

EAST OREGONIAN

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144th Year, No. 84 **WINNER OF THE 2019 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD** \$1.50

UMATILLA RIVER FLOODING



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Jake Bartho uses a pitchfork to load flood debris into a wheelbarrow at Riverview Mobile Home Estates in Pendleton on Wednesday. Bartho was one of 20 people on a Two Rivers Correctional Institution inmate work crew that traveled to the park to help with flood relief.

Pitching in

Inmates from Two Rivers Correctional Institution aid in community recovery from flood

By **ALEX CASTLE**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The van went silent as Corrections Officer Wade Robertson drove himself and a crew of 10 inmates from Two Rivers Correctional Institution into Pendleton's Riverview Mobile Home Estates on Wednesday morning. "They were just appalled by the devastation," Robertson said. For the the rest of the week, two work crews consisting of 10 inmates each from TRCI are traveling from Umatilla to take part in cleanup efforts to recover from the devastation last week's floods dealt to the Pendleton trailer park. A heavy snowstorm in the

Blue Mountains last week, followed by two days of rain and warming temperatures, created the worst flooding in at least 30 years in the city of Pendleton and other smaller communities in the area. The Umatilla River crested at more than 19 feet on the night of Feb. 6 — nearly four times the average height for that date — during the worst of the flooding, and multiple rivers in the area set records for their water level. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown declared a state of emergency on Feb. 7 for Umatilla, Union, and Wallowa counties, which meant the Oregon National Guard could respond.

See Inmates, Page A7

VOLUNTEER-LED TEAM RUBICON RETURNS TO UMATILLA COUNTY

PENDLETON — Team Rubicon, a national nonprofit organization aimed at using disaster response as a means to reintegrate American military veterans back into civilian life, is on the ground in the region to help with flooding recovery efforts. According to the Umatilla Flood Joint Information Center, 40 volunteers are in Umatilla County with their priority being damage assessment. Once the assessment is complete more intense recovery work will begin. The operation is expected to last 14 days. Working in conjunction with state and local authorities, Team Rubicon volunteers will conduct site surveys and debris management in the homes in the communities affected by the recent flooding. Team Rubicon will help the county map the disaster, while also assisting with spontaneous volunteer management. Team Rubicon performs its services at no cost to those affected, thanks to the generosity of donors. "Team Rubicon volunteers responded to Umatilla County in April 2019 due to flooding. We are eager to return and begin assisting these communities immediately as our teams are ready to put their skills to work," said Stephanie Bishop, public information officer with Team Rubicon. "While volunteers are helping in Umatilla, there will also be additional volunteers in the Walla Walla, Washington, area doing recon to determine how to assist in their community."

— East Oregonian

Oregon's revenue picture improves

New outlook fuels heightened expectations for 2020 session

By **DIRK VANDERHART**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — Oregon's budget picture keeps looking up, as lawmakers debate a host of expensive priorities during the legislative session. Under a quarterly revenue forecast delivered by state economists on Wednesday morning, the state is now expected to top \$25 billion in the general fund and lottery revenue during the current budget biennium, which stretches from July 2019 to June 2021. The updated figure includes a \$183.4 million increase in the general fund and lottery resources over what economists predicted in December, and nearly \$675 million more than predicted last June. Those increases were largely driven by higher-than-estimated personal income and estate tax collections. The forecast marks only the latest dose of good news delivered by state economists, who have grown accustomed to sitting in front of lawmakers every three months to predict budgets that are cushier than originally expected. "We have had a consistent pattern of every time we come in front of you saying, 'More money, more money, more money,'" state economist Mark McMullen told lawmakers Wednesday. Also revealed in the new outlook: The "kicker" refund that will flow out to taxpayers this year is greater than initially thought — about \$1.7 billion instead of \$1.6 billion. The higher-than-expected forecasts, McMullen explained, were because of a fact of the Oregon economy of late. Job growth, output and other economic indicators have slowed, tempering economists' expectations. But the taxes that fuel state revenues — personal and corporate income taxes, the lottery, estate taxes, and other mechanisms — have continued to surge. As always, the tidings came with a warning: Oregon could see a slowdown in the future. Fears of



Brown



Baertschiger

Local businesses lend a hand in recovery effort

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — When disaster strikes, Joe S. Merritt thinks tow companies don't get their due. The owner of Frankie's Towing said his company originally responded to last week's flood at the request of the Pendleton Police Department, which Frankie's has a contract with. But after finishing the initial job, Frankie's stayed on the scene and continued to volunteer its time towing cars that stalled out while trying to drive through the floodwater. Merritt said that Frankie's ultimately ended up fishing seven cars out of the water, and transported a group of children to safety to boot. The effort to help Pendleton and the rest of Eastern Oregon recover from the Umatilla River flooding is being supported by scores of volunteers. But local businesses and organizations are also contributing to the recovery effort. McLaughlin Landscaping President Greg McLaughlin was taken aback by the damage the flood did. "It's almost surreal what is going on here," he said. Since the flood receded, McLaughlin said he's been sending small crews of workers out to Riverside each day to clear debris with heavy equipment. The company is donating its employees and resources for the cleanup, and McLaughlin admitted it's a balancing act trying to weigh the needs of the community with the needs of the business. But winter is the slow season for the landscaping industry.

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See Recovery, Page A7

See Revenue, Page A7

Hermiston honors distinguished citizens

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Amid tears, cheers and standing ovations, Hermiston honored some of its most giving citizens at the 50th annual Distinguished Citizens Awards. When it came time to accept their awards, however, most were reluctant to take any credit for themselves. Lou Lyons — Man of the Year — jokingly tried to duck backstage rather than make his way to the podium. Once he took the award, he thanked his employees at Elmer's Irrigation, many of whom have been with him since he pursued the business 27 years ago. "We're here, we're proud to support the community, and that's what we intend to do," he said. Lyons came to Hermiston in 1989 to work with the business's founder, Elmer Georgeson. Presenter Steve Frasier noted Lyons is a strong supporter of youth in the community, donating money and time to a long list of organizations. He provides 400 tickets each year for FFA students to see the Farm-City Pro Rodeo, sponsors the calf-dressing contest, purchase multiple 4-H and FFA animals at the auction each year, and donated much of the irrigation equipment used to support the Umatilla County Fair. "They say if you fly the flag, you'd better walk the walk, and the flag he flies says, 'I care about youth,'" Frasier said. Awards at the banquet are always kept a secret ahead of time, but Woman of the Year Cindy Meyers was especially shocked. As a Hermiston Chamber of Commerce ambassador, she would normally be in the loop on who the chamber was giving awards to, but had been given a fake name.

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Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Lou Lyons delivers an acceptance speech after winning the Man of the Year Award at the 50th annual Distinguished Citizens Awards in Hermiston on Wednesday night.

See Awards, Page A7