

School districts prepare to welcome back students

Some students could return in Milton-Freewater as soon as Jan. 11

By JEREMY BURNHAM
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin



Duff

Quaresma

In Milton-Freewater, some changes could occur as soon as Monday, Jan. 11.

Superintendent Aaron Duff said in his letter the district hopes to return to limited in-person instruction on that date.

Limited in-person instruction allows small groups of students to attend classes for no more than two hours a day. It is meant for students who have special needs or who cannot access their online education.

The Milton-Freewater district used limited in-person instruction this fall until an increased rate of COVID-19 cases in the county required the district to revert to distance learning.

Duff also said in his letter that — pending a school



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Gib Olinger Elementary School and others in the Milton-Freewater and Athena-Weston districts might soon return for in-person learning.

board meeting on Jan. 11 — all K-12 students could transition to a hybrid schedule by Feb. 16.

“The District will do its best to communicate with staff and families in a timely manner,” Duff wrote, “but

please keep in mind that we are making decisions with the most current information we have, which can and has changed on a dime.”

Athena-Weston Superintendent Laure Quaresma said in her letter that her dis-

trict will continue offering a distance-learning option for families who wish it. She said the district is currently figuring out how many families want their students to return to the classroom so a plan can be made.

Quaresma told the *Union-Bulletin* on Tuesday, Jan. 5, that a target date has yet been set for in-person instruction to resume, but that more will be known after the school board meeting on Jan. 7.

‘Stop the steal’ rally at Roy Raley Park



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

About half a dozen protesters gathered on the sidewalk at Roy Raley Park in Pendleton on Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2021, for a “stop the steal” rally in support of President Donald Trump. The group said they came out to protest in support of protesters in Washington, D.C., and in opposition of alleged voter fraud.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Pendleton School Board announces retirements

PENDLETON — Come this summer, nearly half of the Pendleton School District Board will consist of new faces.

At a Jan. 6 school board meeting, Chair Debbie McBee announced that she and board members Gary George and Steve Umbarger intended to retire from the board at the end of their terms expiring in June.

The retirements will open three seats on the seven-person school board, and McBee encouraged her colleagues to solicit interest among district residents in running for the seats.

The school board is losing its most experienced members: McBee was first elected in 2009 while Umbarger was appointed in 2010 before he was elected to fill the rest of the term in 2011.

George was appointed in 2016 and went on to win his single term unopposed the following year. George, the CEO of Wildhorse Resort & Casino, is the only school board member who is also an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

McBee said she’s already spoken with some people who are interested in running for one of the seats. Although each seat is designated a numbered “position,” all the seats are elected on an at-large basis, meaning anyone who lives in the Pendleton School District can run for the seat regardless of where they live.

The deadline for school board candidates to file for the May 18 election is March 18.

Port of Morrow announces internships

BOARDMAN — The Port of Morrow, in partnership with regional industries, is announcing more than 50 summer internships available for the summer 2021 season. Prospective interns can choose from a diverse set of opportunities that include farming, food processing, education, business, information technology, work-

force development and more.

Columbia Works was established to link regional employers with high school and college students who are looking to gain experience in their prospective career field. Columbia Works is part of the Oregon Works network that has seen success in different regions across the state. Initially designed by the McMinnville Economic Development Partnership, the model has been adapted to fit Morrow County business needs.

“We are excited to see continued growth of our summer internship program,” said Kalie Davis, workforce training manager at the Port of Morrow, in a press release. “We are fortunate to have so many businesses that see the value in providing internship opportunities.”

Columbia Works is promoting internship opportunities from 13 employers this year. The positions are listed online at www.columbiaworks.org. The application period is open through April 1.

Umatilla County reports 58th COVID-19 death

PENDLETON — The Umatilla County Health Department announced the county’s 58th COVID-19 death in a Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2021, press release.

The victim is a 94-year-old male who tested positive Nov. 29 and died Dec. 29 at Sun Ridge Retirement Community in Pendleton. This individual had underlying medical conditions, according to the press release.

The announcement comes as the health department reported 50 new cases on Wednesday, Jan. 6, and 75 new cases on Jan. 5, bringing the county’s total to 5,988 total cases reported in the county, according to the Umatilla County COVID-19 dashboard.

Morrow County reported one new case on Jan. 6 and seven new cases on Jan. 5, bringing its total to 8501 cases, according to the Morrow County COVID-19 dashboard. Morrow County has had eight deaths since the pandemic started early in 2020.

—EO Media Group

New UCFD1 fire station operational

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Umatilla County Fire District No. 1 has opened up a new fire station east of Hat Rock State Park.

Known as Station 25, or the Hawman station, it holds three fire trucks and will assist in the fire district’s coverage of the Hat Rock community, which was annexed into the district in May 2020, and surrounding areas.

Fire Chief Scott Stanton said the new station will put about 95% of UCFD’s district within five miles of a station. He said it will not only be of benefit for a quicker response during fires, but property owners in Hat Rock and surrounding areas should save “a lot of money” on home insurance premiums with



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

The new Umatilla County Fire District #1 Station 25 is at Highway 37 and Walls Road east of Hat Rock State Park.

a much lower ISO rating, which insurers use to determine a fire district’s ability to prevent or suppress fires on a property.

Usually fire districts ask voters to pass a bond for a new fire station, but in this

case, the district partnered with Hawman Farms.

Stanton said Mike Hawman, who is a director on the fire district’s board, offered to lease ground on his farm to the district for \$1 per year and to pay for the building of

the new station up front. The district will then purchase the building — which Stanton said was about \$460,000 — from Hawman, allowing it to make payments over time.

The station is located at the intersection of Highway 37 and Walls Road. Stanton said after the district’s 2019 purchase of two new engines, that freed up other engines for Station 25. The station won’t be regularly staffed by paid UCFD personnel, but Stanton said they are recruiting volunteers for it.

He said the district always needs new volunteer firefighters, wherever those volunteers may live within the district.

“Our volunteers are down and calls continue to go up, so we’re always looking for help,” he said.

City delays vote on sidewalk stamps

Technical mistake with draft ordinance forces Pendleton to push decision back

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — A technical mistake meant the Pendleton City Council had to postpone a decision on an ordinance that would prohibit further preservation of historical sidewalk stamps.

Shortly after the Jan. 6 meeting began, City Manager Robb Corbett said the draft

ordinance failed to make an important distinction.

Corbett said the ordinance is meant to alter the rules around the preservation of historical monuments, but the proposal needed to distinguish between historical monuments and survey monuments, a marker set by a surveyor to mark a property or land line.

The sidewalk stamps — a series of historical etchings in the sidewalk that spell out the city’s old street names — rose to prominence after the Pendleton Historic Preservation Commission decided to reinstall or restamp a series of stamps that featured the

names of four Confederate figures: Jefferson Davis, P.G.T. Beauregard, Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee.

In November 2020, resident Joshua Walker broke the Davis stamp in half and nailed a pro-Black Lives Matter sign to it as an act of protest. He was later cited for criminal mischief, and his arraignment in Pendleton Municipal Court is slated for Feb. 24.

Mayor John Turner soon ordered city staff halt reinstallation of the stamps, saying the city had been inconsistent in preserving previous sidewalk stamps. The ordinance was an attempt to pre-

vent future sidewalk stamp preservation, although the four stamps that were along Southeast Byers Avenue are the only known stamps that reference the Confederacy.

Briana Spencer was among a group of residents who encouraged the council to encourage the stamps at a previous meeting, and she was in the audience in the Jan. 6 meeting. Mayor John Turner apologized to her, adding that staff hadn’t discovered the error until a few hours before the meeting, too late to revise the draft ahead of the vote.

The council’s next meeting is scheduled for Jan. 19.

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