

Port of Umatilla adopts a \$5.6 million 2018-2019 budget

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

The Port of Umatilla Commission adopted its 2018-2019 budget this month, capping what manager Kim Puzey said had been a positive year at the port.

The commissioners approved a budget of \$5.6 million. Puzey said there were no major changes to the budget, but there has been some growth despite having a major disadvantage.

"Geography is our biggest challenge," Puzey said, noting that the port is situated on basalt, which he said makes it expensive to develop.

He said the construction of

data centers on port property has been the biggest driver of growth.

"There are good prospects for future data centers — that's a once-in-a-generation economic development opportunity for the region," he said.

Puzey said while the way data centers are counted can be variable, he counts five on port property, and said more could be developed.

The port has also tapped into some other opportunities for economic development, Puzey said. He said a business out of Portland has an option to purchase 160 acres to construct solar arrays.

Puzey said he has spent much of his energy in the past two years working with a



In 2004, the Port of Umatilla installed a new \$3.8 crane at the facility on the Columbia River.

water users group comprised of local farmers. The group is leasing a portion of the port's water rights in order to use some of the water for agricultural purposes.

He said the port anticipates \$200,000 in revenue from that group this year, and \$400,000

from them in the following year.

"That's water infrastructure we didn't previously have," he said.

The port's budget is divided into seven different funds: general, container dock, marina, grants and appropria-

tions, strategic reserve, water rights and regional water.

The port commission adopted a general fund of \$3.1 million. That number includes an estimated \$832,000 that will be collected in taxes. The port district levies a tax of \$0.015 per \$1,000 assessed value on its constituents.

The marina fund remains open, but the port has not operated a marina since September 2013, and will close the fund in 2019.

The port's container dock fund is \$464,862. Cargo shipping is divided into three main categories — bulk, break-bulk, and container. Puzey said the Port of Umatilla imports bulk products like fuel, and exports wheat, another bulk product.

Puzey said container shipping is now nonexistent at the Port of Umatilla, a trend at almost all Pacific Northwest ports.

He noted that the port is the fiscal agent of a \$1 million grant to the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce. The port also received \$2 million in the transportation package from the 2016-2017 legislative session.

Puzey said the port budget has continued to increase annually. He said things were largely as he expected while creating the budget for next fiscal year.

"I have a good grasp of where we are," he said. "I didn't have any huge disappointments or surprises."

RIDGWAY: Would never reduce a speeding ticket in a school zone

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In the courtroom as a municipal court judge, Ridgway often gave offenders sentences that would put them on a better path, said his daughter. A sentence might be reduced, for example, if the person enrolled in college.

"He tried to believe the best in people," she said. "Instead of a punishment, he gave them encouragement. He wanted to be a part of people bettering themselves."

He had his limits, though. "One thing he would never reduce was a speeding ticket in a school zone," she said, adding that her father always drove the speed limit.

Ridgway's road to Pendleton included four years at University of Washington where he played football. In 1961, the Huskies beat Minnesota at the Rose Bowl. The victory was a treasured memory.

After graduation, he worked for Bank of America in San Francisco, where

he once tackled a bank robber who was making off with a bagful of cash. In San Francisco, he also met MaryAlice on a blind date in 1964. The date didn't go well, she admitted. Luckily they had a second date and then a third. They married in 1965 in her hometown of Athena. After Bob earned a degree at Willamette University's College of Law, the couple moved to Pendleton where Bob practiced law and later served as bankruptcy trustee and municipal court judge.

His life was rich outside of work, too. He participated in community organizations and served on a plethora of boards, including the Pendleton School Board. He skied, played piano, worked with wood and spent time in the kitchen baking his signature chocolate chip cookies and ginger snaps. In the last days of his life, he finally shared the secret ingredient for his ginger snaps with his daughter, but she's keeping mum.

Tiah DeGrofft started working for Ridgway at age

14. "I went in one day and asked if he was hiring," DeGrofft recalled. "He had me do filing, take cans to the recycling center and do other silly things around the office."

She said she was just one of many teenagers who found employment at the firm. DeGrofft, who worked there intermittently through high school and college, working her way up to paralegal, remembers the night Ridgway's law office caught fire and burned almost to the ground.

"We stood across the street at the gas station and watched it burn," she said.

The next day he and his employees donned overalls and went through the contents of fireproof file cabinets and then spent hours copying pages to recreate client files. Through it all, Ridgway exuded positivity, she said.

"He really showed me how to persevere through tough times," DeGrofft said. "He cowboyed up and came up with a game plan."

Another of Ridgway's employees, Karen Lange, will ever be grateful to Ridgway. After an attacker crushed the right side of her head with a pipe in 2013 as she strolled Pendleton's parkway, Ridgway kept her job available and continued to pay her. She returned to work wearing a helmet and missing some of her memories. Ridgway encouraged her to do what she could.

"He was the best boss," Lange said.

Attorney Rob Collins considered Ridgway a mentor.

"He was someone who cared deeply about other people," Collins said. "He was a good lawyer and a good human being."

Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock knew Ridgway both socially and through various community organizations.

"What an enormous loss to Pendleton," he said. "I can't think of very many people who have been held in such high regard as Bob. If there is a book on moral standards and ethics, he

would be the author."

MaryAlice is having trouble wrapping her mind around Bob's death and how swiftly it came. She said he had no symptoms until the middle of April, when he experienced chest pain. A PET scan revealed a mass of orange where the cancer had spread throughout his body.

She pointed to a brimming basket of cards on her kitchen counter. Each one contains a heartfelt message to Bob, all acknowledging that a bright flame was about to go out. One came from the mother of one of the offenders he sentenced in court. She thanked Bob for setting her son on a better road.

MaryAlice and Darcey read the cards aloud to Bob.

"No one sent get well cards," MaryAlice said. "Everyone knew it was the end."

So started a series of lasts. His last meal was a blackberry milkshake from Hal's Hamburgers. He said what he needed to say to the special people in his life. During one conversation, Darcey asked him what he

hoped his legacy would be.

"I just want to be remembered as a good guy," he said.

Mission accomplished.

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0810.

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