

Art: 'They'll be able to see themselves in this area'

Continued from Page A1

Annie Smith, BMCC's Native American liaison and success coach, said the art purchase represented a boost to the college's American Indian students.

"They'll be able to see themselves in this area," she said.

Crow's Shadow Marketing Director Nika Blasser said the seeds of the idea grew out of a 2019 exhibit at BMCC's Betty Feves Art Gallery. The gallery reached out to Crow's Shadow after a planned exhibit fell through and the resulting collaboration led to "This Good Land," an exhibit that spotlighted American Indian artwork from the nonprofit's collection.

Lori Sams, the Feves Art Gallery director, said she solicited feedback from students on the exhibit and she received a strong response, especially from the college's American Indian students.

BMCC Grants Manager Bonnie Day said more than 3% of BMCC's students identify as American Indian or Native American. That means BMCC has the largest proportion of indigenous students of any community college in the state.

With those facts in mind, Day and a group of BMCC staff began applying for grants to make the college's visual presentation start reflecting some of the students it serves, a process that took more than a year to complete.

The larger of the two



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Dena Summerfield checks the frame of Tyanna Van Pelt's "My Life" on Monday, June 14, 2021, at Pendleton Art and Frame in preparation for its display at Blue Mountain Community College.

grants — a \$59,360 grant from the Oregon Department of Education — provided the lion's share of money to the college to purchase prints from Crow's Shadow.

But the grant expanded past artwork, including money for a free Umatilla language class for 25 students, educational materials and a "day of learning" for the BMCC Board of Education on the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Blue Mountain is hustling to use the grant funds, having

already selected the art, paid for its framing and chosen specific locations for each piece of art.

Annie Smith, the college's Native American liaison and success coach, said staff were very intentional with where they placed each print.

For instance, the college is placing an untitled print from James Lavadour and Lillian Pitt at the Hermiston campus because it's evocative of the Hermiston area's natural landscape, which was known traditionally as K'ul'k'ul'lipa,

or "at the bowls," because of the area's bedrock formations and butte. For the college's veterans center, Smith and the college chose George Flett's "Prairie Chicken Dancer Flashing His Power Through His Mirror" because Flett himself was a veteran and the print depicts an indigenous warrior.

"I liked to select pieces that were meaningful to that place," Smith said.

Blasser said Crow's Shadow artist-in-residency program attracts American

Indian artists from all across the country, but the work they produce during their residency is often locally inspired because of their surroundings on the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

At the same time Blue Mountain is changing out its decor across its facilities, it's also targeting a much smaller space.

Until recently, BMCC's Native American Club operated without a space of its own, often gathering in Smith's office as an unoffi-

cial hub. The library recently converted a room it used for storage into an official meeting space for the club, meaning the room needed new decorations.

The college is using a smaller grant — \$3,863 from the Oregon Arts Commission — to provide Crow's Shadow art for the repurposed room. The artwork bought for the club is more local, featuring young CTUIR artists who made the prints through Nixyaawii Community School's printmaking program. While Crow's Shadow took a cut of the money spent on the professional artwork, 100% of the proceeds from the student artwork went to the artists.

Megan Van Pelt, the Associated Student Body president and a member of the Native American Club, was involved throughout the process of selecting and placing the artwork.

Van Pelt said she found it "appalling" that many students, even those who attend the Pendleton campus, know little about the CTUIR and hopes the art will increase awareness about the tribes.

It's a bittersweet moment for Van Pelt. Although she played an integral role in securing a space for the Native American Club and the artwork project, these projects are being completed as she's set to transfer to the University of Oregon after obtaining her associate's degree from Blue Mountain.

Van Pelt said she'll help finish the projects over the summer before moving to Eugene in the fall.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Lifeways, with its office at 331 S.E. Second St., Pendleton, was Umatilla County's mental health services provider for 16 years. The nonprofit recently protested the county's move to select Community Counseling Solutions to provide mental health and addiction treatment. The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners on Wednesday, June 16, 2021, rejected that protest and stayed with Community Counseling Solutions.

County:

Continued from Page A1

concerns about the service being provided to Umatilla County residents," Murdock said. "The only objections I have heard have come from Lifeways employees and their corporate office. On the other hand, we have received numerous messages of enthusiasm from throughout the county."

Murdock also apologized to the committee members for an article in the East Oregonian, which he said was "primarily guided by a less-than-professional press release from the Lifeways head office," referring to a June 11 statement from Lifeways CEO Tim Hoekstra. The press release called CCS "underqualified and underprepared" and the county's decision "a gamble" to residents' health.

Murdock added the county already received more communication from Community Counseling Solutions "than we have received from Lifeways in the last year or more." He said he was confident that county residents in need will receive "skilled and expedient service, as will the agencies that depend on the provider for support."

In an email to the East Oregonian, Kimberly Lindsay, the executive director for CCS, said the organization "acknowledges this has been a difficult process for all involved." She also

stated, "We are both humbled and honored by the county's decision, and we are excited to deliver upon our mission of providing dynamic, progressive and diverse support to the residents of Umatilla County."

Lifeways officials did not immediately respond to emails requesting comment prior to press time.

The county recently put out a request for proposal for a single provider to handle mental health and addiction services, after years where those services were divided between Lifeways, which handled mental health, and the county's own substance abuse services provider. An independent consultant recommended the county conjoin those services, noting patients often fall under both categories at once.

Hoekstra in the June 11 statement said Lifeways, which has served Umatilla County for more than 16 years, plans to stay in the county and "is already underway in pivoting its services to retain staff." Officials have yet to provide specifics of what that might look like.

Lifeways has 11 facilities in Umatilla County and more than 120 employees, most of whom are county residents, officials have said. In all, Lifeways reported it serves 184 clients with schizophrenia disorders, 491 clients with major depression, 471 clients with post-traumatic stress disorder, 215 clients with bipolar disorder and more than 2,000 clients with adjustment disorders.

COVID-19: Umatilla County remains high risk

Continued from Page A1

a decent uptick, Fiumara said there's likely much more to come. He estimated the county could see between a 5% to 10% increase in its overall vaccine rate, but even that isn't likely to raise the county's vaccine rate past 65%, the benchmark the state set for counties to move to lower risk.

"We still have some gaps," he said. "Again, these are not gaps that magically get us to 70%. But these are gaps that — it wouldn't surprise me if we're talking 5 to 10%."

Fiumara said it's most likely the county will see restrictions lifted when Oregon reaches the 70% vaccine threshold the state set for reopening its economy. State health officials have projected meeting the benchmark by the end of June.

Cases on the decline

The new data comes as COVID-19 case counts continue a gradual decline in the county, following statewide trends. State health officials reported declining cases for six consecutive weeks until the week ending Sunday, June 13, which saw a 3% increase in cases, according to state health data.

Fiumara said the county's decline does not mimic the state's, but the data shows similar, promising signs that the pandemic is subsiding. The county has reported declining cases for five consecutive weeks, according to county health data.

"We are declining," Fiumara said. "We peaked a couple of weeks ago, it seems. And it has been going down since then. So



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Cpl. John Shown with the Oregon National Guard administers a COVID-19 vaccine to Mary Freedom during a COVID-19 vaccination run by Yellowhawk Tribal Health Care Center at Wildhorse Resort & Casino in Mission on Feb. 23, 2021. New data shows the Pendleton ZIP code area has the largest uptick in COVID-19 vaccinations in the state during the past week, largely from vaccination clinics at Yellowhawk.

I think we're following the same trend."

With low vaccination rates overall, "the curious thing will be to see if we fall as far" as the state's case rates, Fiumara said. He added it's possible the county will continue to see case spikes in the coming months due to low vaccination rates.

"I think we are likely going to see some flareups," he said. "They'll hopefully be nowhere as large as what we've seen in the past."

Fiumara said he expects to see cases rise in response to the upcoming Fourth of July holiday.

"We are assuming there's going to be some events going on," he said. "There's

going to be vendors and there's going to be people very happy to be out and about and not being required to have any restrictions. It is entirely possible that we end up with some spikes in cases out of that. It's just the nature of people being out and about and not everyone being vaccinated."

Fiumara added he hopes any case spikes will be hindered by enough residents being vaccinated. He estimated that over the past few weeks, county vaccinations have fallen from 1,200 per week to around 800 per week.

More than 5,700 county residents have been vaccinated since the beginning of May, according to

county data.

"More folks are being vaccinated," he said. "It's not the size we'd like. But as more folks continue to get vaccinated, we'll keep these flareups" under control.

In Gov. Kate Brown's most recent assessment, Umatilla County remained at high risk, with stringent restrictions on indoor gatherings and commerce, while Union, Morrow, Baker and Walla counties have all fallen to lower risk.

In all, 25,435 doses have been delivered in the county, according to an Oregonian/OregonLive database. That's roughly 31% of the county's total population, the third lowest percentage in Oregon.

Candidate:

Continued from Page A1

picture of an institution that was struggling to stay relevant with the people it's supposed to serve.

He recalled a conversation he had with a young Boardman Recreation Center employee, who told him she was much more excited about the course offerings at Columbia

Basin College in Pasco than BMCC. A family he talked to in Milton-Freewater admitted to knowing nothing about Blue Mountain but lit up at the mention of Walla Walla Community College.

Following an extended period of declining enrollment across BMCC, Lewis said he would prioritize growing the student body if selected as the college's next president.

Blue Mountain has many strengths, he added, but it

lacked an understanding of the communities it was serving, especially its communities of color.

"(We) assume the students will find us," he said. "They've flipped the script on you. They want to know if you understand them, and if they matter."

With the final round of interviews completed, the task of picking the next president falls on the board of education. Besides Lewis, the board also is consider-

ing Mark Browning, the vice president of college relations at Western Idaho College, Western Nebraska Community College President Carmen Simone and Christopher Villa, the former president of Portland Community College's Rock Creek campus.

The board will meet behind closed doors twice on June 16 to discuss the candidates. The board expects to make a formal decision in July.

VISIT US ON THE WEB AT:

www.EastOregonian.com