregon uses just .03 percent, despite the fact that the land in Eastern Oregon produces more per acre than Idaho. Doherty said taking 1 percent more from the Columbia River would result in \$1 billion in economic growth.

"Maybe we should just shut Idaho down and feed the world from here," Russell quipped.

Commissioners and Morrow County staff also chimed in about how well the two counties work together in overlapping areas. That includes each county's dispatch center serving

as the other's backup, and Morrow County contracting with Umatilla County to handle environmental health responsibilities such as restaurant and public pool inspections.

Murdock noted the planning for this meeting started seven months ago. Lindsay said they should not have to wait that long to meet again.

Other tidbits the meeting revealed:

- Morrow County now requires new wind farms to install aircraft detection technology that eliminates the flashing lights on the turbines at night. Russell said people complain about the bright, red flashing lights obstructing the night sky. The technology, which is new, detects aircraft some distance away, then turns on the lights.

- The counties need nurses in their public health departments but attracting the is a problem, primarily because the salaries the counties can offer can't compete with what private practice can pay.

- Wolves and wildfires came up over the grilled chicken lunch. Commissioners said they noticed the Portland-metro area sure took notice of the Eagle Creek Fire in the west end of the Columbia River Gorge and its affect on air quality. Russell said those same Oregonians "didn't give a rat's ass" when wildfire ravaged more than 110,000 acres in the John Day area and destroyed dozens of home in 2015.

- Morrow County got a great deal on the furniture for the Bartholomew Building, which houses several county departments and the big conference room where the meeting took place. Karen Wolff, Morrow County human resources director, took the Umatilla County group on a tour of the building and explained the furniture was state surplus, only three years old. The county had to buy it all in one swoop for \$10,000.

That included delivery, which took six semis and three moving trucks. The haul brought tables, desks, chairs and five refrigerators.

"They had to use the moving trucks because the semis were overweight," she said.

The county stuffed the furniture in warehouses and the old school in Lexington, she said. After outfitting the Bartholomew Building, there was plenty left.

Wolff said the county first asked schools and other organizations to take what they wanted, then offered what was left to the public to take for free.



Photo contributed by ODOT

The Oregon Department of Transportation Region 5 has purchased five new tow plows, capable of plowing two lanes at once, in preparation for winter.

ODOT: Forecasting a 55-65 percent chance of La Niña

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ODOT is expanding the use of rock salt in Eastern Oregon to include I-84 between Idaho and Boardman, Interstate 82 near Hermiston and state highways 395, 207, 730, 331 and 11.

"We will still be monitoring things, seeing how often it is used and what its impact to the environment is," Snow said. "Salt is not the best thing to use in all conditions. It's just another tool in the toolbox."

ODOT plans to build two additional salt sheds near Meacham and the city of Umatilla, though Snow said those will likely have to wait until next spring.

Region 5 is also the home of five new tow plows, mounted to the backs of snowplow trucks, which will allow a single driver to plow two lanes of highway at a time. Snow said maintenance crews spent last week training to use the equipment and are now ready to go.

"They're definitely going to be used there in Eastern Oregon, all along the interstate," Snow said. "It will really help us to be more efficient."

The new vehicles cost \$140,000 each, though Snow said the region was already planning to replace its old

trucks and buying tow plows made sense from an operational standpoint.

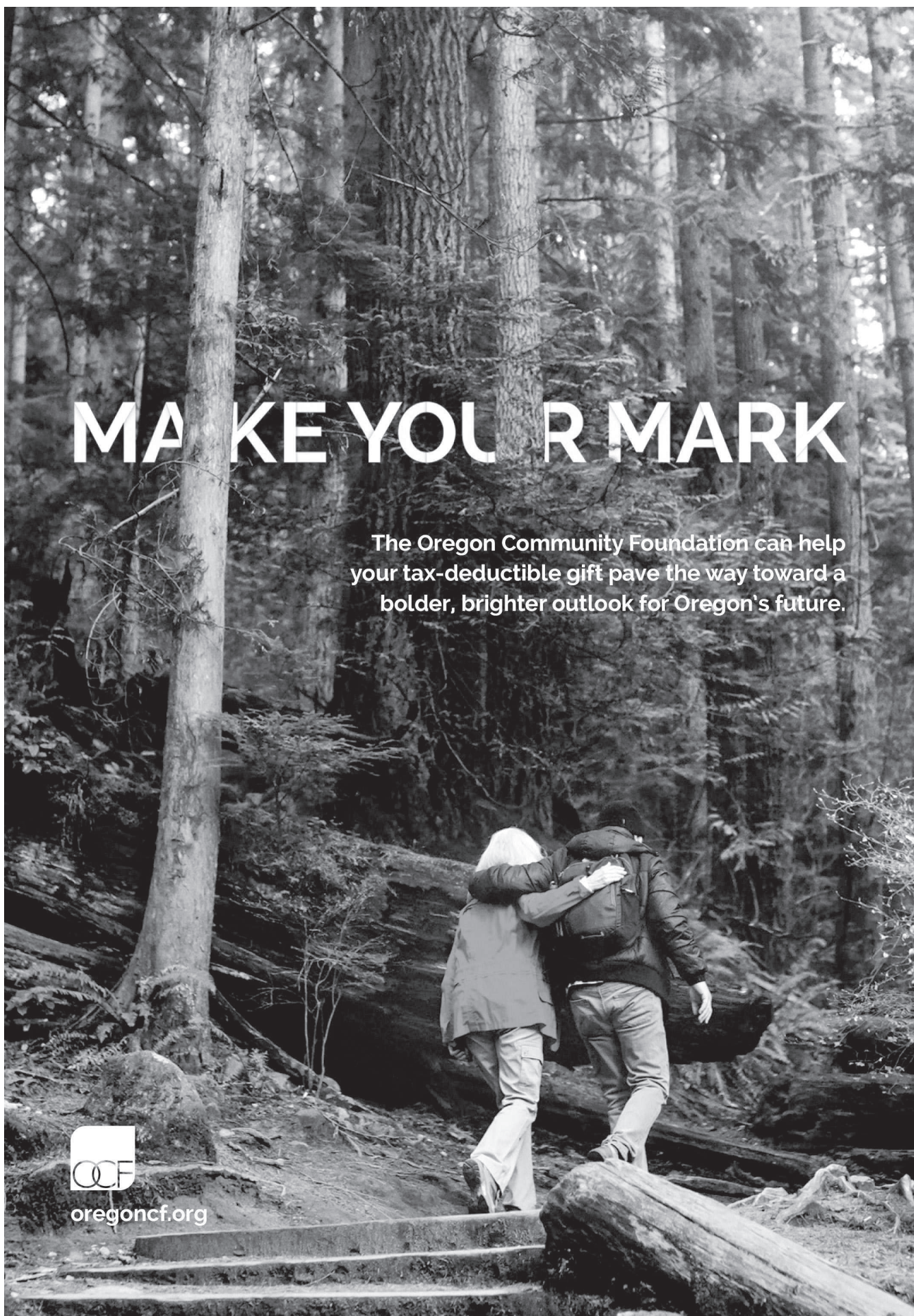
It may not be long before the plows are pressed into action. Snowstorms swept over the Blue Mountains Thursday and Friday, dropping as much as 4 inches over Tollgate and 10 inches near Ski Bluewood in Washington.

John Peck, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Pendleton, said this year is shaping up to be another La Niña winter for the Pacific Northwest, which generally means colder and wetter conditions than normal.

The National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center is forecasting a 55-65 percent chance of La Niña, Peck said. But he stopped short of saying the winter will be as bad or worse than last year.

The Climate Prediction Center will release its annual winter outlook for December through February on Thursday, Oct. 19. The latest seasonal outlook maps for January through March call for an equal chance of average, below-average or above-average temperatures, and a 40-50 percent chance of above-average precipitation.

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