

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OUR VIEW

# Tip of the Hat, kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to Sunridge Middle School and Pendleton School District for their decision to hire Eric Virgil, who was born with an intellectual disability that makes learning, problem solving and reasoning a challenge, for a part-time custodian position at the school.

The 42-year-old Pendleton man worked in a sheltered workshop for many years, but dreamed of having a regular job in the community. District Facility Manager Ken Lesock, on the hiring panel, listened to the pitch with interest. The plan was that Virgil would work with the help of his job coach at Horizon Project to keep him on track. Virgil had previous janitorial experience with Horizon Project. Sunridge Principal Dave Williams said he doesn't regret the hiring decision, calling it a classic win-win. Virgil gets the fulfillment of working hard and earning a paycheck. Sunridge gets a clean school and the satisfaction of helping a man realize his potential.

That decision led to Williams and the district's director of business services, Michelle Jones, traveling to Wilsonville to accept an award from The Arc Oregon, which supports and advocates for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The award goes to a business or individual employing a person with an intellectual disability for at least a year

and elevating the person's independence, integration and participation in the community. Williams, who called the award "humbling," said Virgil has more than proved he can do the job.

**A kick in the pants to developer Saj Jivanjee** for playing loose with a deal for the Pendleton Heights housing development.

Jivanjee of Newberg originally set out to build 72 townhouses east of Olney Cemetery. The city donated land off Tutuilla Creek Road to Jivanjee and fronted him the money for infrastructure improvements. That was seven years ago.

Since then, Jivanjee has come back to the city to alter the deal. He finished 32 townhouses and claimed building the next 40 was not feasible. So he pitched a 100-unit apartment complex instead, and the city council reluctantly agreed.

Jivanjee again and again came back to the city to change the terms of the deal, usually asking for more public money or to shift around the debt. He asked in September for a new debt repayment plan. The city council voted that down.

But in February the city agreed to take on more infrastructure cost and Jivanjee agreed to pay the city \$150,000 before starting the apartment project.

That didn't happen.

Jivanjee started the work without



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

**Custodian Eric Virgil looks over his checklist under the watchful eye of his job coach, Chris Humphrey, while working at Sunridge Middle School on Tuesday in Pendleton.**

paying the city. The city did not stop the work. Corbett expressed his confidence that Jivanjee would pay up by June 15.

The townhouses are for lease. How many of the folks leasing in Pendleton Heights are allowed to skip payments?

Jivanjee told *East Oregonian* reporter Antonio Sierra he was too busy to talk about this until next week. That from a guy relying on public money to complete his development.

The city either has a deal with Jivanjee or it does not. Letting \$150,000 slide may seem like petty cash to the city, but is also sends the message this deal has no teeth to hold Jivanjee accountable.

That's a bad setup. The next developer who ignores the terms of a deal can point to the case with Jivanjee for an easy out. The city let one guy do it, so why not let the next one?

**A tip of the hat to the men and women who have served this nation.** This weekend many of us will enjoy

long holiday weekend filled with barbecues and family gatherings. Yet while we all enjoy the time off — and hopefully good weather — it is important that we recall why Memorial Day matters.

Memorial Day weekend is a time when the nation can collectively stop and reflect on the men and women who died while serving in the armed forces. Once known as Decoration Day, Memorial Day allows all of us a moment in time to remember that our freedoms are truly not free and that many brave Americans made the ultimate sacrifice for liberty.

While those who gave the last full measure of devotion to our nation are gone, we will not, cannot, forget them. We hope everyone has a great Memorial Day weekend, but while you are enjoying the time off, take a moment and remember those who gave their lives for us to enjoy the freedom we often take for granted.

## YOUR VIEWS

### Streets and future budgets

As Pendleton's mayor, city manager, and city council continue to wrangle over ways to fund rebuilding our streets, increasing revenue through various fees and taxes seems to be the only avenue open for discussion. In the end, after speaking to those civic groups that have great sway with City Hall, we'll get an ultimatum: Approve increasing taxes or expect a tripling of the utility fee. That's possible because no vote by taxpayers is required, and it's the easy way to avoid any budget cuts.

A gas tax is probably the most fair because it does leave you with options. You can protest by cutting back on your driving or buying your gas elsewhere. Arrowhead comes to mind and CTUIR will appreciate it. Thirteen cents a gallon is pretty hard to swallow alone, so willing participation by tourists will be essential. However, with free cellphone apps, those tourists the city is so depending on will soon discover gas is considerably cheaper at the numerous truck stops and other towns in the area.

Meaningful budget cuts, though unpopular at City Hall, need to be discussed. Token cuts like the \$750 reduction in support of the Pendleton Downtown Association (PDA)'s flower basket program just won't cut it. City Hall, using the Pendleton Development Commission, has funneled millions into the downtown area with mixed results. Businesses continue to come and go on a regular basis, some just merely relocating from one part of the city to another. A program that merely shifts businesses around does little to promote economic growth. The PDA claims a zero vacancy rate downtown on their webpage when nothing could be further from the truth.

Terminating both the PDC, whose administrative budget has ballooned to over \$100,000, and financial support for the PDA would be a good start. The budgetary restraints placed on the use of state and federal tax/grant revenue are endless. Those same restrictions don't apply to utility franchise fees. It seems the simplest solution to our street problem would be to shift the PP&L franchise fee of \$1.2 million into

the street maintenance fund where it was intended to go. Then, institute a fair, sensible approach for additional housing to increase our tax base.

**Rick Rohde  
Pendleton**

### Basic human rights belong to babies too

Anti-abortion laws are not about taking rights away from women. They are about the life and rights of unborn human children who had no say in being conceived by women who were exercising their rights to do as they please with their bodies.

After conception, the rights of the unborn child should come first, before those of the mother, except when the health of the mother maybe in jeopardy.

If reasons can be put forward to deny basic human rights to one group, then reasons can be put forth to deny them to all groups. This is not advancing humanity, it is taking us backwards.

**Robert Stuart  
Hermiston**

### UP layoffs devastating families

In May of 2018, I was lucky enough to get offered a job working for Union Pacific at the Hinkle yard. My family and I sold almost everything we owned, and moved from Springfield, Missouri, to Oregon. I started as an apprentice electrician, and was granted journeyman status just before my probation period was completed. It was a great career and a nice family-supporting wage.

Fast forward to March 2019, and the career opportunity we moved halfway across the country to invest ourselves in just vanishes. I get that companies have to make hard choices, and that a lot of other people were affected by the layoffs, but that was devastating to my family. I just hope that everyone affected by these layoffs finds a new career that will be able to support their families.

**Jonathan Slagley  
Irrigon**



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