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# EAST OREGONIAN

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## BMCC makes changes amid layoffs

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — When a new president takes over Blue Mountain Community College later this year, they will inherit a very different institution than the one that belonged to their predecessor.



Green

At a Wednesday, April 16, workshop, interim BMCC President Connie Green updated a Zoom audience that neared 50 people about the 2021-22 budget. The new fiscal year would not only bring more layoffs, but a complete overhaul of the college's administrative structure.

In an interview, Green said she identified issues with the college's

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## Natural gas energy project abandoned

Perennial Power Holdings ceases construction of plant

By JADE MCDOWELL AND  
BRYCE DOLE  
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Perennial Power Holdings has abandoned plans to build a natural gas power plant outside of Hermiston amid litigation brought by environmental groups.

Columbia Riverkeeper and Friends of the Columbia Gorge announced on Tuesday, April 15, that counsel for the Perennial Wind Chaser Station, a proposed 415-megawatt natural gas power plant, sent an email to the Mult-

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### EO SPOTLIGHT

# Curated with care

Oregon nonprofit provides CTUIR with healthy, sustainable food during pandemic

By SHANE HOFFMANN  
For the East Oregonian

**M**ISSION — On a frigid February morning, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation held its twice-monthly food distribution. With sheets of snow blanketing the ground from a recent snowstorm, members of the reservation worked hand-in-hand with distribution drivers from The Wave Foundation, a Portland nonprofit sustainability coalition that helps provide communities like the reservation with healthy and sustainable food options during the pandemic.

Motown and rock 'n' roll oldies emanated from a StreetHopper Bluetooth speaker with an 8-inch woofer. Wave distribution workers, community members and high schoolers from the reservation clad in jackets, gloves, hats and scarves danced through various jobs, trying to stay warm amid brisk winds.

Kathleen Elliott, the workforce development/BOLSTER Program coordinator for the Tribes, said she danced partly out of necessity.

"It was cold, I needed to stay warm," she said.

But her expressive movements weren't simply the outcome of chilly weather, but rather a joyful experience, one which brings the community together.

"The Wave has been a godsend to us," she said.

#### Worrisome trends

According to a report from Oregon State University, in 2020 an estimated 1 million Oregonians, nearly 25%, experienced food insecurity — defined as an individual who "had a disruption in their ability to feed themselves or their family." The percentage has greatly increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, up from just 10% in 2019.



The Wave Foundation/Contributed Photo

The contents of a The Wave Foundation Food Box handed out on March 18, 2021, in Mission, include SBABC Enterprises ground buffalo (purchased from a Shoshone Bannock Tribal member), Red Lake Nation Foods Syrup (a Native-owned company), Cuties clementines, mushrooms, Romaine lettuce, Brussels sprouts and cauliflower.

While the U.S. Department of Agriculture conducts its annual food security surveys in December of each year, the data aren't presented to the public until nine months after, once the numbers have been analyzed. Without the USDA's data, Mark Edwards — an OSU professor who has studied food insecurity for more than 20 years and published the report — branched out to other avenues in order to portray the fallout from COVID-19 in a more timely way.

Edwards turned his attention to tracking the food insecurity rate of people applying for unemployment. He found that a large percentage of those applying stemmed from jobs predominantly held by minorities. Edwards says historically the number of food insecure Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Indigenous individuals tended to be twice that of white individuals. His study was no different. The report finds BIPOC households have been disproportionately affected, leading to a food insecurity rate

that is two to three times higher than for white Oregonians.

"One of the bigger surprises for me has been in some ways the shift in our thinking that had to have happened," Edwards said. "It's not just emergency food. There are a lot of people who are suddenly in an emergency because of COVID-19, but before that there were a lot of people that were chronically without food."

Founded in spring 2020 in response to the growing issue of food insecurity during the pandemic, the USDA's Farmers to Families Food Box Program partners with local businesses, primarily farms, buying their food before distributing it back to the community through organizations, such as food banks and other charities.

The program has distributed more than 100 million boxes since the start of the pandemic, but with its widespread nature, the boxes sometimes contain items that either clash with a community's cultural needs or dietary preferences. A glut of dairy items sent

to a community with high rates of lactose intolerant individuals; packages of red meats and pork that may conflict with religious ideologies; a lack of nutritious produce options.

"Sometimes food goes into the pipeline that can't be controlled on down," Edwards said. "At times, there hasn't been great coordination to figure out, 'Well, what food needs to show up here in this or that community?' It was just, 'Hey, here's what we've got,' which has often been the way we deal with commodity, excess foods."

The Wave is working to retool the program in order to better serve community needs. Instead of implementing a top-down system, The Wave works with communities, customizing boxes to better match necessity and preference with sustainably sourced items. In doing so, the coalition has partnered with BIPOC communities and businesses to create more resilient and equitable food chains.

#### From the ground up

In January 2020, The Wave's co-founder, Justin Zeulner, and a small group of associates and close friends decided to stake their claim in the world of sustainability. Zeulner, who had worked in the sustainability industry for years with several businesses, including the Portland Trail Blazers, began networking and constructing his team. The Wave's team featured individuals from a variety of backgrounds, including commercial fishermen, climate advocates and chefs.

Zeulner and his team worked to reel in stakeholding businesses and federal grants, all the while receiving donations from private philanthropies to get the coalition up and running. Zeulner says The Wave's blueprint and plan was vast — tackle the issue of sustainability with a furthered focus on public health and social justice.

"It became evident, extremely fast, that remote communities, specifically tribal nation communities, are always underserved," Zeulner said. "The pandemic shone the spotlight on big gaps that we have in this country, that being one of them."

The Wave's first big project centered around implementing

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Volunteers hand out USDA food boxes, The Wave Foundation food boxes and bottled water, as well as other items donated to or purchased by the CTUIR during a distribution event in Mission on Dec. 30, 2020. The Wave Foundation/Contributed Photo

## COVID-19 NUMBERS IN UMATILLA COUNTY

TOTALS FOR WEEK ENDING 4/15/21



|                        |                           |    |                 |    |                      |                    |      |                    |    |
|------------------------|---------------------------|----|-----------------|----|----------------------|--------------------|------|--------------------|----|
| RISK LEVEL<br>MODERATE | NEW CASES<br>OVER 2 WEEKS | 75 | TOTAL CASE GOAL | 40 | OR LESS OVER 2 WEEKS | POSITIVE TEST RATE | 2.8% | POSITIVE TEST GOAL | 5% |
|------------------------|---------------------------|----|-----------------|----|----------------------|--------------------|------|--------------------|----|

