

OLINGER: An opportunity that only comes once every 100 years

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Some of the features incorporated into Gib Olinger resemble the hallmarks of other modern schools: common areas in the grade level “pods” where teachers can do small groups or meetings and an electronically controlled double set of doors that forces visitors to check in at the office before entering the building.

But Gib Olinger also has qualities that are hard to find elsewhere: a rock climbing wall in the gym, a gym/auditorium with a stage that can convert into a music classroom by activating an electronically controlled wall, a mini-amphitheater in the library where kids can sit for story time.

Clark admits that much of the technology that currently makes Gib Olinger “state-of-the-art” will eventually become obsolete, but the impact of the new school will be felt throughout the

community. In lieu of the Muddy Frogwater Festival, rebranded as Milton-Freewater Rocks! in recent years, the Milton-Freewater Chamber of Commerce organized Gib Olinger Week this year, which included a family movie night, a parade, and a salmon barbecue.

The Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance is holding its own honorary event called the Broadway Bash, a Saturday event on Broadway Avenue with food, music, and games meant to highlight the “Hyphen District” on Broadway Avenue.

Clark said he thinks Gib Olinger could have a positive impact on the surrounding area, envisioning a coffee shop in one of the empty storefronts on Main Street or improvements to the nearby “houses that have seen better days.”

In the longterm, Clark imagines a parent who’s been relocated to the Walla

Walla Valley. They have options between school districts in Walla Walla, College Place, Milton-Freewater, and the Athena-Weston area.

With the addition of Gib Olinger, “their chances of moving to Milton-Freewater just improved.”

Clark acknowledges that parents will go through an adjustment period.

Instead of the usual neighborhood schools that have stood for a century, 540-560 children in grades K-3 will all go to the same school, a student population larger than McLoughlin High School.

There will also be some shuffling between schools as Milton-Freewater finishes its renovation and realignment.

Freewater Elementary School will serve all Milton-Freewater fourth and fifth graders until the 2019-2020 school year, when repairs at Ferndale Elementary School will be com-



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

This multipurpose room at Milton-Freewater’s new Gib Olinger Elementary School will serve as a cafeteria for the school’s approximately 550 students.

pleted and it will take over those duties.

Freewater will eventually be vacated for a new community use, which Clark said he will spend the year trying to determine, while

Grove Elementary School will be demolished within a few months.

Even with all the change that’s happening in Milton-Freewater, Clark said opening a new school in

Milton-Freewater is an opportunity that only comes once every 100 years.

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JOBS: Paychecks may increase

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shortages.

“While it’s certainly good that jobs are plentiful and the economy is improving, finding qualified employees to fill the positions created by that growing economy is an arduous task,” the press release states.

In an interview, Wildhorse human resources director Lorena Thompson said as many as 5 percent of applicants will not pass the gaming background check.

The CTUIR isn’t the only employer looking for hired help.

Mid Columbia Bus Co. has a 15-20 percent turnover rate every year and is in constant need of bus drivers. Top Pendleton employers like Keystone RV and Hill Meat are also consistently advertising for unfilled jobs.

Despite the current surplus of jobs, Dallas Fridley, a regional economist for the Oregon Employment Department, said Umatilla County’s employment rate has been slower to fall post-recession than the rest of the state as job growth has been offset by events like the closure of the Umatilla Chemical Depot. Currently, Umatilla County’s unemployment rate is about a half-point under the state’s average. Additionally, a low unemployment rate in Umatilla County hasn’t equaled a dramatic increase in wages.

According to the Oregon Employment Department, private sector wages in Umatilla County rose from an average of \$34,785 per year in 2014 to \$36,105 in 2018, only a 3.8 percent increase.

When the public sector is added, wages have risen by a slightly more robust 5 percent, but both figures don’t match the inflationary rate, which rose 6 percent during that time period.

Umatilla County was outpaced by

the state in both overall wages and its rate of growth, with overall wages rising from \$46,896 to \$51,117, a 10 percent increase.

Fridley said the overall economic outlook looks good for Umatilla County. Due to a combination of a younger and more diverse workforce and strong agriculture and food processing industries, Fridley anticipates the unemployment rate should stay low.

And if that is the case, Fridley thinks the pressure on wages should mean local residents should see their paychecks start to rise.

Thompson, the Wildhorse HR director, said the company evaluates wages each year to see how they correspond with the Oregon minimum wage and the pay at other American Indian casinos and often raises pay rates as a result.

Thompson said previous employees used to be reliable source of labor, returning to the Wildhorse fold after working elsewhere for a while. But even with wages rising, Thompson said former Wildhorse employees are working elsewhere and staying there.

“It’s kind of a tough labor market right now,” said Cyr, the employment manager.

While Wildhorse’s job offerings remain in the single digits at this point, the problem could be compounded as the tribes plan a multi-million dollar expansion. Thompson doesn’t know how many more staff the new facilities will require, but she knows there will be a need.

In the meantime, Wildhorse spokeswoman Mary Liberty-Traugher said the resort and casino plans to hold more recruiting events to fill its vacancies.

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GUNS: Oregon received 50 order petitions

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“And the last straw, really,” Reddington said, “was his access to firearms.”

Reddington is one of two people in Umatilla County to petition state courts for extreme risk protection orders. The other was a wife in Hermiston who obtained an order on March 2 after her husband no longer could “tell reality from non-reality,” according to the court filing.

He believed people were members of a “mafia cartel” and trying to kill him for his house. He told his wife she was in on the plot, and if she forced him to leave he burn down the house with her inside. He said he would shoot her son, too, because he was part of the cartel.

The couple declined an interview. The *East Oregonian* also was not able to contact the subject of the order Reddington obtained.

The Oregon Legislature in 2017 passed the law allowing police, family members or roommates to ask a judge to issue an extreme risk protection order prohibiting otherwise law-abiding citizens from having weapons if they indicate they are going to hurt themselves or someone else. The law went into effect Jan. 1.

Oregon courts as of July 31 received 50 petitions for the orders. Judges granted 42 and denied eight. Phillip Lemman, acting deputy state court administrator for the Oregon Judicial Department, said half of Oregon’s 36 counties have a least one case.

“A good chunk of the cases — 20 percent — are in Multnomah County,” Lemman said. “But this has been used statewide, from Josephine County to Umatilla County to Columbia County.”

Law enforcement officers sought 34 orders and family or roommates sought 15. One came from an employer, but the court dismissed that outright because the law does not apply to employers.

Keeping guns out of the wrong hands is an obvious intention of the law, but Lem-

Summary of Oregon’s new extreme risk protection orders

50 petitions filed as of July 31

- Law enforcement filed 34, family or household members filed 15, and an employer filed one.

Outcomes

- Courts granted 42 and denied eight (including the one from the employer because the law does not apply to employers).
- The subject of the orders requested hearings in 11 cases.
- The courts upheld two of the orders, dismissed six and three cases are pending.

County distribution

11 cases in Multnomah

7 cases in Josephine, Washington

4 cases in Marion

2 cases in Benton, Curry, Deschutes, Linn, Malheur, Umatilla, Yamhill

1 case in Columbia, Jackson, Jefferson, Lake, Lane, Polk, Tillamook

Source: Oregon Judicial Department

man said the law addresses weapons: “That includes firearms, but it is anything designed for or capable of causing death or serious physical injury.”

Reddington said he expected the petition process would be similar to obtaining a search warrant. But instead of writing a lengthy affidavit testifying to the need for the order, Reddington sat through a hearing at the Umatilla County Courthouse, and he was the only person on the witness stand. Lemman said for these orders, the judge only hears from the person seeking the petition.

The judge, however, has to find “clear and convincing evidence” the person presents a risk in the near future, such as immediate risk for suicide or injuring or killing another person. Clear and convincing evidence, he said, is a higher standard than most civil cases, which use the standard of “preponderance of the evidence.”

The circumstances for the petitions vary, he said, from people suffering a mental health break to someone with a drug addiction, “but the standard remains the same.”

If the petition is successful, the judge issues an order and police serve it to the person, who can give their weapons to law enforcement, a licensed gun dealer or a third party capable of receiving the weapons. That third party, for example, cannot have a felony

conviction.

Reddington said in his case, the man was in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, so serving the order was no problem. And police already put the gun into safekeeping.

People who lose their weapons can request a hearing to contest the order, and there are timelines for that. The husband in the Hermiston case challenged the petition in late April, and a judge dismissed the protection order.

That was one of 11 hearings to challenge orders. The courts dismissed six of those orders and upheld two. The other three are pending.

Otherwise, orders expire after a year. Lemman said petitioners can go the court again to renew orders.

“There has been a lot of discussion about what police can do when they have good reason they believe someone is about to do something threatening to someone,” Lemman said. “This is just the Legislature’s effort to provide a solution for these situations.”

Reddington said he did not know how his case would play out.

The subject of the order may not even live in Pendleton now, he said, nor could he say if he would renew the order. Overall, however, he said he saw these orders as a valuable tool families and police can use to protect the community.

Executive chef Jeff Sommer watches over the work of some of his line cooks as they do the morning prep work in the main kitchen at Wildhorse Resort & Casino on Wednesday in Mission.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

DAIRY: The facility must limit its water usage to 65,000 gallons per day

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resigned his position from Lost Valley Farm because he was concerned the facility wasn’t complying with its “confined animal feeding operation” permit.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture called Aylett as a witness against Greg te Velde, the dairy’s owner, who is accused of contempt of court for violating a settlement deal with the agency.

“The stuff he was doing wasn’t legal, wasn’t right,” said Aylett during an Aug. 24 court hearing in Portland. “I did not want to be involved.”

According to Aylett, te Velde requested that he apply wastewater to a center pivot-irrigated field that was

already saturated, risking contamination of groundwater with nitrogen.

“He asked me to just pick a circle and he would take the fall for that circle if we over-applied,” Aylett said.

Other witnesses defended the dairy’s performance and refuted allegations by ODA, which wants to shut the facility down.

A retired Oregon State University animal science professor, Mike Gamroth, cast doubt on claims of excessive water usage at the dairy.

Since starting operations in 2017, the second-largest dairy in Oregon has been cited repeatedly for wastewater problems by ODA, which led to the lawsuit.

Under the settlement deal Lost Valley reached with

ODA in March, the facility must limit its water usage to 65,000 gallons per day.

The agency now alleges that te Velde has committed Velde of court by exceeding the agreed-upon amount by up to 375,000 gallons per day, thereby contributing to wastewater management problems at the site.

To sanction the dairy, ODA is requesting that a judge order the facility to stop generating wastewater, which would effectively shut it down.

During the court hearing, Gamroth — a retired OSU professor with extensive experience in the dairy industry — said he doubted ODA’s estimates of water usage.

Gamroth testified that he

doesn’t see how hundreds of thousands of additional gallons could be used without a glaringly obvious “Olympic size swimming pool” of excess water at the facility.

“I can’t find where that water goes, I really can’t,” Gamroth said.

One factor that could figure into ODA’s estimate is an inaccurate water meter that varies in its flow rate and total usage data, he said.

“It’s simply not realistic, and it’s got to relate to that meter,” he said.

State officials also based their estimate on the changing levels of water in manure lagoons, which are difficult to measure, Gamroth said.

A variation of just one inch in lagoon levels equates to 160,000 gallons of water, he said. “I don’t have con-

fidence in those measurements, basically.”

Gamroth said he has probably visited every dairy in Oregon and does not believe Lost Valley Farm’s water usage is abnormally large.

“I don’t see any difference for a dairy of that size,” he said.

Similar conditions exist at other dairies, for which they haven’t been cited, Gamroth said.

“I think it’s a fairly clean dairy. Compliance issues are quite minor in most cases,” he said.

Overflow problems have been “minor,” wastewater storage is no longer a problem and the facility poses no greater environmental risk than other dairies, Gamroth said.

During cross-examination by the state’s attorney, Lisa DeFever, Gamroth acknowledged that he submitted a declaration in Lost Valley’s bankruptcy proceedings in May stating that the facility used nearly an acre foot of water per day, or roughly 320,000 gallons.

DeFever said the dairy hasn’t properly tested the nitrogen content of wastewater applied to fields, potentially causing groundwater contamination.

She also said the facility’s manure storage problems will likely resume once summer is over, which will “come back and bite us” when the rainy season begins.

“We will end up with them in the winter full and overflowing,” DeFever said.