

Class 2A: City will get newer \$85,000 portable basketball floor

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has happened over the past year, I think folks were hoping that by having the event it meant there may be a small bit of normalcy returning.”

The Chamber of Commerce puts on an impressive event every year, but Rosenberg said they have plenty of help.

“Like all events that happen in Pendleton, it takes great coordination with numerous agencies helping,” she said. “For the chamber, in particular, we work with Altrusa, VFW, OSAA, Pendleton Convention Center, Pendleton Downtown Association, chamber ambassadors, not to mention the many restaurants and individual volunteers.”

The OSAA takes note of every detail.

“It’s a fantastic place to go,” Welch said. “Each team has a host family, they take care of the media, coaches and officials. At the bigger school tournaments, it’s just a game. Here, it’s a championship. People want to go watch the games because they are basketball junkies. I want to go back to Pendleton every year.”

Among the eateries that see a brisk business during the tournament is Dairy Queen Grill & Chill, which is across the parking lot from the convention center. It typically has a line out the door during the tournament. This year, it’s just another day of the week.

“We would absolutely be busy,” DQ owner Trevor Moon



A crowd fills the Pendleton Convention Center on March 6, 2020, for the Oregon School Activities Association 2A State Basketball Tournament.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

said. “We would order heavy — you could bank on it being a good day every day the tournament was there.”

While some orders were just a few dollars, it was the team orders that kept the burgers on the grill.

“The biggest order I have ever seen was for a team with a \$200 ticket,” said Moon, who has owned the establishment for five years. “We count on those days.”

Amy Madden, owner of Roosters Country Kitchen, typically sees a generous uptick in business during tournament week.

“I always give the coaches a welcome gift of a book or coffee mug,” Madden said, “and a gift certificate for the team if they chose to eat with us. I do miss them. It was the last thing we had last year before we got shut down.”

While the extra business

is nice, Madden also enjoys meeting the people.

“I have 30-somethings come through who say they ate here when they played in the tournament,” she said. “The kids are amazing — they are excited to come to Pendleton. It’s fun to treat them well.”

A long road to recovery

Pendleton has faced a tough year with the cancellation of Bike Week, Whisky Fest, the

Pendleton Round-Up, and now the basketball tournament.

The city also has lost businesses that weren’t able to survive the months of being shut down.

Beard said the convention center has lost 160 events since March 16, 2020.

“When the building is empty, there are still utilities,” he said. “If there is an event, we have to have staff. It’s the Convention Center’s job to

bring people to Pendleton. My job is to bring events to Pendleton to fill hotels and restaurants.”

Rosenberg said there is no easy fix for the loss of revenue as a result of state COVID-19 restrictions.

“It’s going to take years to truly be able to put a number to what our community has lost,” Rosenberg said. “I can tell you, if we are unable to move forward and have some of these events that are such a huge economic driver for the whole area, Pendleton will look a lot different this time next year.”

Somewhat of a silver lining

While there is a lack of basketball being played at the convention center, the building is getting a new floor.

The center’s old portable basketball court — formerly property of the Phoenix Suns — was 25 years old and had several dead spots.

The city traded in the floor for a newer one that was used by an NBA Development League team from Texas. The floor is being refinished and will sport a couple of well-known logos. The new court, which should be ready in two weeks, has a price tag of \$85,000.

“The Pendleton Round-Up and Happy Canyon have been instrumental in helping get the new court,” Beard said. “Their logos will be on the floor, as well as other sponsors.”

Class 1A:

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“I feel lost,” Kathy Taylor said on Tuesday morning, March 2. “It’s like there’s something I’m supposed to be doing but I’m not.”

Taylor said the Oregon School Activities Association, which oversees prep sports in the state, told her in December 2020 the tournaments wouldn’t happen in 2021.

An OSAA official said, however, the organization has no plan to move the tournaments from Baker City.

And Taylor wants nothing more than to return to her usual hectic introduction to March in 2022.

“I’m hoping we get back to some semblance of what we call normal,” she said.

A year ago, the situation seemed normal only with the benefit of hindsight.

The 2020 Class 1A tournaments took place as scheduled from March 4-7 (as did the Class 2A events in Pendleton, and the Class 3A tournaments in North Bend).

But the pandemic, though scarcely begun, had an effect.

Portable handwashing stations were set up outside the BHS gym. The Baker School District used a misting system to disinfect the gym and other

parts of the high school each day. Yet, the tournaments happened.

Crane nipped St. Paul, 45-41, to capture the girls state title the night of March 7, 2020.

On the boys side, Triad beat Damascus Christian 58-56 for the boys championship a few hours later in the usual raucous atmosphere in the BHS gym.

“It seems like ages ago,” Taylor said of the 2020 tournaments. “We were fortunate. The community came together really well to make it happen.”

Less than a week later, high school sports in Oregon were postponed. Later, they were canceled for the rest of the spring.

The Baker girls basketball team was unable to defend its 2019 Class 4A state title.

And now, almost a year later, the pandemic continues to thwart traditions across the state.

Taylor said the absence of the tournaments affects Baker City in multiple ways. The economic losses are the most obvious.

Taylor said the 2020 tournaments drew about 9,500 spectators over the four days.

As always, a significant percentage of those fans were visiting Baker City, staying in local motels, dining at local restaurants and shopping at local stores.

But as a longtime volun-

teer, and now co-director, Taylor said she also feels a personal sense of loss.

She will miss seeing some of the people from across Oregon that she has come to know over the years.

“There are relationships that have been built,” Taylor said. “You’ve watched these kids grow up, it’s like family when they come back (for the tournaments). That personal connection has been lost.”

Taylor likens the situation to one that so many people have faced over the past year.

“It’s like losing contact with your grandchildren,” she said. “It’s like a big family reunion, and it didn’t happen this year.”

The cancellation of this year’s tournament won’t have a major financial effect on Baker County Tournaments, Taylor said, because the OSAA makes an annual payment to cover the tournament costs.

All the workers, with the exception of scorekeepers, are volunteers, Taylor said.

She’s optimistic the 2022 tournaments not only will happen, but will attract larger crowds than usual because spectators are so excited to be able to watch high school basketball again.

“I think there will be so much enthusiasm to follow the kids,” Taylor said.

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