

Sunset:

Continued from Page A1

ence seven-and-a-half years ago and was in the hospital for 10 months.

“Once I was discharged, I wasn’t fully functional,” Bent said. “I had pretty serious cognitive impairments and then I went through a recovery cycle of doing a lot of different alternative therapy.”

This experience changed his perspective, and he said he became more opportunistic about what could help people. He said this led him into executive and life coaching and a desire to help others.

He wasn’t looking to get involved with senior housing but was introduced to Sun Ridge through its listing agent, Haven Senior Investments, where Bent serves as partner and chief operating officer.

“The more I looked at Sun Ridge and the more I got educated on Pendleton, I felt very comfortable that it would be a good place for me to support,” Bent said.

While Haven Senior Investments will be overseeing and managing Sun Ridge, according to Bent the daily operations will mostly be handled by Kelly Parker, who has already been filling in for the Biegler whenever they’ve left town and will become general manager on Aug. 16.

While this is Bent’s first retirement community, Rolly Biegler said he felt good about the transition and Bent’s abilities. Biegler said the new company has been trying to keep them



Don Carter, left, a Portland attorney representing the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, auctions the Sun Ridge Retirement Community on Aug. 17, 2005, on the steps of Umatilla County Courthouse, Pendleton. Principal Bidders Dan Pinkos, of Illinois, and Rolly Biegler, of Pendleton, are side-by-side in the middle of the sidewalk. Biegler won.

East Oregonian, File

as close to it as possible and they will continue to help run the community for the next month or so.

Additionally, there also will be two assistant managers who have been there for about 15 years and will continue in their roles as assistant managers. Because of this, Bent said there will be good continuity from Rolly and Carol’s leadership because the team mostly is staying the same.

Bent said he had one

goal: to take the culture the Biegler developed and make it similar but, if possible, better.

“Rolly and Carol did an exceptional job,” Bent said.

Rolly Biegler did not disclose the sale price. Umatilla County records show it has an assessed value of about \$2.4 million. It’s completely self-contained and has independent apartments with kitchens, along with six more private cottages. When it went up for

auction in 2005, the Biegler outbid Dan Pinkos of Glen Ellyn, Illinois, for \$572,000 in 2005, according to East Oregonian archives.

The facility went up for auction in 2005 after the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development foreclosed it due to the owner’s debts to HUD, which did not release the amount of debt.

According to Debbie McNeal, the manager at the time, only about one-third of the apartments had been

filled and HUD had prohibited renting more apartments after it had been foreclosed.

But, since buying the business, Rolly Biegler said he and his wife have been able to keep it about 90-92% full for the most part. And the number hasn’t really changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, where they haven’t had a single case in the facility.

Bent is planning on putting in a new roof on the main building because it is 50

years old and then spruce up the place a little further. But, while the new owners are trying to keep the Biegler close, “To say it’s gonna be exactly the same as before is kinda impossible,” Rolly Biegler said.

As for the structure for residents and activities, everything will be kept similar except when they find “further services or activities that would be beneficial,” Bent said.

“Last thing I want is anybody going into a senior housing facility feeling like they’re being tucked away there to wait to pass away,” Bent said. “I want to help them feel purposeful and connected to the community.”

And, for Rolly and Carol Biegler’s transition into retirement, Bent said he was “honored to have the opportunity to be a support of them to move on to that part of life.”

Rolly Biegler said he has never made a decision that’s affected so many people in his life.

“It’s sad because it’s a new change in their lives,” he said. “A new change in our life.”

He said they were looking forward to their own retirement and the community has been supportive of their decision — especially as they’re all retired themselves. Additionally, he wanted to thank the community for their support over the years, the people who have helped with maintenance, their vendors and the people of Pendleton for their support.

“Without them,” Rolly Biegler said, “we couldn’t have done it.”

Farmer:

Continued from Page A1

fighters asking if he could bring his bulldozer to help them in the fight.

For more than a week, he said he was positioned at the heart of the fire, where the embers hopped over the roads and smoke trails ran up the hills among the steep canyons. But when he arrived, he realized most bulldozers were attached with more safety equipment than his. He felt somewhat out of his league, he said, but he added there were plenty of men around his age driving tractors.

“It’s a job for loggers,” Piercy said, “not farmers.”

One night, he got the opportunity to push a trail with his dozer through what he described as a hotspot.

“It was exciting,” he said. “I felt protected because of everyone around me, but I also know there’s a level of protection they can’t offer you in a fire. A lot of smoke.”

Piercy said he was fascinated by the way firefighters used science, weather patterns and other strategies to curb the spread of the blaze.

He also said he was pleased with the efficiency of supporters, noting the large meals his team received throughout the day, which he estimated to be thousands of calories daily. Each morning they received fresh coffee, hash browns, eggs, sausage, cold cereal, milk and juice. During the day, they ate sandwiches, vegetables, apples, canned tuna, bags of nuts and chips. Every night they received a salad and a warm meal.

“It’s logistically amazing,” he said.

Restaurants in towns up to two hours away over windy gravel roads fixed meals for the firefighters. Schools received funds for allowing firefighters to camp in their yards. Everybody in town who wanted to work and help out could be described as a hotspot.

“It’s an industry,” he said. “It energizes those towns.”

Although he enjoyed the experience, Piercy said he doubts he’ll ever fight a fire like the Elbow Creek Fire again.

“I’ve realized,” he said, “this is probably a young man’s work.”

PGG:

Continued from Page A1

acquired Mountain West Moving & Storage, another La Grande business.

Once a steadfast presence through Eastern Oregon, PGG methodically sold its assets after the dissolution vote in 2015. In the years that followed, PGG sold its energy division, upcountry elevators and terminals to other companies. The co-op’s Umatilla County retailers all were sold into private hands and repurposed.

But PGG’s Pendleton properties took a little longer to move. The former PGG Energy building was sold in 2020 to Hines Meat Co., a La Grande butcherery that now uses the facility as a store and restaurant. The McGregor Co. of Colfax, Washington, completed acquisition of the PGG grain division and the McKennon Station seed processing center, which will continue to operate under the Pendleton Grain Growers banner.

But the centerpiece of PGG’s once extensive holdings was its headquarters at 1000 S.W. Dorion Ave. The facility includes the co-op’s former retail showroom,



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

A sign in the parking lot of the former headquarters of Pendleton Grain Growers advertises job openings on Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2021, for drivers with commercial licenses at EO Rentals. The building in Pendleton sold at auction to Braseth Properties, of La Grande, on July 23, for roughly \$1.8 million. Braseth Properties does business as Eastern Oregon Rentals & Storage in La Grande, and the family also owns Eastern Oregon Rental & Sales and Mountain West Moving & Storage.

automotive service center and warehouse.

The PGG building has sat mostly empty as the cooperative sold assets elsewhere. The city of Pendleton considered the PGG building when it was trying to decide a new location for its fire department in 2016, but ultimately

opted to build a new facility on bare land at 1455 S.E. Court Ave. In 2019, PGG commissioned renderings of concepts that could fit the building, including a van or RV conversion business or a Goodwill-like operation with retail and workforce training. By the time the building

went up for auction with a reserve price of nearly \$2 million, PGG had lowered the asking price from \$2.1 million. When PGG completed the sale of the building on July 23, Braseth Properties bought the property for roughly the same amount as its assessed value.

COVID-19:

Continued from Page A1

Boyle said the governor’s office and OHA have “been in communication with Umatilla County about what assistance or additional resources they may need” and added that the state “will continue to reach out and stand ready to assist.”

Reported COVID-19 hospitalizations have spiked statewide as the highly contagious delta variant rips through communities, infecting huge swaths of unvaccinated people. As of Aug. 3, nearly 380 people were hospitalized with COVID-19, the highest total since January, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported.

And Umatilla County has been at the epicenter of the infection, which health officials attribute to the county’s low vaccination rates. The county reported 745 cases during the past two weeks,

amounting to a case rate that was the highest in the state and more than eight times higher than Multnomah County. More than 22% of all tests conducted in the county came back positive during that time period, the second highest in Oregon, according to state data.

Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston, however, is not seeing the same uptick in hospitalizations as St. Anthony. As of Aug. 3, the hospital had reported just five COVID-19-related hospitalizations during the past two weeks, according to Caitlin Cozad, spokesperson for Good Shepherd.

But the number of tests coming back positive at the hospital has more than tripled since mid-July, Cozad said.

Nearly 9,900 people have contracted COVID-19 in Umatilla County since the pandemic began, according to the county health department. In all, the county has reported 94 COVID-19 deaths.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Rochelle Packer assembles COVID-19 testing kits Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2021, during a free testing event at CHI St. Anthony Hospital, Pendleton. The free testing events will continue each Wednesday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. through the end of August. Those tested can expect to receive their results in two to five days, said Steve Hardin, the hospital’s emergency department manager.