

NEAL: A search started in spring, ended up with 33 applicants

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Morrow staff — about 61 people. He reports directly to his father.

“Our operating budget is approximately one-third of the port’s budget,” he said.

A wider search

Board president Jerry Healy said the commissioners hired George Dunkel from the Special Districts Association of Oregon to recruit candidates. After the initial recruitment period, they asked Dunkel to expand the search to a wider geographic region, and ended up with 33 applicants.

Neal was selected after a search that started in late spring of this year, and ended with a day of interviews with three panels of community members and people from regional businesses and industries. Neal and the three other finalists went through the panel interviews. One was eliminated, another chose not to move forward, and Neal and finalist Stephanie Seamans were interviewed by the port commission.

Seamans is a Certified Public Accountant and the community and economic

development manager for Benton-Franklin Council of Governments in the Tri-Cities. She worked for many years as a CPA and business development manager for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Seamans declined to comment for this story.

Port commission vice president Rick Stokoe said Seamans had many of the qualifications they wanted, but she did not have experience with ports.

Healy said Neal’s background, both with the port and at other businesses, made him a compelling candidate.

“He’s had a very successful marketing career,” Healy said. “He’s grown the businesses he’s worked with.”

Stokoe said the commission didn’t talk to the panels directly, but all the information was relayed to them through Dunkel.

“The panel didn’t make a recommendation to us — they told us their thoughts,” he said.

He said the commission asked the candidates an identical set of about 20 questions, including questions about their leadership



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

They sit in stacks at the Port of Morrow’s dry goods warehouse waiting to be exported overseas.

style, and their willingness to move to Morrow County.

Family connection

Though Neal will succeed his father in the position, both commissioners said the relationship ultimately had nothing to do with their decision.

“I was very concerned, as was SDAO, and Gary,” Healy said. “He’s been pretty

walled-off from the process. He was not involved in any special meetings or phone calls regarding the hiring.”

Stokoe agreed. “His relationship to Gary didn’t have anything to do with my decision,” he said. “We didn’t exclude anybody. We wanted input, we invited panelists from all over. If our sole intention was to hire Ryan, we didn’t

have to open it up.”

Ryan Neal said he understands the scrutiny that comes with a public position, but didn’t feel the relationship had to do with his hiring, and said his father had no input or involvement in the process.

“I feel like my background in business development shows that I have the skills that align with what

the executive director at the port needs,” he said. “I followed the process just like everybody else.”

Don Russell, a Morrow County commissioner and former Port of Morrow commissioner, has known Ryan Neal for many years, through his early career and time at the port.

“It seems like a bunch of guys from Morrow County ended up at Knight in Portland,” he said, noting that Neal was promoted quickly and rose through the ranks of the company.

He said the port works with the county regularly, including on the Enterprise Zone committee. That committee has two voting members each from the Port of Morrow, Morrow County and the city of Boardman. He said Neal will likely fill his father’s spot on that board.

Russell said he thinks Neal’s qualifications will speak for themselves.

“I believe in the next two years, Ryan Neal will make us all forget who his father is,” he said.

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RISE: Consistency was the vital principle in connecting with schools and students

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“I was impressed that every one that applied has a mental health background,” Ashton-Williams said.

While school starts early next week, the RISE corps have orientation Sept. 4. Ashton-Williams said the gap provides time for program staff to talk with school office workers, teachers and counselors and build relationships.

“You might have a great curriculum to share, but if you don’t have a great relationship with each school

and have built trust, it doesn’t work,” she said.

B.J. Wilson, Hermiston School District’s director of special programs, said, “RISE worked exceedingly well for us.”

Hermiston schools wanted RISE to accomplish two tasks: decrease the number of student referrals for discipline and increase student attendance. Wilson said he didn’t have numbers, but RISE contributed to improvements in both areas. He said the program provided students with another adult they could trust and

receive encouragement from.

“We felt those connections were a great benefit,” Wilson said. “Just the fact they had another adult connection at school really helped them want to attend.”

Ashton-Williams said those connections with the students and the schools came down to one vital principle: “Consistency — we show up every single day we’re supposed to show up and deliver the services we said we would deliver.”

But only Taylor Wilson remains on the RISE team from the first year. Katrina

Bretsch left during the school year, and Ashton-Williams said she at times had to fill in. Roy Barron, Hermiston’s newest city councilor, lost his position with RISE in June due to routine tardiness, he said.

While schools can rely on substitute teachers to fill in, Ashton-Williams said, the county does not have that nor is there a bank of on-call mental health workers in Eastern Oregon.

Still, she said, RISE provides compensation that is commensurate with the education and background of its

staff, and that incentive could help the small program avoid turnover. And the supervisor also can double as one of the RISE counselors in a pinch.

Wilson said losing RISE staff was nobody’s fault, but those changes affect the students. They make connections with people, he said, and then those people are not there. Still, he commended RISE for keeping its promises to be there for students.

Taking that promise to the far reaches of the county presents other hurdles.

Ashton-Williams said RISE is looking at the pos-

sibility of video services for some schools, such as Ukiah, which is an hour drive from Pendleton. And RISE is going to be flexible. Some schools may need RISE groups just once a week, she said, and others more, so the program will prioritize those needs.

Wilson also said he is confident in the county’s ability to deliver RISE to the other schools. Ashton-Williams sounded determined to make it so:

“We’re going to provide service to any student,” she said.

HOUSING: Pendleton’s housing scarcity has been documented multiple times by the city

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more affordably.

According to a chart provided by I & E, the company has built similarly sized apartment complexes in Molalla, Silverton and Independence, and is planning or building apartments in Forest Grove, Sandy, Albany and St. Helens.

Corbett wants to spend the next few weeks negotiating details of an incentive package, but ideas that were mentioned briefly included a land donation or a property tax deferral.

While generally supportive of the project, a few councilors wanted additional language inserted into an incentive package that would protect the city’s investment.

Councilor Paul Chalmers suggested a series of benchmarks that I & E would need to meet, while Councilor Scott Fairley wanted a “clawback clause” that would allow the city to take the land back if the development went south.

Once I & E commits, Ivanov assured the council that his company would follow through on building the complex and establish a lasting presence by continuing to manage the facility once it’s finished.

“We’re going to be the city of Pendleton’s neighbor forever,” he said.

With council approval, Ivanov said I & E plans to build the apartments in a single phase over an 18-month period.

Due to a scheduling quirk, the council will be meeting back-to-back weeks on Aug. 28 and Sept. 4 and could potentially approve a deal with I & E during one of those meetings.

If I & E goes forward with the complex, it would add to a growing list of housing projects around Pendleton that are in various stages of development.

The 55 housing permits the

city issued in 2017 represented a 10-year high, but Pendleton is on pace to surpass that number in 2018.

The city has issued 24 housing permits through July, a 41 percent increase from the same time last year. Most of the building activity was centered around single-family homes and townhouses at Sunridge Estates, an area where the city sold developer Dusty Pace several lots.

Pendleton’s housing scarcity has been documented multiple times by the city, most recently in a housing study that showed Pendleton’s market could support 125 more rental units and 90 for-sale units.

If added together, there are 463 housing units either permitted by the city or proposed at the city government level.

But the Pendleton City Council’s goal — 50 new dwellings per year — is measured in houses built rather than permits issued.

Some developers are still working on permits, while others are already deep in the construction process.

Portland developer Nate Brusselback received his permits back in December and is in the midst of building a 25-unit set of duplexes on Southwest 28th Drive near Juniper House.

Brusselback said construction is slightly behind schedule, but expects all the units to be done by the fall.

The two- and three-bedroom apartments will all be 1,262 square feet with one-car garages, according to Brusselback, and rent for \$1,395 per month.

Brusselback said the duplexes have already received interest and he expects more demand to come once the units are complete.

Pendleton developer Al Plute has the smallest planned development, but he has the added benefit of receiving \$340,928 in grants from the city toward his \$1.3 mil-

lion effort to convert the third floor of the Bowman Building on Frazer Avenue from offices to 18 apartment units.

Plute said he’s close to receiving his building permits and plumbers should be able to start their work on the building by the end of the month.

Although his engineer anticipates the Bowman won’t run into any obstacles during the construction process, Plute said the historic nature of the building means things could change. He’s hopeful that the apartments will be completed by May 2019.

“I’m not going to put pressure on myself,” he said. “I’m just going to go with the flow.”

Longview, Washington, developer Hal Palmer received permission from the Pendleton Planning Commission to proceed with a 116-home subdivision called Sunset View Estates near Harris Junior Academy in March, but there’s been no visible activity on the property since then. Palmer did not return a request for comment on Tuesday.

Newberg developer Saj Jivanjee has been looking to expand the 32-unit Pendleton Heights development on Tutuilla Road since 2016, but financing issues have plagued the project.

Jivanjee wants Pendleton to assume more financial responsibility to extend the road to the complex and restructure the debt he already owes the city.

After some councilors expressed frustration with his latest proposal in June, Corbett said the city is waiting for Jivanjee to present a new proposal.

“The ball’s in his court,” Corbett said.

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BRIEFLY

Strong quake rocks Venezuela but little damage reported

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — A powerful earthquake shook Venezuela’s northeastern coast on Tuesday, forcing residents in the capital to evacuate buildings and interrupting a pro-government rally in support of controversial economic reforms.

The 7.3 quake was the largest to strike Venezuela since 1900, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. But at a depth of some 76 miles (123 kilometers) it appeared to have caused only limited damage even near its epicenter a few miles off the sparsely populated Cariaco peninsula stretching into the eastern Caribbean.

In Cumana, the biggest city near the quake’s center, supermarket shelves came crashing down. At a shopping center, a woman caught in the panic of people rushing out of the building fell on an escalator and injured herself.

In downtown Caracas, concrete from the top floors of the unfinished Tower of David skyscraper fell to the sidewalk, forcing firefighters to close off traffic. A block away, children wearing surgical masks stretched their neck toward the 620-foot (190 meter) building after having fled a nearby foundation for poor children suffering from cancer.

“We felt something strong and they told everyone to run,” said Marisela Lopez, who was at the foundation with her 7-year-old daughter when the quake struck.

Iowa student killed by Mexican man in U.S. illegally

MONTEZUMA, Iowa (AP) — A man from Mexico living in the U.S. illegally has confessed to kidnapping college student Mollie Tibbetts while she was running in her small Iowa hometown, killing her and dumping her body in a cornfield, authorities said Tuesday.

Christian Bahena Rivera, 24, was arrested and charged with first-degree murder in the death of the 20-year-old Tibbetts, whose July 18 disappearance set

off a massive search involving state and federal authorities.

Rivera led investigators early Tuesday to a body believed to be Tibbetts in a cornfield about 12 miles (19 kilometers) southeast of Brooklyn, Iowa, where Tibbetts was last seen running. Division of Criminal Investigation special agent Rick Rahn said.

“I can’t speak about the motive. I can just tell you that it seemed that he followed her, seemed to be drawn to her on that particular day, for whatever reason he chose to abduct her,” Rahn told reporters at a news conference outside the sheriff’s office in Montezuma, where Rivera was being held on \$1 million cash-only bond.

The news that the highly publicized and gruesome crime was allegedly committed by a person in the country illegally drew immediate outrage. President Donald Trump noted the arrest and called for immigration law changes at a rally in West Virginia.

Soldier to plead guilty in terrorism help case

HONOLULU (AP) — A Hawaii-based Army soldier accused of attempting to support the Islamic State group will plead guilty, one of his lawyers told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

Sgt. 1st Class Ikaika Kang has agreed to plead guilty, but Alexander Silvert, an assistant federal defender representing him, won’t say what charges he’ll be pleading to.

“We’ve agreed on a sentence,” Silvert said, declining to elaborate. He referred further questions to Kang’s other attorney, Birney Bervar, who couldn’t immediately be reached.

Court documents allege Kang provided classified military information to undercover agents whom he believed were part of the Islamic State group.

Kang is scheduled to withdraw his not guilty plea Thursday, court records show. The hearing was moved from the afternoon to the morning because of concerns about a hurricane headed for Hawaii, Silvert said.

“I’m not going to put pressure on myself,” he said. “I’m just going to go with the flow.”

— Al Plute, Pendleton developer