

EAST OREGONIAN

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142nd Year, No. 80 WINNER OF THE 2017 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD One dollar

PENDLETON



Pendleton Parks and Recreation director Liam Hughes gestures with his hand while parks lead Shane Thomas sets the measuring mechanism on a laser leveling device while parks manager Jeff Hamilton looks on Tuesday at Aldrich Park in Pendleton. Hughes was touring the city's parks Tuesday and discussing updates that are needed to the facilities.

Taking parks to new heights

New department director brings lengthy list of career credentials

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

There are a lot of tall tales surrounding Liam Hughes, and at least one of them is true.

To contain his 7-foot-2-inch frame, the Englishman bought an eight-foot-long mattress, but he still needed a bed frame. Using his amateur carpentry skills, Hughes lined his lengthy mattress with a frame made from logs.

"All my friends hate me when they have to help me move it," said Hughes, who has since retired the bed from personal use.

Just a few days into his new job as the director of the Pendleton Parks and Recreation Department, Hughes ducked into his office and stretched his legs out as he settled in for an interview Monday.

The soft-spoken Hughes, 34, recounted his journey from small-town England



Pendleton Parks and Recreation director Liam Hughes looks around while taking a tour of Sherwood Park with Shane Thomas and Jeff Hamilton on Tuesday in Pendleton.

to the head of one of Eastern Oregon's most extensive municipal park systems.

Hughes grew up in Hullbridge, a village in the southwestern county of Essex. Situated near the River Crouch, the British Office for National Statistics counted 6,527 people in its 2011 census.

Hughes' high school classmate Sarah Hopkins-Chery described the villages in that area of the country

as being very similar, each containing a pub, a convenience store and few other amenities in their small boundaries.

She remembered Hughes as being laid-back while remaining passionate about sports, eventually gravitating toward basketball.

"Being 7-2, everybody knew who he was," said Hopkins-Chery.

Both Hughes and Hopkins-Chery ended up pursuing their basketball dreams in the United States, with Hughes moving to Modesto, California in 2000 while still in high school.

Hughes was able to advance his basketball career at Oregon State University, playing there for four years before using an extra year of eligibility to play for Western Oregon University while in search for more minutes.

See HUGHES/5A

Tensions rise as delays continue on depot transfer

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

The Oregon National Guard has its portion of the former Umatilla Chemical Depot, but nobody knows when the rest of the property will be transferred to local control for economic development.

Frustration was palpable on a meeting via conference call between members of

"There's been a public process for 29 years. Don't tell me it needs more. How many more years does it need?"

— Gary Neal,
Port of Morrow general manager

the Columbia Development Authority board (made up of representatives from Umatilla County, Morrow County, the Port of Umatilla, Port of Morrow and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation) as they discussed additional roadblocks that have come up.

"It just continues to be one lost opportunity after another," board member Kim Puzey said, referring to interested developers who have gone elsewhere due to the delays.

The U.S. Army's Base Realignment and Closure office was at one point expected to transfer land to the CDA for industrial and agricultural development and a wildlife preserve in 2013, but that deadline has since moved several times, most recently to November 2018.

During Tuesday's meeting, however, CDA director Greg Smith reported that the Environmental Protection Agency had changed its mind and decided to require a Class A permit for hazardous waste disposal under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. Smith said he thought that process would likely

See DEPOT/3A

PENDLETON

Bells, whistles and a big, red button

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Pendleton firefighters at their future station will be able to warn passers-by they are hitting the road with the push of a button.

A big, red, mushroom-shaped button on the wall.

The new station on the east end of town also will house old fire tech — the city's 59-year-old fire pole and original bell.

Fire Chief Mike Ciraulo and members of the design firm Mackenzie and general contractor McCormack Construction delivered the tidbits during an update on the fire state Tuesday night at the city hall Community



The modified designs for the new Pendleton fire station, to be built on the former St. Anthony Hospital site on Court Avenue.

Room. The project is funded by a \$10 million bond voters approved last year. The red button, Ciraulo said, is about increasing public safety and cutting down emergency response time.

Project manager and architect Cathy Bowman of Mackenzie explained the Oregon Department of Transportation is working

See FIRE/6A

Windy River teacher's sex abuse charges came from time in The Dalles

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

The Boardman teacher arrested Friday was charged with multiple counts of sexual abuse for incidents that took place last year while he was teaching in The Dalles.

Robert Weems, 42, was arrested by The Dalles Police and has been charged with one count of official misconduct in the first



Weems

degree, two counts of sexual abuse in the second degree, and one count of sexual abuse in the third degree. According to the indictment, Weems abused a girl under the age of 18 between March and November of 2017 in Wasco County. Weems was hired by the Morrow County School District in July 2017, and is now a sixth-grade teacher.

See TEACHER/6A

