

RANGE: The state has invested \$1.7M financial package in the UAS range

Continued from 1A

check processing center was acquired from Community Bank and started operations in July. The city used the proceeds from a \$1.7 million financial package from the state to outfit the building with the latest technology.

Its decor dominated by pictures of sun-kissed drones in mid-flight, the center acts as the headquarters for the UAS range. Range Manager Darryl Abling said the building is an upgrade over the asbestos-laden offices at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport.

Chrisman said the big revenue generator for the center was the command room, a space almost entirely comprised of desks and computer monitors. From the command room, customers like Pacific Northwest National Laboratory can operate their UASs as they run test operations.

The command room is powered from a nearby server room, where the whirring machinery transmits 10 gigabytes of information per second. That kind of speed is necessary — Abling said a 10-minute test can transmit 100 gigabytes of information to the operators below.

If a customer uses the center's antenna, the command center can handle



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Engineer Steve Lawn explains how he can design and build hardware onsite at the Pendleton UAS Range Mission Control and Innovation Center on Friday in Pendleton.

flights within a 5-mile radius, but the radius is practically limitless if customers use their high speed internet connection, command center manager Steve Lawn said.

The incubator

The "innovation" part of the center is an incubator for new tech businesses, a space with low rent and access to the center's various equipment.

The incubator's only current tenant is Digital Harvest, the Virginia

company Lawn used to work for before he was hired by the test range.

Digital Harvest is using the incubator to develop its Remote Operated Vineyard Robot, a remote-controlled vehicle that resembles a golf cart with a robot arm that's being designed to prune clusters of wine grapes.

The vehicle's development is being aided by two Pendleton High School interns who are learning the ropes in exchange for expe-

rience. Lawn said interns from the high school and Blue Mountain Community College figure prominently in the incubator's future.

"Hopefully, (businesses will) move into the airport industrial park and take interns with them," he said.

Customers can use the 3-D printers as a part of the testing process. For instance, if they want to modify a propeller on their drone, they can quickly produce a propeller with the printer and

put it into the field.

In the meantime, the center has used the 3-D printers for smaller projects like a dropping mechanism for the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office search and rescue drone and a custom-made splint for a woman recovering from arthritis.

If a customer wants to see how a modification looks without actually making it, they can use the virtual reality room to get a full three-dimensional model of the vehicle that can be inspected up close.

As Lawn continued to demonstrate the material, he switched to rendering of three maps that show the air spaces of Pendleton, Portland and Seattle. Lawn said he used the maps to show a class of farmers how air space works.

During a visit to Pendleton Thursday, the Oregon State Aviation Board talked with Chrisman about using virtual reality to simulate the effect a wind turbine would have on a pilot descending into an airport.

The stakes

All of these investments into the UAS range need to pay off or the city could face some consequences.

On top of the \$535,000 the city has already invested into the UAS range, the biggest investor has been the state and its \$1.7 million

financial package, which was used to build the command center and a hangar currently occupied by Airbus.

Almost 40 percent of the package is already a loan, and if the range isn't able to generate 130 jobs by 2020, another 30 percent of the package will revert from a grant to a loan.

Additionally, the city's auditor is also pushing the city council to adopt a payment plan for the \$2.5 million in internal debt the airport has accrued over the past two decades.

Although Abling and Lawn are the test range's only full-time staff members, Abling said he's documenting all the hours customers are putting into UAS testing, which can be used to count toward full-time jobs.

Additionally, the growth at the test range has created more supply than demand as customers ask for more space than there is available.

"You have to have hotel rooms if you want someone to stay in town," Chrisman said.

He added that the airport is encouraging customers to privately develop storage space to help alleviate demand.

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APOLOGY: Council 'not in a position' to remove a fellow councilor from office

Continued from 1A

comment. The Facebook comments in question happened on the Facebook page for "Kumu Hina," a documentary about a transgender Hawaiian woman. Nakapalau argued with filmmaker Joe Wilson about transgender rights, culminating in his comment about spitting on Wilson's grave. The comment has since been deleted and Facebook shows Nakapalau edited another part of the conversation to remove profanity.

Thursday's meeting started with public comment from Vickie Read of Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Read, who is from Pendleton, said if the city does not publicly condemn Nakapalau's words that could imply other city leaders support the ideas he expressed.

Read said she regrets her own ignorance in years past, when her son, who was 17 at the time, told her he was gay and she responded by saying he didn't fit the stereotypes she had grown up with and so it wasn't possible for him to actually be gay.

"He said, 'Mom, why would I choose to be something people hate?'" she said. "I realized he was right."

She said she felt like the world had also grown more tolerant in the years since, but reading about Nakapalau's comments gave her the realization that "we have not moved on."

Jenny Sullivan of Hermiston also spoke up, saying she couldn't imagine a gay person wanting to move to the area after reading the comments.

"I'm absolutely disgusted and think any self-respecting council would throw him off," she said.

After the council addressed agenda items, Harris said he had not been able to find any sort of policy about Echo councilors' speech or social media use, and proposed that the council come up with an ethics statement and social media policy to provide guidance for any future incidents, and also that the council issue an apology.

City administrator Diane Berry said she had brought examples of such policies before the council in the past and they had not expressed interest in adopting them, but she could bring them forward again. She cautioned, however, that cities are much more limited on what they could do to an elected official versus a city employee. City attorney Bill Kuhn said the council was "not in a position" to remove a fellow councilor from office, but the council could ask for an apology from Nakapalau or



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

A sign on the door of the Buttercreek Coffeehouse and Mercantile in Echo states people of all sexual orientations are welcome.

post something on their own Facebook pages.

Harris said he wasn't trying to remove Nakapalau from the council but did think they needed to send a unified message.

"Something that goes to the public that says we're dealing with it the best we can," he said. "I'm saying we stand up and apologize and say we're doing something to fix it."

Pam Reese, a Main Street business owner who was present at the meeting, said in an email Friday that a public apology is the "least the council could do to send a message that Echo is an inclusive community."

"It was mystifying to watch a group of elected officials struggle to understand how to do the right thing about the hate speech of one of its members," Reese said.

She said that while she supported an apology, she thought it would be more appropriate to take a stronger stand by calling for Nakapalau's resignation. She and a few other business owners have placed signs on their door stating that they welcome all races, religions, countries of origin, sexual orientations and genders in response to the controversy.

"We stand with you. You are safe here," the sign states.

In 2014 Echo School's student government president was Zach Christensen, an openly gay senior. Christensen, who lives in Stanfield, said while he was going to school in Echo he did receive pushback from some adults on a proposal to start a Gay-Straight Alliance chapter. But the chapter was approved, and he said friends, classmates, family and members of his church from the area were mostly supportive, despite Echo being a small, largely conservative town.

He said he feels Nakapalau is entitled to express his opinions. But he also said Nakapalau should realize that the consequence may be a backlash from people who disagree with his views.

"There (are) LGBT youth in Echo and they probably

Full statement from the city of Echo

"The Echo City Council would like to extend its sincerest apology to those who were offended by comments made by a council member in a Facebook dialog reported by the East Oregonian. Comments of individual council members on their personal social media accounts do not have any endorsement or approval of the council as a whole nor do they represent city policy. The City would never endorse or approve any statement that disparages any person because of his or her race, ethnicity, religion, age, sex, or sexual orientation. Further the City of Echo has never taken any action or set any policy that was in any sense prejudicial or biased toward a class or group of people.

The city council is made up of elected volunteers who donate their time without any form of compensation and who have rights like other citizens such as freedom of speech."

heard that by now and it does affect them, so I think it would be good for them to hear an apology," Christensen said, "but I think it would make more sense for him to make the apology."

Harris has made a post apologizing for Nakapa-

lau's comments on his own Facebook page, and told the *East Oregonian* Friday he couldn't speak to what other city councilors were thinking but he hopes any hesitation that happened Thursday stemmed from "a lack of knowing what

to do." "It's not the mistakes we make that define us, it's how we move forward from our mistakes," he said.

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