

UEC celebrates 2,000 days without accident

By NICK ROSENBERGER
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Every morning, families across Umatilla County click their lights on, flip the switch on their coffee makers and take showers warmed by an electric current. Their workplaces are air conditioned and laptops charged by wires threading through the county's golden countryside — wires with enough voltage to kill with a simple mistake.

The men and women at Umatilla Electric Cooperative work with these live wires every day so we can enjoy these simple pleasures. While the worst workplace injuries in most industries might be a joint injury or broken bone, those working with these currents face a different kind of danger.

"These guys miss the

wrong thing and it kills them," said Chris McMahon, UEC's administrative safety assistant.

But over the last nearly 5-1/2 years, or 2,004 days to be exact, Umatilla Electric Cooperative has avoided all accidents leading to lost time, which McMahon described as an accident where someone injures themselves during work-related duties and is not able to work.

This is not a simple achievement with electrical work posing such a risk for injury or death. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 75 fatalities in the five years between 2014 and 2019 in the electrical power transmission, control and distribution

industry alone. This number does not include nonfatal injuries.

Another Bureau report in December 2020 found there were 750 fatalities related to exposure to electricity across all industries from 2015 to 2019.

"The motive to constantly be learning and to be diligent in what we do is paramount in what happens," McMahon said, "because the simplest of mistakes can easily kill someone."

Whether working on construction, doing repairs or making sure trees are pruned away from high-voltage power lines, the dangers are persistent — especially as brutal heat continues to pound the Pacific Northwest

and puts a strain on the state's electrical system.

There also is a potential for a backfeed of electricity from somebody running a generator because their power went out. When employees go out to do a simple repair there may be dangerous levels of electricity from the generator that unintentionally flows backward towards workers.

"It's a day-to-day occurrence that these guys are constantly in that environment," McMahon said.

"I stand with Umatilla Electric employees who have demonstrated safety for their community and safety for one another," said Robert Echenrode, UEC's general manager and CEO. "In my years in the utility industry, this is a milestone I am most proud of and want to express to each employee my appreciation for continu-

ing to keep safety at the front of their minds and reaching this incredible achievement."

According to McMahon, UEC made safety a top priority to make it so far without injuries, starting with hiring people with the right mindset and who are cautious about their work.

"It's a culture of safety that we develop here at Umatilla Electric," McMahon said.

While they have their daily actions, procedures, policies and safety meetings, UEC employees also study near misses. Whether it is their own near misses or those in other facilities, the information is accessible and open to review.

"A near miss is essentially something that potentially could have been a lost time accident, but it was not just due to the grace of God," McMahon said. "We're able

to look at that and learn from other people."

On Tuesday, July 27, its 2,000th day without an accident, UEC held a celebratory dinner for employees and families at the Maxwell Event Center, Hermiston. The cooperative had employees anonymously vote for someone they felt went above and beyond and embodied the safety culture in the organization and named Glen Saul the Umatilla Electric Safety Champion.

"They've shown that they can do this," McMahon said. "They got it down. They understand and they're constantly practicing."

"Collectively it takes everybody to be able to do something like this and to constantly be engaged in what happens each and every day," McMahon said, "because complacency kills."

Pendleton hosts Oregon's return to championship swimming

By NICK ROSENBERGER
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — With more events returning to Oregon and Umatilla County, Pendleton is moving fast to play host, including for Oregon Swimming's 2021 Championships from to July 22-25 for swimmers 11 years and older.

Oregon Swimming, a local swimming committee of USA Swimming, put on the championships, which normally take place at Mount Hood Community College in Gresham. But, Mount Hood made the decision during COVID-19 to not open for any events this summer, forcing Oregon Swimming to find a new venue for their championship event.

"Initially we didn't even know if we would be able to hold a championship meet," said Debbie Laderoute, the executive director of Oregon Swimming.

With 28 teams in attendance, approximately 35 officials, 50 coaches and nearly 500 athletes (down from around 800 in 2019) plus family members, Laderoute estimated the event helped Pendleton see an influx of more than 1,000 people during the course of the competition.

Swimmers from Portland to Bend to Medford converged on Pendleton and were well supported by the community, she said. Pendleton, with one of the few 50-meter swimming pools in the state required for the long course swim season running from April until the end of August, seemed like a good choice. Better yet, the Pendleton pool was outdoors, which would help prevent COVID-19 from spreading.

Laderoute and the team at Oregon Swimming reached out to Jeff Hamilton, a recreation supervisor for the city of Pendleton, who agreed to host the championship at the Pendleton Aquatic Center.

"They were really excited to help us plan this event," Laderoute said. "They helped make it happen for us."

Additionally, the Pendleton Aquatic Center and Pendleton Swim Association loaned Oregon Swimming the use of all of their equipment for the event, which was generous, she said. The Main Street Cowboys also were in attendance to help and donated two canopies for coaches to escape the sun.

"Our families and teams are extremely thankful to Pendleton and the aquatic center and to the Pendleton

Swim Association," Laderoute said.

All this, despite the Pendleton Swim Association and Umatilla County residing outside of the boundaries of the Oregon Swimming committee. The local swimming organizations instead are in the Inland Empire Swimming committee, which also consists of parts of Idaho and counties in Eastern Washington. Only members from within the Oregon Swimming LSC were allowed to compete in the Pendleton event, however.

"For a lot of our kids, this is the first event that they've had an opportunity to be a part of since COVID," Laderoute said. "We had a short course championship meet at the beginning of March and that's in around the time that things started shutting down."

And, with no host team this year, Laderoute said she was proud of how the Oregon swimming community pulled together to make this event a reality.

"It really felt like our community coming together to make it happen," she said.

Additionally, Laderoute credited volunteers who traveled from across the state to take part in the return of championship swimming in Oregon.

Sheriff's sergeant arrested in domestic violence incident

By BRYCE DOLE
East Oregonian

WESTON — A sergeant with the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office went to jail after a domestic violence incident that occurred over the weekend at his home in Weston.

The sergeant, Roy Swiger, reported himself to the Oregon State Police Monday, July 26, according to Under-sheriff Jim Littlefield. State police arrested Swiger and took him to the Umatilla County Jail that day. Littlefield said Swiger called the sheriff's office after he called the state police to report the incident.

Littlefield described the incident as an "altercation" between Swiger and his wife that was "completely out of character for Sgt. Swiger." He said he did not know Swiger's condition when he was arrested.

Littlefield said Swiger was "booked like any other person and then issued a court date in the future," and Sheriff Terry Rowan made the call to promptly cite and release Swiger from jail due to the "totality of circumstances," which included concerns for his safety in a jail with people he had arrested.

The sheriff's office placed Swiger on paid leave. According to the county's human resources department, Swiger makes \$6,992 a month.

Oregon State Police is investigating the incident, Littlefield said. Once the sheriff's office receives information from the criminal case, Littlefield said the agency plans to launch an administrative investigation to determine if Swiger violated sheriff's office or county policies and procedures.

Littlefield said the sher-

iff's office does not believe Swiger to be a flight risk and added Swiger has no disciplinary history with the sheriff's office since he started in 2017. Swiger has worked in law enforcement for almost 20 years, but Littlefield said the sheriff's office does not have any knowledge of disciplinary issues with other agencies.

The Oregon Criminal Justice Information Records Inquiry System shows Swiger started his law enforcement career as a reserve for the Milton-Free-water Police Department. He rose to the rank of officer and left in 2005 to take a job with the Forest Grove Police Department.

Swiger worked as an officer there until October 2017, then resigned a month later and joined the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office as a senior deputy before promoting to sergeant in 2018.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Council will talk contracts at next meeting

PENDLETON — The Pendleton City Council has scheduled a light meeting for Tuesday, Aug. 3, but members still are poised to approve a couple of contracts.

The council agenda includes items about a proposed \$150,000 contract with Interstate Concrete & Asphalt to patch over utility cuts and a proposed lease with American Sprinklers Inc. to rent land at the Pendleton airport.

The council meeting will be held Tuesday at the council chambers in city hall, 500 S.W. Dorion Ave. The meeting can also be accessed virtually via Zoom at <https://bit.ly/3iaPLbo>.

Free series show how to sell on social media

PENDLETON — The second of a two-session series on how to sell on social media is Wednesday, Aug. 4.

The Blue Mountain Small Business Development Center in a press release announced the series, which is free due to funding from the 2020 federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act.

Part one, "Setting Up Shop," is live now on YouTube. The session covers how to set up social media

shops on Facebook and Instagram.

A social media shop allow businesses to sell products directly on Facebook and Instagram without an additional e-commerce platform. Business owners also can integrate an existing e-commerce platform into their Facebook or Instagram shop.

Part two, "Driving Traffic" is Wednesday, Aug. 4, 9-10 a.m. and teaches how

to set up ad campaigns on Facebook and Instagram. To register, go to: <https://bit.ly/2WECxeT>.

Facebook and Instagram ad campaigns allow businesses incredible precision in who and where they advertise, according to the press release. This session is a follow-up to the previous session about setting up Facebook and Instagram shops.

—EO Media Group

Hotrod-a-rama rolls into town



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
Cars line the parking lot of the Heritage Station Museum on Friday, July 30, 2021, for Hotrod-a-rama in Pendleton. The event, featuring hundreds of hot rods and classic rides, as well as music and vendors, runs through the late evening hours of July 31.

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