

BOARDMAN

Co-op to expand Columbia River grain terminal

Project aided by \$2.5M grant

By GEORGE PLAVEN
EO Media Group

Morrow County Grain Growers, a farm supply and marketing cooperative based in northeast Oregon, broke ground Wednesday morning on a major expansion of its grain elevator and shipping terminal along the Columbia River in Boardman.

With support from a \$2.5 million state grant, the co-op plans to build a new rail unloading facility at the 35-year-old terminal, transferring grain from trains onto river barges en route to Portland for export.

Kevin Gray, MCGG general manager, said the project will help relieve rail congestion down the Columbia River Gorge. Trains hauling wheat and corn from the Midwest can instead offload at the Boardman elevator and take advantage of faster, more efficient river transport.

Of course, the added bushels also mean more business for the co-op. Gray said they will boost capacity at the elevator by 600,000 bushels, and hire up to five new employees after construction is finished in February 2019.

“This is really a strategic upgrade that’s going to add new life to the elevator,” Gray said. “From a logistics standpoint, we really think



Morrow County Grain Growers general manager Kevin Gray talks about the plans for the Boardman Grain Terminal on Wednesday during a groundbreaking ceremony at the Port of Morrow in Boardman.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

this is going to improve the amount of grain that works its way down the Columbia River system.”

Morrow County Grain Growers purchased an interest in the Boardman Grain Elevator in 2013, and co-owns the facility with the Port of Morrow. It is located in the port’s East Beach Industrial Park, near the Pacific Ethanol plant.

A Union Pacific main line runs through the port, and the elevator will eventually share a rail loop with the ethanol plant. The port plans to build a 2,200-foot rail spur to the elevator using funding it received from last year’s \$5.3 billion state transportation package.

“We’re excited about the opportunity to accommodate unit

train offloading,” said Gary Neal, the port’s general manager. “Rail continues to be a very strong need for our region. Investing in that piece of infrastructure is very important to the viability of our industries.”

Plans to upgrade the Boardman elevator have been in the works for years, according to Gray, but

it wasn’t until the co-op landed a \$2.5 million grant from the Oregon Department of Transportation’s ConnectOregon program that they could finally put it all together.

Steve Biehler, the project manager for the elevator expansion, said they didn’t know exactly how large the budget would be for the additions, but that it would likely total between \$15 and \$20 million at completion.

“It is going to be state-of-the-art,” Gray said. “If we continue to see congestion on the rails through the Gorge, I think the adoption is going to be huge.”

Gray said he expects the facility will handle a “significant number” of trains in its first year. The economic impact will be driven by volume, which he said varies year to year based on market conditions.

Even when trains aren’t at the elevator, Gray said the offloading site can also be used by local wheat growers trucking in their harvest from the field. The high-speed equipment is rated at 60 bushels per hour, he said.

“This is a really big deal for a company like Morrow County,” he said.

Cameron Krebs, a Morrow County farmer and chairman of the co-op board, said the project is a major step forward in maintaining relevance for their members.

“As a co-op, our goal as the board of directors is to return profitability to our members,” Krebs said. “This is one opportunity to add another competitive component.”

PENDLETON

Langton found in Texas, won’t answer questions

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Drew Langton of Pendleton is no longer missing.

Police Chief Stuart Roberts said the U.S. border patrol Wednesday in Texas stopped Langton, and he was alone and appeared in good health.

Why Langton left Pendleton on Monday remains a mystery. He remains free and not in custody. He is an adult who has committed no crime.

“He didn’t want to talk to anyone,” Roberts said.

Langton was adamant on that, the chief said, and would not talk to his family and refused to answer questions from Pendleton police.

Langton, 29, has been a page designer for the *East Oregonian* since 2013. He returned Saturday to Pendleton from a vacation in Florida with his family, who live in Michigan.

Pendleton police no longer consider this a missing person case, Roberts said.

Langton’s recent behavior is out of character from the man friends, family and coworkers know.

PENDLETON

Council considers tobacco license

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

Umatilla County Public Health wants to institute a tobacco retailer license in Pendleton, but the city council isn’t sold yet.

Mariah Hinds, the county’s tobacco prevention and education coordinator, pitched the council on the concept at a meeting Tuesday.

She said youth in Umatilla County consume above average amounts of tobacco while buying it from places that are lax in following state law.

According to Oregon Health Authority Data, the county’s 11th grade smoking rate is 40 percent higher than the state average. Other methods of tobacco consumption like chewing tobacco, cigars, cigarillos, or e-cigarettes were either double or triple the state average.

Hinds said one in three Umatilla County retailers sold tobacco to an underage decoy during Federal Drug Administration inspections, according to 2015 data. One in five failed multiple times and some as many as three times.

While selling cigarettes to minors under 21 is illegal, Hinds said offending retailers aren’t penalized, although the clerk who sells them can be fined.

She said a local license would help keep retailers accountable, curb tobacco sales and underage use and give local authorities a better idea of where tobacco is being sold.

Hinds presented data that show in the California communities where a tobacco retail license was



EO file photo

The Pendleton City Council discussed a possible tobacco retail license at its Tuesday night meeting.

introduced, youth sales decreased by an average of 68 percent.

Tobacco licenses have already been introduced to a handful of Oregon cities including Portland, Salem, Corvallis, Klamath Falls, Veneta and Ashland.

Hinds said there are about 80 tobacco retailers in Umatilla County, although several council members thought it was much higher.

Under the county’s proposal, a retailer would pay a set fee, currently \$250 to \$350 per year, which would go toward the county’s administrative costs.

Umatilla County Environmental Health, which already handles restaurant inspections, would handle enforcement. If a store was caught selling tobacco to minors, they would be fined \$500 for the first offense and \$1,000 for subsequent violations in addition to other penalties like license suspension and revocation.

Hinds said the council could also consider other laws like prohibiting tobacco products from being sold

within 1,000 feet of a school or another tobacco seller.

The council greeted Hinds’ presentation with skepticism.

Councilor Dale Primmer said implementing a license for tobacco would spur criticism from the community that the city was singling out tobacco retailers for local enforcement while leaving marijuana and alcohol enforcement to state agencies.

With Pendleton already charging between \$100 and \$1,000 per year for business licenses, Councilor Becky Marks worried that a new tobacco license would overburden businesses.

“You are going to crush economic development in the city of Pendleton,” she said.

Hinds responded that unlike marijuana and alcohol, there is no state or federal agency that enforces tobacco sales laws against retailers.

She added that some retailers, like the Circle K at 335 S.E. Court Ave., sell “thousands of dollars” worth of tobacco products per week.

The county health department did a survey of 54 tobacco retailer and found a narrow majority favored the license.

Mayor John Turner said he was concerned that Pendleton would become a “nanny state” if it implemented some of the county’s proposals.

“I am concerned that in our quest to maybe keep that one kid from buying that one pack of cigarettes, you would develop some overly onerous restrictions on free enterprise,” he said.

In other instances where the council considered introducing a significant tax, Turner said the council often referred the issue to voters.

Turner said the proposal was “not ready for primetime” and suggested Hinds meet with other cities about tobacco licensing, refine her proposal and then return to the council.

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BRIEFLY

No serious injuries reported in airplane crash near Tollgate

(Walla Walla) Union Bulletin

A Walla Walla University aviation student and instructor were in an airplane that crashed near Tollgate Wednesday morning, university spokeswoman Kim Strobel said.

The two were flying a single-engine Piper Arrow airplane. Both walked away from the crash north of Tollgate, WWU officials said.

The university has not released names or more details.

Strobel said WWU aviation program officials are working with the Federal Aviation Administration and National Transportation Safety Board as those agencies investigate the crash.

Pasco school threat linked to Sunnyside school shooting threat

Tri-City Herald

Pasco schools had their own scare today after social media posts warned of a possible threat to an unidentified school.

Officials said in a post that they immediately called Pasco police to investigate. Those officers linked the posts and possible threat to the threats made against Sunnyside High School on Tuesday.

At least one teen was arrested in that case.

Pasco schools said there are no legitimate threats to any school in the district.

The response comes on the heels of an explosive found at Prosser High School and threats at Kennewick and Grandview high schools.

Community Bank account opened to support Dunagan

Pendleton resident and Korean War veteran Joseph Wayne Dunagan has opened a bank account to help pay for a legal fight for medical care.

According to Barbara Ann Wright Dunagan, Joe enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves in 1956 and was active duty in the Korean War, but has not been able to access benefits and care via the Veterans Administration. Dunagan has been diagnosed with cancer.

An account in his name has been set up at Community Bank, Pendleton, 157 S. Main., to help Dunagan. Donations can be mailed in his name, or to “Black ops Korea Vet with cancer needs help.”

Group seeks heightened protections for streak-horned lark

SALEM (AP) — An environmental group has sued a federal agency on behalf of a ground-dwelling songbird with feathers that look like horns, saying a loophole should be closed that exempts airports and agricultural activity from protective measures and that the lark should be listed as endangered.

The Center for Biological Diversity filed its lawsuit Wednesday in federal court against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which in 2013 gave the streaked-horned lark “threatened” rather than higher-level “endangered” status, the group said.

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