

# Oh God, no – not Pendleton



MATT HENRY

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

In the spring of 2000, my wife and I made the decision to abandon our American Baptist roots for the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church and take the opportunity to serve as pastors for a UMC church somewhere within the conference boundaries. Having spent the last year in Douglas County, we were looking forward to a move.

I fantasized where we might be assigned to serve. Astoria? Bandon? Eugene? Ashland? Salem? Bend? My future employer pulled me aside at the end of a clergy conference in May and told me where I'd be placed in two weeks. "Matt, we'd like you to serve our church in"

At that point, I was like Alfalfa mooning over Darla: I could feel the ocean breeze, I could smell Western pine growing in the Cascades, I could be a community actor in the Shakespeare country near the California border, I could relish waterfalls near the Washington border.

"Pendleton," he said. My joie de vivre took an immediate nosedive. Oh God, no, not Pendleton! The only encounter I'd had with the town was briefly driving through one night as an ABC pastor heading to teach a worship workshop the next day in Milton-Freewater. The sun had set, the streets had rolled up by 9 p.m., and I was struck by the shabby, yellowed, dustiness of this cowboy town, run down and tired looking. The word on the street was the conference was having a hard time finding someone who actually wanted to be here, most of us being from the big city somewhere. Thus it was that we landed in a tiny rental on Southwest 28th Street and an

octagonal sanctuary the last week of June.

When I was a child, my grandmother pounded it into my head: Just try it, you'll like it. So I did. I traded the soupy green of overcooked asparagus for the rich, verdant prairie carpet of growing wheat. Driving through the countryside, I was bowled over by the flowing beauty of jade green covering the land. The Blues weren't the Cascades, but they provided a beautiful backdrop to this sea of green. And as the seasons progressed, I was awed at the beauty of the wheat as its green changed to spun flax underneath a shimmering sun lighting up the cobalt blue sky. The richness of the color was breathtaking. The sky was wide open, I could see to the horizon unimpeded and I finally felt free.

And what I found here in this little podunk town well east of wherever I wanted to be surprised me the most and it is exactly the opposite of what I expected: tolerance and room for the outsider. In short, while the area is and probably shall remain a sea of red, let alone green, there was/remains room to be oneself and express one's values freely. Blues like myself had established a beachhead here and were living peacefully among our predominantly conservative friends, neighbors, volunteers.

The cultural freedom here has given me a rich and fulfilling life in the very last place I expected to find it and this is what makes living here so balanced for me — the moderative influences of tribal Native, cowpoke, farmer, and Bohemian blending together into this ameliorative experience I have come to call "home."

Of course, the deepest impact had on me as an outsider to the community was the genuine love, welcome and support I felt from my church, the congregation of Pendleton First United Methodist Church. They, more than any other,

made me want to stay even though I knew as a UMC pastor I would be forced to itinerate eventually and move on to serve a different church. Families with the name of Sawyer, Remington, Schiewe, Kendrick, Templeman, Morgan, Symons, Nelson, Parker, Thompson, Kruse, Evans, Wood, and many others did tremendous work in helping to pad my nest and build a home.

This was true and demonstrated by our desire to move right back here for good the first chance we could. However, this has been the experience of a privileged white male; I'm all too aware that POC's experiences are surely very different. If you are reading this and are non-white, know that many of us are moved and blessed by your courage it takes to live here and the cultural richness you provide.

I'm retired now. I keep myself involved in being a part of the community in different ways. My cremains have a spot waiting in a corner of St. Andrew's Mission Church graveyard. The one thing Amy and I had both required of a community was that it have a good, decent café with character and a Bohemian feeling. The afternoon we arrived, the first thing we did after leaving the church was to take a walk and "explore downtown." It was a Sunday afternoon, Main Street was deserted and I thought to myself, "Oh God, what have I said yes to?" It was at that moment my eyes were drawn to some fancy-looking gold script on a shop window. We peered through a window that said "Great Pacific Wine and Coffee Company" and thought, well, maybe we can make a go of this after all.

*The Rev. Dr. Matt Henry is a retired American Baptist/United Methodist pastor, who pastored the Pendleton First United Church and now joyfully makes "hippie food" for the houseless at the Warming Station.*

## COMMUNITY BRIEFING

### Echo FFA blooms with plant sale

ECHO — The Echo FFA plant sale, which began Wednesday, May 5, continues through the weekend. Items available for purchase include bedding flowers, perennials, hanging baskets, assorted herbs and vegetable starts.

Sale hours are Thursday from 4-6:30 p.m.; Friday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; and Saturday, 9 a.m. to noon. The event is being held in the greenhouse, which is located behind the school. Those who come on Thursday should watch for students and buses in the area. People are reminded to wear a mask and adhere to social distancing.

For more information, visit [www.facebook.com/echo.ffa](http://www.facebook.com/echo.ffa).

### Veterans affairs seeks input on health care

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — The Walla Walla Veterans Affairs Medical Center, along with other VA medical centers in the region, is hosting a public virtual listening session entitled, "The Future of VA Health Care." Veterans and members of the public are invited to participate.

Ideas and feedback from veterans is being sought on how to design a health care system of the future and grow services for veterans that reinforces the VA's role as a leader in health care. The listening session, hosted by Dr. Teresa D. Boyd, the VISN20 Network Director, is an opportunity to help reimagine how the VA delivers care in an equitable, high quality, veteran-centered manner.

The Virtual VA Listening Session is Friday, May 7, from 1-2:30 p.m. People can participate via computer by registering at [www.bit.ly/WallaWallaVAListens](http://www.bit.ly/WallaWallaVAListens) or by calling 404-397-1596, access code: 199 092 4246.

For more information or questions related to the listening session, contact Linda Wondra, Walla Walla VA's public affairs officer, at 509-386-1117 or [linda.wondra@va.gov](mailto:linda.wondra@va.gov).

### Irrigon seeks vendors for spring bazaar

IRRIGON — There's still time to register as a vendor for the Irrigon Spring Bazaar.

The event is Saturday, May 22, from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on the Irrigon Plaza, next door to city hall, 500 N.E. Main Ave. Setup time is 8 a.m. Vendors must supply their own table, chairs and a canopy, if desired. They will be provided space for a 10-foot table. The cost is \$10.

The vendor application is available at [www.ci.irrigon.or.us](http://www.ci.irrigon.or.us). It must be returned by Wednesday, May 12. For questions, contact [manager@ci.irrigon.or.us](mailto:manager@ci.irrigon.or.us) or 541-922-3047.

### Boardman Pool hosts water safety event

BOARDMAN — A Water Safety Day is planned by the Boardman Pool & Recreation Center.

The family-friendly event is geared for children ages 4-12, but all ages are welcome. Participants will have an opportunity to swim with a mermaid, get fitted with a lifejacket, watch a rescue demonstration, participate in a swim level test and visit with officials from the Morrow County Sheriff's Office marine patrol, including an opportunity to take a boat ride.

The free event is Saturday, May 15, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the recreation center, 311 N. Olson Road, Boardman. Preregistration is required. For more information, contact 541-616-1050, [recinfo@](mailto:recinfo@)

[boardmanmarinapark.com](http://boardmanmarinapark.com) or visit [www.boardmanparkandrec.com](http://www.boardmanparkandrec.com).

### Bon Jovi to rock the big screen

MILTON-FREEWATER — If you recognize such songs as "Livin' on a Prayer," "You Give Love a Bad Name" or "Bad Medicine," you won't want to miss the Encore Drive-In Concert with Bon Jovi.

The never-before-seen show was recorded live, exclusively for a one-night only event at drive-ins, outdoor venues and some cinemas across the United States — and it's coming to Milton-Freewater. The epic live concert was recorded exclusively to broadcast on the big screen for fans to enjoy.

Tickets are now on sale for the Saturday, May 22, event. The gates open at 7 p.m. with the concert film being shown at 8 p.m. The M-F Drive IN Theater is located at 84322 Highway 11, Milton-Freewater. The cost is \$89 per vehicle, which can have up to six people.

For tickets or more information, click the link on the M-F Drive IN Theater's Facebook page. In addition, concert merchandise is available on the ticket website.

### Reunion organizers seek Army 2nd Infantry

FOX LAKE, Ill. — The Second (Indianhead) Division Association is searching for anyone who served in the Army's 2nd Infantry Division at any time.

For information about the association and its 99th annual reunion, which is scheduled for Sept. 29 to Oct. 3 in Kansas City, Missouri, visit [www.2ida.org](http://www.2ida.org) or contact Bob Haynes at [2idahq@comcast.net](mailto:2idahq@comcast.net) or 224-225-1202.

— EO Media Group

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