

BMCC: Kim Puzey has been on the board for 25 years

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accepted into a registered nursing program when she decided to move closer to her father's side of the family in Eastern Oregon. Upon arriving, she learned that her credits wouldn't transfer, spurring feelings of discouragement.

She began taking classes at community college again, including a stint at BMCC, before transferring to Portland State University to study health studies and community health education.

She excelled in the classroom, completing her bachelor's degree in less than a year-and-a-half, but she was also a single mother who was struggling without family nearby.

After getting behind the wheel after spending some time at a local bar, Sampson-Samuels was charged with DUI in 2010. After attending a diversion program, the charges were dropped. Additionally, she checked into an outpatient program from the Native American Rehabilitation Association, a decision she credited in helping her grow long term.

"It was a really bad decision and it was a really bad outcome at the time," she said. "I felt like everything was crumbling down on me. But it was a really good learning opportunity for me. I started crawling out of a hole, a cycle, that had affected me my whole life."

Sampson-Samuels eventually returned home to work as an administrator for the Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center and has since moved on to working for the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board, a remote job that allows her to stay in Pendleton.

Sampson-Samuels said she decided to run for the BMCC board because she wanted to make the college a destination for everyone, regardless of their age, race or gender.

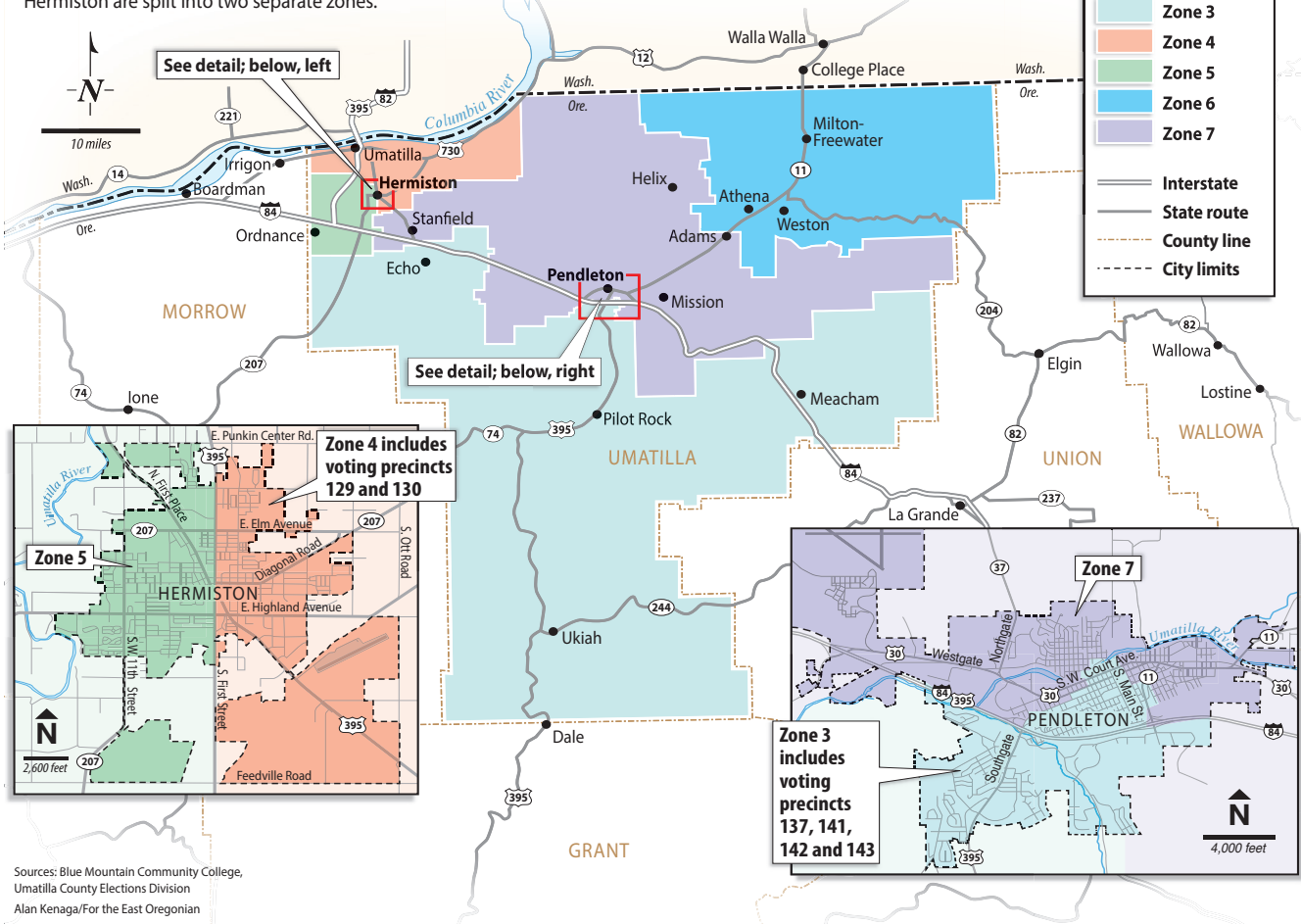
"(We should) build on its current strengths, make it a destination, make it a college people want to attend and not just because it's the only option."

Given BMCC's enrollment crunch, Sampson-Samuels said the college could send out a survey to local high schoolers and other prospective students to gauge which classes they want to see.

As a way of being more inclusive toward the college's

BMCC Board of Education zone map

Umatilla County holds five out of the seven zones on the Blue Mountain Community College Board of Education, but only zones 3, 4 and 6 will be up for election on May 18. Both Pendleton and Hermiston are split into two separate zones.



Sources: Blue Mountain Community College, Umatilla County Elections Division, Alan Kenaga/For the East Oregonian

American Indian students, Sampson-Samuels said the board could meet with the Tribes' Board of Trustees and maybe even create an advisory committee on the issue.

Zone 4 (East Hermiston and Umatilla)

Having spent 25 years on the BMCC board, Zone 4 incumbent Kim Puzey said he was not only the longest tenured member currently serving on the board, but also the longest serving board member in the college's nearly 60-year history.

For Puzey, the motivation to continue serving on the board lies in both the past and the future.

The son of a man who spent his working life on a kill floor at a slaughterhouse, Puzey credits his ability to work an office job to public education.

"My entire family has been emancipated from poverty because of education," he said.

Puzey said his parents' generation lived in an era of public investment, a time when Americans were willing to raise their taxes to fund highways, airways, dams and other infrastructure.

But the same sense of public investment hasn't

been extended to community colleges in recent years, Puzey said, linking BMCC's decreasing enrollment to the increasing unaffordability of post-secondary education.

Puzey's desire to preserve BMCC for his grandchildren and other future generations led him to propose a radical restructuring of the college's assets. Over a series of editorials, Puzey suggested merging the college with local school districts to create a K-14 model. Under his proposal, the school districts in Hermiston, Milton-Freewater, Baker City and Morrow County would take over the college's facilities at those locations while BMCC's flagship campus in Pendleton would become an extension of Eastern Oregon University.

Puzey is facing a challenge from Umatilla entrepreneur Kipp Barron, who is making his first run for public office along with his children.

While Barron is running for the BMCC board, daughter Jubilee and son Caleb are making bids for two separate seats on the board of directors for the Umatilla County Special Library District. Another son, Josiah, is running unopposed for a seat on the Umatilla School



Barron Currin Puzey Sampson-Samuels

Board, all but assuring him an electoral victory.

Barron said the simultaneous campaigns evolved from conversations he had with his children about local politics.

"It's just important to be thinking about these things instead of always looking at the screen that we have in (our hands), scrolling (through) mindless stuff," he said. "We were always looking at what was going on in the special election and we all kind of had the same idea."

Barron said he was motivated to run for the board because he's taken BMCC classes in the past, and as a native of the area, he wanted to give back.

Zone 6 (Milton-Freewater, Athena and Weston)

Abe Currin has a bachelor's degree from the University of Oregon in political science and a master's degree in teaching from Eastern Oregon University, but he's

made a career as a cider maker for Blue Mountain Cider Co. in Milton-Freewater.

Currin grew up in the area, and when incumbent Tony Turner approached him about replacing him on the BMCC board, Currin welcomed the chance to bring "fresh blood" to the board.

"I'm a big proponent of community colleges, especially in rural areas," said Currin, who is running unopposed.

Addressing the college's current budget crunch, Currin said higher education is always trying to navigate budget crunches and the board's challenge will be to balance their fiscal responsibilities while cutting as few services as possible, including those provided by the college's satellite campuses in Hermiston, Boardman and Milton-Freewater.

Currin said he's "neutral" about BMCC's impending

BMCC BOARD CANDIDATES

ZONE 3
(South Pendleton, Pilot Rock, Echo, Ukiah and Meacham)

Carrie Sampson-Samuels
Age: 36
Occupation: Project director at Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board
Birthplace: Jefferson City, Missouri
Years in Umatilla County: 9
Highest level of education: Graduate certificate, Oregon Health & Science University
Family: Married, four children and two stepchildren

ZONE 4
(East Hermiston and Umatilla)

Kipp Barron
Age: 57
Occupation: Entrepreneur and security worker
Birthplace: Pendleton
Years in Umatilla County: 50
Highest level of education: High school diploma and some college
Family: Widowed, four children

Kim Puzey
Age: 69
Occupation: General manager at Port of Umatilla
Birthplace: Salt Lake City, Utah
Years in Umatilla County: 27
Highest level of education: Master's degree, Eastern New Mexico University
Family: Married, six children and 18 grandchildren

ZONE 6
(Milton-Freewater, Athena and Weston)

Abe Currin
Age: 42
Occupation: Cider maker at Blue Mountain Cider Co.
Birthplace: Baker City
Years in Umatilla County: 38
Highest level of education: Master's degree, Eastern Oregon University
Family: Single

staffing cuts until he can learn more about the situation, but he did speak about the college's falling enrollment.

Currin said he spent a year at Walla Walla Community College before transferring to the University of Oregon, so he knows the importance community colleges play in education.

He added that boosting enrollment could involve the college spreading awareness over the role it plays in helping people get an education.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Chairs sit in a social distancing pattern during the Pendleton City Council meeting on Sept. 1, 2020.

Survey:

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America has solved yet, so the council doesn't want to invest taxpayer money into it, deferring to nonprofits like the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon. He added that larger communities like Portland and Seattle

have invested resources into homeless services, but their problems have worsened.

"How can you make it a goal if you're never going to solve it?" he said.

Turner said the council will formally adopt its new goals at its next meeting on Tuesday, May 4. From there, the council will break up into committees to discuss how to measure progress on each of the goals.

Risk:

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they have no idea about job security?" he said. "It's like nobody has any insight into what it's like to run a business. I'd be saying something different if they could identify that the restaurants were the problem."

Contact tracers have followed up on the likely sources of the county's reported cases throughout the pandemic. Murdock, the liaison for the county's health department, said, "I'm not sure I've ever heard a restaurant mentioned" by contact tracers as a source of an outbreak.

Morrow County Commissioner Don Russell said the same is true in his county.

"I think restaurants have been unnecessarily penalized by government regulation," he said. "It's tough

to stay in business. Some of them may never come back. Even though there's been grant money available to them, it's not enough to make them whole. And then how do you get your employees back when they've been laid off for a while, and then you open back up?"

To cushion the financial blow to businesses, Brown said she is working with the Oregon Legislature on an emergency \$20 million financial aid package.

With restaurants at limited capacity, Murdock said he's concerned it will drive people to gather in environments more susceptible to infection.

"After 13 or 14 months, people want to get together," he said. "They're limited in going to a restaurant, so they find somewhere else to gather, and it's usually under circumstances that are far less safe than going to a restaurant. The aver-

age home doesn't utilize the same health and safety precautions. So we're forcing people to have gatherings, I guess."

County officials have said social gatherings combined with the county's low vaccination rates are driving the case spike.

"In almost every single case, the people who are now being infected aren't vaccinated," Murdock said.

The county has long reported some of the lowest vaccination rates in the state. According to the Oregon Health Authority, approximately 23% of the county's population is at least partially vaccinated, the lowest total in Oregon.

Umatilla County commissioners, along with officials from across Eastern Oregon, have previously requested the state relinquish its authority over local governments, claiming individual county governments are

better suited to make decisions that best serve their communities.

"We know the local circumstances best, we know the local situation," Murdock said. "And we think we could be boots on the ground and manage it better than having it come from the state. Plus, it's difficult for us to keep track of the (state's) regulations, because they change all of a sudden."

Russell said he is confident in the ability of Morrow County's health department to take the reins.

"It seems like local government knows the territory more than state government," he said. "And I know Gov. Brown has a really tough job. She's trying to protect the populous from this horrible pandemic that has covered the world. But, again, I think the hospitality industry has been picked on unnecessarily in some cases."

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