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BMCC staff reduction approved by college board

Blue Mountain Community College to reduce staff by 14, including seven layoffs

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — By a 5-2 vote, the Blue Mountain Community College Board of Education approved reducing the college's staff by 14 positions, including seven layoffs, at a special board meeting on Friday, April 30.

The move represented a slight improvement from a previous

projection that anticipated 11 layoffs as a part of 16 staff reductions, but BMCC administrators maintained the cuts needed to happen so the college could stabilize itself as it attempts to recover from a sustained period of declining enrollment exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

BMCC will lay off five supervisory employees that covered areas like grants, student success, admissions and marketing. The college is also laying off a business instructor



Green

and a web content specialist. "This is a really hard list," interim President Connie Green said. "These are real people with real lives that made an impact on students."

After the meeting, Green said the college was able to reduce layoffs and position eliminations by negotiating with the union and also permanently cutting some unfilled positions from the budget.

While only one faculty member is being laid off, the college is



Hill

cutting six vacant teaching positions in subjects like math, Spanish and biology in addition to one administrative position.

Board Chair Jane Hill gave the college's two union presidents time to make brief remarks. Pete Hernberg, the president of the Blue Mountain Faculty Association, used his time to try to save the business instructor's job.

Hernberg argued that eliminating the position would actually lose the college \$280,000 instead



Puzey

of saving them money due to a loss of enrollment resulting from a decrease in business offerings to students.

"This is extremely damaging to our students," he said.

John Fields, the college's vice president of instruction, said there was a "difference in interpretations" of what the college would lose or gain from laying off business faculty, while Hill defended the administration's recommendation.

"We have a job to provide stability," she said.

Board member Kim Puzey

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LOCAL ELECTIONS 2021

Water control district sees influx of interest

Six candidates running for Birch Creek Water Control District board

By BRYCE DOLE
East Oregonian

PILOT ROCK — Six candidates are running for positions on the board of the Birch Creek Water Control District this year in response to flooding around Pilot Rock in recent years.

"This is the first year that we've actually had very much interest because of the floods we've had just recently," said Charles Hemphill, a longtime board member and resident.

The board utilizes a tax base to help with residents' requests for repairing the waterways near Pilot Rock that have been damaged by flooding and prevent floodwaters from causing further damage. Residents living along East and West Birch Creek roads are eligible to apply for funds from the district.

Water districts are also meant to improve agriculture, public health, welfare and safety of communities, according to state law. The districts also can acquire, construct and operate facilities to improve the use of local water resources for both communities and local wildlife.

The board meets on an

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Michael Willingham lifts the lid to examine his tri-tip during the Buckaroo BBQ Challenge at the Pendleton Convention Center on Saturday, May 1, 2021.

Back in the saddle

Hundreds gather for annual Cattle Barons event in Pendleton

By BRYCE DOLE
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The smell of roasting tri-tip and baby back ribs wafted from smokers across the parking lot outside of the Pendleton Convention Center, where the Willingham family chatted and laughed on an afternoon warm enough for T-shirts.

The lot was filled Saturday, May 1, with dozens of competitors, each looking to

dish up the most delicious barbecue of the day, and the Willinghams had returned to reclaim their title.

"I like the atmosphere down here," said Michael Willingham, a corrections officer at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution.

Until recently, Willingham said he would have shrugged off the idea of competing at the Buckaroo BBQ Challenge, which is part of the annual Pendleton Cattle Barons weekend event. With things changing every few weeks due to the pandemic, he was concerned that the event would be canceled and that all his effort, and his money, would go to waste. But standing beside his family — some of whom he hadn't seen since before the pandemic began — he was glad the event had worked out.

"It's good to get out and do things with

your family again," he said. "Just always sitting at home. It's driving me crazy."

Hundreds of people gathered in and around the convention center over the weekend for the annual Cattle Barons, one of the first major events in the Pendleton area since the pandemic began. The event raised scholarship funds for students looking to start careers in agriculture.

"It's nice to be outside doing something, especially during COVID," Natasha Willingham, Michael's daughter.

Cattle Barons during COVID-19

Andy VanderPlaat, the president of Cattle Barons, said that until January, the board was unsure if the event would happen due

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Telepharmacy options get boost from Senate bill

Sen. Bill Hansell sponsors SB 629 to allow pharmacists to provide virtual services in certain circumstances

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The pandemic spurred on a surge of telemedicine options, and some medical providers

are hoping that trend continues after it is over.

Cheryl Pearce, director of physician clinics for St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton, said the hospital had used telehealth in some cases in the past, including for its stroke recovery program. But the clinics were limited on what telehealth they could provide.

Rural clinics were unable to be



Hansell

reimbursed for telehealth appointments for Medicare patients in their home, for example.

Once the pandemic hit, the Trump administration waived those rules, allowing clinics to continue seeing patients even when everything was shut down.

"A lot of the time, we just had to do it by telephone initially, because we couldn't get any webcams because everyone in the country was trying to do everything virtually," Pearce said.

Since then, however, St. Anthony

has been able to expand and strengthen its virtual telehealth offerings. Pearce said the number of visits done virtually have "waxed and waned" over the course of the pandemic, depending on how quickly COVID-19 is spreading in the community.

She said some providers like doing video or phone visits, others don't. Similarly, some patients prefer to be seen in person while others prefer a video visit. She said telehealth can be

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