

The family-owned and run newspaper: a once common enterprise

EO Media Group began the new century by reckoning with the challenge of digital publishing

Editor’s Note: In 2018, EO Media Group published an historical book by author William F. Willingham, “Grit and Ink: An Oregon Family’s Adventures in Newspapering, 1908-2018” (<http://books.eomediagroup.com/grit-ink/>) Since its publication, the family-owned media company that owns and operates the East Oregonian has doubled in size, having recently acquired newspapers in La Grande, Baker City, Bend and Redmond. The following story is excerpted from this book and is part seven of a seven-part weekly series.

EO Media Group

PENDLETON — Family executives are at the center of this history. But the hiring of talented and exceptional non-family business managers has been essential to fashioning strategies for the company’s survival in difficult times. In the postwar era, the most significant of those top managers were Pat Patterson,



EO Media Group file photo
EO Media Group Board of Directors 2017, from left, Jeff Rogers, Heidi Wright, Cory Bollinger, Kathryn Brown, Susan Forrester Rana, John Perry, Harrison Forrester and Steve Forrester.

hired in 1984, followed in 2005 by John Perry. When Perry retired in 2017, Heidi Wright became chief operating officer. The family ownership has also elected non-family, outside directors to the board of directors. In 1997, Tom Brown came to a board position while he was president of a New England group of newspapers. Joining Brown was Lucy Mohl, who was a player in the early Seattle digital world. Subsequently joining the board were Jeff Rogers and

Cory Bollinger, who held top positions in Midwest newspaper companies. While the company began the new century by reckoning with the challenge of digital publishing, it did not lose sight of its mission as a news organization. Identifying climate change as the major issue of the new century, all the company’s newsrooms collaborated on a 2005 year-long series on how climate change was appearing in each region. The series won a national award of special

merit in the Grantham Prize for Excellence in Reporting on the Environment. Community newspapers face a challenge in the digital age. COO Heidi Wright’s main challenge is monetizing the digital side of publishing. One of Wright’s initiatives is One Boat, a digital platform that helps local tourism-related businesses reach an out-of-area market. Prior to Wright’s arrival, in 2015, the company formed a collaboration with the Pamplin Media Group to

create a statehouse bureau that is based at the *Capital Press*. The bureau produces stories for the newspapers of Pamplin and the EO Media Group. Its reporters also produce a weekly emailed report from Salem, called Oregon Capital Insider. These two companies have enlarged the audience of its statehouse report by signing other newspapers in eastern and southern Oregon. Those papers’ readers become subscribers to the Oregon Capital Insider. The enlarged size of that audience has enabled Wright, in partnership with Pamplin’s top executive, Mark Garber, to monetize the newsletter, with advertising. One of the company’s boldest moves, in 2019, was moving *The Daily Astorian* from a five-day publishing schedule to three days. In the process, the newspaper was renamed *The Astorian*. As part of this shift, newspaper delivery moved away from independent contractor carriers to the U.S. Postal Service. Throughout many transitions and the continuing need to run a profitable enterprise, the owners have always kept a larger view of the meaning of family. Their sense of family extended beyond just the relationship of the owners in a closely held company.

The EOMG has attempted to provide decent and fair working conditions for its employees. Pay and benefits met and often exceeded industry standards. Whenever financial conditions allowed, the company maintained a policy of profit sharing with employees — the money being paid into retirement accounts. The company also promoted from within and provided training and growth opportunities to make that option possible. Recognizing that each newspaper has a somewhat unique environment, the EOMG upper management has given local managers considerable autonomy to serve the needs of their readers and communities. The EOMG of the 21st century is an example of a once common but now endangered enterprise: the family-owned and run newspaper. The company traces its roots to the Bull and Jackson families of the nineteenth century and continues with the Aldrich, Forrester, Bedford, and Brown and Chessman families of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Across time, the connecting link always has been a commitment to providing objective reporting and honoring the diverse opinions and values of the communities served by their newspapers.

Quilt shop opens in Stanfield

Mama Bear’s Quilt Shop owned by Chad and Kristi Ray

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

STANFIELD — Quilt enthusiasts and city officials gathered Friday morning to celebrate the opening of Mama Bear’s Quilt Shop in Stanfield. “We’ve taken a chance on a 119-year-old building, and we hope you like what we’ve done with it,” Chad Ray told the group. Chad and his wife, Kristi, own the quilt shop at 170 S. Main St. Chad said it all started 22 years ago when he bought Kristi a gift certificate for fabric and some sewing supplies for Christmas one year. Her love for the art of quilting grew over time, until eventually she decided to go all in. He said he hopes more people from around the area catch the quilting “bug.” Kristi said she has always enjoyed the craft of coming up with new quilts, and loves seeing all the beautiful



Staff photo by Jade McDowell
Customers browse fabrics at the grand opening event for Mama Bear’s Quilt Shop in Stanfield on Friday morning.

quilts other people are able to create as well. “They’re all different and amazing,” she said. The store features walls of fabric, thread, PFAFF sewing machines, a long arm quilting machine and other supplies. Kristi said she plans to start offering quilting classes soon, and Chad will provide maintenance and repairs for sewing machines. They thanked the city of

Stanfield for their patience and support through the financing and remodel process for the historic building, which over the decades has served as everything from a pharmacy to an auto parts store. Mayor Tom McCann said he was amazed when he saw how the Rays had transformed the interior of the old building. “We are thrilled to have you here,” he told them.

Sherwin-Williams opening in Hermiston

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The old Payless Shoe Store building in Hermiston won’t stay empty for long after the shoe retailer went out of business this summer. The building at 1390 N. First St. is being remodeled into a Sherwin-Williams paint store. Jeffrey Light, director of real estate for midwestern states and Canada for Sherwin-Williams, confirmed

Tuesday that the new store is expected to open in late December 2019. He said the Hermiston store will be focused on “residential repaint and DIY business,” serving homeowners and painting contractors in the area. Sherwin-Williams is a national chain with stores around the United States including Pendleton, Kennewick, Pasco and Richland. In addition to its stores selling paints and stains, the company also provides

specialized coatings for industries, such as aerospace, railroads, marine, gas and oil, bridges, health care, food service and fire protection. Sherwin-Williams isn’t the only company sprucing up that section of North First Street. Panda Express is building a new restaurant two buildings down, at the former Stockman’s Steakhouse at 1530 N. First St., which is also set to open in December.

BRIEFLY

Career summit rounds up regional workers

PENDLETON — An upcoming regional event will provide employers across Eastern Oregon an opportunity to have access to the workforce. The Eastern Oregon Career Summit is Wednesday, Oct. 23 from noon to 6:30 p.m. at the Pendleton Convention Center, 1601 Westgate. Area employers are encouraged to reserve a table during the event by contacting WorkSource Oregon. There is no fee to participate. In addition to employer booths common at job fairs, there also will be a number of breakout sessions taught by workforce development professionals — some aimed at employers and others for job seekers, including a session by a nationally certified work ethic trainer using the “Bring your ‘A’ Game” work ethic curriculum. Held in conjunction with the career summit, Pendleton High School will host several guest speakers in the morning as part of Career Day. Students from Pilot Rock and Weston-McEwen also will be in attendance. All other high schools in the region have been invited to the Eastern Oregon Career Summit, making it the best place in Eastern Oregon to have access to the next generation of the workforce. Representatives from WorkSource Eastern Oregon, the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce, the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce and Eastern Oregon Business Source planned the event as a part of the Pendleton School to Careers program. To reserve a booth at the event, call 541-276-9050. For additional information, visit www.co.umatilla.or.us or search the Pendleton and Hermiston chamber websites.

Energy Trust heats up with incentive program

HERMISTON — The Energy Trust of Oregon recently teamed up with Hermiston’s Eastern Oregon Heating and Air Conditioning to offer reduced pricing on an energy-efficient heat pump upgrade. For a limited time, eligible consumers can save up to \$2,500 on qualified ductless heat pumps, and as much as \$3,000 on central heat pump systems. The upgrade can result in a 40-60% savings on heating and cooling costs. In addition, the system can improve indoor air quality, providing a safer and healthier home. There are no income qualifications required to take advantage of this offer. However, there are certain restrictions that apply. The offer, which expires Dec. 31, is available to homeowners in Hermis-

ton, Pendleton and the surrounding areas that have electric heat. It is not open to businesses. A nonprofit organization, the Energy Trust of Oregon is dedicated to assisting utility customers benefit from saving energy and generating renewable power. Its services, cash incentives and energy solutions have helped provide Oregonians across the state with savings on energy bills. Energy Trust of Oregon serves customers of Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, NW Natural, Cascade Natural Gas and Avista. They also have resources available to assist consumers in evaluating their home energy use, provide no-cost and low-cost tips and other system upgrades and cash incentive programs. For more information about the incentive program, call Eastern Oregon Heating and Air Conditioning at 541-567-3095 or visit www.easternoregonheating.com. For more about the Energy Trust of Oregon, visit www.energytrust.org. For questions, contact info@energytrust.org or 1-866-368-7878.

Find farms offering pumpkins, apples with Oregon’s Bounty

SALEM — Pumpkins, apples, pears, and squash are just a few examples of the favorites of fall harvest. If you want to venture out into the beautiful countryside and buy seasonal food directly from a farmer or rancher — where do you go? “Everyone knows where their local farmers market is, but not everyone knows where to find roadside farm stands, pumpkin patches, u-pick orchards, and harvest events. That’s where Oregon’s Bounty comes in,” said Anne Marie Moss, Oregon Farm Bureau communications director. Oregon’s Bounty at OregonFB.org is a searchable online directory of nearly 300 family farms and ranches that sell food and foliage directly to the public. The Oregon’s Bounty website allows visitors to search for a specific agriculture product — like pumpkins or apples — and/or search for farms within a specific region of the state, such as Eastern Oregon, Portland Metro, the Gorge or the Willamette Valley. Visitors can also do a search for “u-pick” or “events” to locate those activities. “Oregonians love farm-fresh food. Thanks to the diversity of Oregon agriculture, we can buy an enormous variety of fruits, vegetables, meat, nuts, flowers, and much more directly from the families who grew it,” Moss said.

— East Oregonian staff



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Dermatology-trained Nurse Practitioner