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California company pitches electric scooters

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — A Los Angeles-area company has been pitching small-town America on adopting its electric scooter program, and Pendleton is its next target.

At a Tuesday, March 9, workshop, Michael Covato of Bird, a Santa Monica, California, “micromobility” company, fielded numerous questions from the Pendleton City Council as it prepares to vote on an ordinance allowing Bird’s scooters on city streets and the Pendleton River Parkway.

While Bird has been in large metro areas for years, Covato told the council that the company has been looking to expand its presence across the globe. He said one of the reasons Bird was interested in Pendleton was because of its demographics and its “phenomenal grid structure” in the city’s core.

“I don’t think we’ll be competing with the Los Angeleses of the world, but I don’t think we need to,” he said.

A cursory Google search shows that Bird has been soliciting its services to rural and suburban towns across the country, many of them with populations under 50,000 people. If the council gives Bird the green light, Pendleton would join Hermiston, which has already launched the company’s scooters.

Pending council approval, Bird intends to introduce as many as 55 scooters in April at no charge to the city. Covato said Bird would partner with a local business or organization to act as a “fleet manager” for its scooters. In exchange for a cut of the scooter rental revenue, the manager would oversee the program locally and resolve any issues with the scooters.

All customer interactions with the scooter — locating a scooter, payment, activation and deactivation — will be handled by a downloadable cellphone app.

Covato also fielded numerous questions about the safety of the scooters and how they would integrate into existing traffic.

Across several answers, Covato said all riders will be required to view a safety tutorial before operating the scooters. When operating a scooter, a rider will also be required to wear a helmet and avoid driving on the sidewalks.

See Scooters, Page A8



Analie Carnes, dancing the lead role of Clara, admires her gift of “The Nutcracker” during a performance at the Heritage Station Museum amphitheater.

EmmaLee Demianew/Contributed Photo

The show must go on

Complications with COVID-19 forced annual holiday production to adapt

By TAMMY MALGESINI
For the East Oregonian

PENDLETON — In the midst of a global pandemic, Julie Sneden-Carlson used creativity in presenting “The Nutcracker” in its 13th holiday season in Pendleton. Anticipating things would be different for the popular production, the owner of Pendleton Ballet Theatre began planning early.

However, because of ever-changing restrictions with the coronavirus, by the time the holiday season was being ushered in, Sneden-Carlson had gone from Plan B to Plan C, with multiple changes on the fly. The end result was the creation of a DVD featuring costumed dancers clad in sparkly face masks and white canvas tennis shoes accented with sparkles.

Sneden-Carlson brainstormed with



Steve Machajewski serves dancers from “Grandmother Ginger” a gift of sipping chocolate from Alexander’s Artisan Chocolates and Vino Bistro.

Amanda Sauer/Contributed Photo

Shannon Gruenhagen, marketing and tour coordinator at Heritage Station Museum. Because of restrictions on indoor gatherings, rather than staging the production in the Bob Clapp Theatre at Blue Mountain Community

College, Sneden-Carlson made some changes and was looking at presenting “The History of The Nutcracker, Clara’s Magical Journey” at the museum.

Walking through the building, they found ways to integrate each piece into a living history lesson, Gruenhagen said. The two women planned out five different locations within the museum, turning the performance into one that had the audience traveling to the different sets. Local musicians and actors Bill Mayclin and Murray Dunlap agreed to highlight the historical aspect and serve as tour guides, with “dance moms” narrating the story changes, Sneden-Carlson said.

The collaborative effort between the museum and Pendleton Ballet Theatre, Gruenhagen said, provided a wonderful way to connect with the community, fulfilled a

See Nutcracker, Page A8

Former motel to get new role

The Whiskey Inn to become homeless facility thanks to \$1.3 million grant

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Superficially, the future of The Whiskey Inn doesn’t look promising.

The former motel’s sign featuring a cowboy slumped against a post is turned inside out. Whatever visual evidence the empty parking lot offers is confirmed by a sign at the entrance that states the motel is “permanently closed.”

But by the end of March, the 35-room motel, situated at 205 S.E. Dorion Ave., will be reborn as a facility that will serve the unhoused, a first of its kind in Eastern Oregon.

On Wednesday, March 10, the Oregon Community Foundation announced it was granting the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon a \$1.3 million grant to purchase the former motel and turn it into a facility that will offer temporary housing to local homeless residents.

CAPECO CEO Paula Hall said she was both excited and a little overwhelmed to receive the grant, which the foundation

See Motel, Page A8



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

The former The Whiskey Inn site, located at 205 S.E. Dorion Ave., has been purchased by the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon with the help of a \$1.3 million grant from the Oregon Community Foundation. CAPECO intends to repurpose the site for transitional housing for the homeless.

Morrow County moved to lower risk

County one of 13 lowered in state’s latest assessment of COVID-19 risks

By BRYCE DOLE
East Oregonian

SALEM — Morrow County has been lowered from the moderate coronavirus risk category to lower risk, allowing restaurants, fitness and entertainment facilities to open at greater capacities, according to a press release from Gov. Kate Brown’s office on Tuesday, March 9.

The move comes as the county continues to see rela-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Irelynn Kollman serves up a pair of cookies to go at Breaking Grounds Coffee in Heppner on Feb. 19, 2021. Morrow County has been lowered from moderate coronavirus risk category to lower risk, allowing a variety of businesses to open at greater capacities.

tively low case counts, with 33 confirmed and presumptive cases reported between

Feb. 14 and 27, according to data from the Oregon Health Authority. The state looks

at a county’s case count or testing positivity rate over a recent two-week period to determine what its risk level should be.

“We’re just really excited to see our numbers get down to the point where we can celebrate the hard work that all the citizens have done,” Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay said.

The new levels go into effect on Friday, March 12. Morrow County was one of 13 counties lowered in the state’s latest assessment of COVID-19 risks on March 9,



Lindsay

showing positive signs that the state is making strides toward overcoming the pandemic.

“We are largely seeing case rates decline across the state, with the most counties in the Lower Risk level since the framework was introduced in November,” Gov. Kate Brown said in a press release. “I encourage all Oregonians to keep it up and to get your vaccine when it’s available to you.”

Almost all the counties that were lowered in the state’s risk category are located east of the Cascades,

See Virus, Page A8

