

Meyer Distributing building new warehouse in Hermiston

Company expects to hire as many as 100 employees

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — A new warehouse starting construction in Hermiston is expected to produce 100 new jobs once it is completed later this year.

Meyer Distributing, a distribution company headquartered in Jasper, Indiana, received a building permit from the city of Hermiston in March to begin work on a new \$11 million warehouse. Meyer Distributing Chief Executive Officer Jeff Braun said he expects the warehouse to begin opera-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Meyer Distributing, a distribution company headquartered in Jasper, Indiana, plans to construct a new \$11 million warehouse at this site located at 975 E. Penney Ave. in Hermiston.

tions in December.

According to its website, the family-owned company is “a leader in specialty products marketing and distribution” and uses strategically placed warehouses around the country to distribute auto parts, sanitation supplies and lifestyle products.

After the Hermiston warehouse opens near the end of 2021, Braun said the company expects to hire between 75 and 100 people by the end of 2022. He said starting wages for all positions will be at least \$15 an hour, and the company will likely begin hiring in November.

The Hermiston warehouse will house inventory ready to be shipped

to customers in the region. Braun said the building will be more than 169,000 square feet, and the building permit filed with the city values it more than \$11.1 million.

The facility will be located be at 975 E. Penney Ave. in Hermiston’s southern industrial area, about one-half mile west of Ranch & Home.

Braun said the company’s Indiana headquarters has a population of approximately 16,000 people in a county with a population of about 43,000 people.

“We are aware of how important an impact a company like ours can have on the local community and look forward to being a good partner with the city and its citizens,” he said in an email.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Umatilla County reports one new COVID-19 death

PENDLETON — Umatilla County Public Health announced one new COVID-19-related death, according to a press release.

Umatilla County’s 83rd death with COVID-19 is a 47-year-old male who tested positive on Feb. 2 and died on Saturday, April 3, at Legacy Emanuel Medical Center in Portland, according to the press release. The individual had underlying conditions.

Man arrested after fighting police officer

HERMISTON — A man who fought a police officer in Hermiston on Monday, April 5, was arrested on charges of disorderly conduct, resisting arrest and assaulting a public safety officer, according to Oregon State Police records.

The man was arrested, according to records, after he was tased.

Ramon Viesca, 30, of Umatilla, was stopped by an officer for walking in the road and “causing a hazard” around 6 p.m. on West Robnett Street. The officer, Josiah Smith, told Viesca to get out of the road, though he initially did not listen, according to records.

Smith attempted to stop Viesca and a fight broke out between them. Smith then tased Viesca, who was arrested and later booked in the Umatilla County Jail, according to records.

CTUIR expands vaccinations to all county residents

MISSION — In an unprecedented move, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation is opening up its next COVID-19 vaccine clinic to all Umatilla County residents.

According to a Tuesday, April 6, announcement, the CTUIR is expanding eligibility for its Monday, April 12, and Tuesday, April 13, clinics at the Wildhorse Resort & Casino to all county residents 16 and older.

The tribes have enough doses to vaccinate 1,755 people, but the CTUIR had initially targeted tribal members, tribal employees, non-tribal reservation residents, Blue Mountain Community College students and staff, local school district students and staff, restaurant workers and grocery store workers for its April 12-13 clinics. The CTUIR has made an effort to vaccinate non-tribal employees since February, but this is the first time the tribes have made county residency the only requirement.

The Tribes made their announcement on the same day Gov. Kate Brown announced all Oregon adults would be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine on April 19.

While every adult Oregonian will soon be eligible for the vaccine, Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said there’s an advantage to the Tribes

expanding vaccine eligibility. Instead of the Moderna vaccine, which most of the state uses and is only approved for ages 18 and up, the Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center uses the Pfizer vaccine, which people as young as 16 can receive.

Umatilla County residents can make an appointment for the clinics at Wildhorse by calling 541-240-8733. The second shot will be administered during a second series of clinics on May 3-4.

Blood drives planned for April

PENDLETON — The American Red Cross is urging healthy individuals to celebrate National Volunteer Month in April by donating lifesaving blood, platelets and plasma.

Type-O blood is particularly needed to continue to meet patient needs, according to a news release. Blood donors are currently being tested for COVID-19 antibodies as well, and plasma with high levels of antibodies may be used as treatment for COVID-19 patients. People who are showing symptoms or may be actively ill with COVID-19 should not show up to donate, however.

Volunteers can schedule a donation appointment by downloading the Red Cross Blood Donor App, visiting RedCrossBlood.org, calling 1-800-RED CROSS (800-733-2767) or enabling the Blood Donor Skill on any Alexa Echo device. As a special thank you, those who give before April 30 will be entered for a chance to win one of five \$1,000 gift cards.

Upcoming local donation opportunities include:

- **Monday, April 19**, from 12:30-5:30 p.m., Our Lady of Angels Catholic Church, 565 W. Hermiston Ave. in Hermiston
- **Monday, April 12**, from 12-6 p.m., St. Anthony Hospital, 2801 St. Anthony Way in Pendleton
- **Tuesday, April 13**, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Peace Lutheran Church, 210 N.W. Ninth St. in Pendleton
- **Tuesday, April 20**, from 12-5:30 p.m., Veterans of Foreign Wars, 1221 S.E. Court Place in Pendleton.

Lexington airport receives grant funds

LEXINGTON — The Lexington Airport received \$452,000 from the Federal Aviation Administration as part of a grant intended to improve airports statewide, according to a press release from the offices of U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley.

The grants provided 16 Oregon airports with about \$10.3 million to prepare for winter weather, repair runways, improve guidance systems and perimeter fencing, and make other improvements.

Lexington Airport received funds to install a guidance system for the runway and improve the airport’s pavement.

for commerce that supports local jobs as well as for quality of life,” Wyden said. “The importance of federal investments in infrastructure like these local airports is especially crucial when Oregon small businesses and families are working hard to weather the economic fallout from this public health crisis.”

Airports that received the funding are located in Florence, Baker City, Medford, Portland, Lexington, Chiloquin, Ontario, Creswell, Cottage Grove, Siletz Bay, Burns, Coos County, Aurora, Gold Beach, Mulino and Independence.

Cascade Natural Gas offers relief grants for customers

KENNEWICK, Wash. — Cascade Natural Gas is offering a debt relief program for residential customers whose bills are past due because of financial hardship.

According to a news release, the Oregon Public Utilities Commission approved the program, known as the Big Heart Grant, on March 25.

One option, the Automatic Hardship Grant, is designed for customers with a history of receiving low-income assistance on their utility bills. They can automatically receive a one-time grant for the amount of their total past due balance, up to \$1,500.

The Financial Hardship Grant is for customers who have not received energy assistance in the past two years but are currently experiencing financial hardship. A grant of up to \$1,500 will be applied to the customer’s past due balance, calculated by household size, income and account balance.

For information, or to apply for a grant, call Cascade Natural Gas at 1-888-522-1130.

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District gets moving on multiple construction projects this spring

East Oregonian

PILOT ROCK — The Pilot Rock School District is beginning multiple construction projects in the next few months.

The district will soon break ground on a seismic project as well as starting its bond projects.

“We are really excited to get the dirt moving and see progress on all of these great projects,” Pilot Rock School District Superintendent Troy Jerome said. The seismic project at the high school was made possible with a seismic grant awarded by the state of Oregon for more than \$2.4 million in spring 2019.

The bond projects are


funded through a General Obligation Bond passed by Pilot Rock voters last November. The \$12 million bond will fund a variety of projects, including school safety, deferred maintenance and a new gym.

“We are very, very thankful for the support of our voters in passing the bond and making it possible for so many improvements that will benefit future Pilot Rock students,” Jerome said.

In early March, the school district sold the bonds at a favorable rate and will have about \$350,000 more for bond projects than originally budgeted. According to Amanda Lapp,

the district’s business manager, the district was able to shorten the life of the bond’s debt service by four years and remain stable with the dollar amount per \$1,000, with a slight decrease over the life of the bond.

The district is working with three companies on the seismic and bond projects — McCormack Construction as the contractor, Straightline Architecture as the architect and ZCS Engineering and Architecture for the seismic projects. Jerome said having all of the companies work together is advantageous for timelines and the potential for cost savings.



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