

Longtime local art centergrant writer, storyteller retires

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — J.D. Smith, a writer and long-time employee of the Pendleton Center for the Arts, is retiring.

A grant writer and program manager from Athena, Smith left an indelible mark on the center during his 20-year career.

“J.D. leaves enormously big shoes to fill in hiring a new grant writer for the arts center,” said Board President Susan DeMarsh. “He has shaped the cultural life of Pendleton in a profound way. We’re excited for him to enjoy retirement and look forward to reading about his travels.”

After coming to Eastern Oregon with his wife in the early 1990s, Smith wrote a grant in 1998 to help turn the city’s former library into what is now the art center. “He shaped the heart and soul of the organization,” said Roberta Lavadour, the art center’s executive director. “He steered us early on toward things that are now on-trend, which is equity and inclusion.”

In addition to supporting local arts and music through grant writing, Smith helped start the center’s Art Rocks Teens and Rock & Roll Camp, providing upward of 100 students an opportunity to play music, write songs and sing together in the summers.

“The noise that results is beautiful,” Smith said. “Of all the things I’ve done, that’s my favorite.”

All the while, Smith has been an advocate for equal opportunity among students, particularly those who may not be able to afford certain programs.

“Because the art center is situated on the north hill, it’s been a constant struggle for me to make sure that the kids from down in the flats can come up there and do what they want to do too,” he said. “So I’ve always been an advocate for free programs for kids.”

A lifelong storyteller, Smith grew up in Alliance, Nebraska. He studied Latin and Greek and earned his bachelor’s degree at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, just as the civil rights movement was underway.

From 1964 to 1965, Smith worked as a civil rights worker in Mississippi when churches and freedom houses were being bombed, including an interracial living space where he lived.

“I’ve never really written much about that because I’m still processing it,” he said. “I have no desire to ever go back to Mississippi. I can tell you that.”

He left Mississippi to begin a master’s course at Harvard. But the civil rights movement had changed him, and he was dissatisfied with life at a prestigious institution and its “stuffy people.” So he dropped out.

He moved to California for a short period before moving out to Devon, Montana, a small rural

town near the Canadian border where, for a year, he taught eight students at a one-room schoolhouse.

“It was far out,” he said.

After that, he returned to California, where he fell in with, among others, Ken Kesey’s Merry Pranksters. He found whatever means of work he could find to survive, including making and selling leather sandals from the back of his truck in the parking lot of Stanford University.

In 1968, he began his four-year stint as a manager and editor for the Whole Earth Catalog, a counterculture magazine with essays and articles that,

put simply, showed readers how to optimize their lives.

In 1972, Smith and his colleagues won the National Book Award for the “Last Whole Earth Catalog,” raking in millions of dollars in book sales, which they donated as a foundation to organizations, including the Sierra Club, the Black Panthers food for children program in Oakland, California, and other crisis centers. Doling out those funds was how Smith said he got into grant writing.

From there, Smith went on to live a blue collar lifestyle. He said he worked as a golf course greens mower, an auto parts runner, bookstore clerk and much more.

“In retrospect, as an 80-year-old man, I liked the blue collar stuff more than anything else,” he said. “It was never tough to find a job.”

In 1992, he moved to Pendleton, and joined the art center a few years later. Lavadour said Smith has been an integral advocate for the center’s employees and has consistently done the behind-the-scenes work to keep things running smoothly.

“He’s a storyteller, and he’s been able to tell our story at the art center exceedingly well,” Lavadour said.

Smith said he’s enjoyed working with youths and meeting people during his 20 years at the art center. And he knows it was a good job because “nobody’s hit me and I haven’t been attacked by wolves,” he said. Overall, he said, it was good for him to hang out with people who made things and did stuff.

“That’s probably the best thing that I’ve been able to do there or what’s happened to me,” Smith said. “It’s been a good job, all in all.”

The art center is now seeking applicants for a half-time grant writer position.



Smith

Agencies respond to agricultural burn near Adams



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

A tractor plows the edge of an agricultural burn Friday, Sept. 24, 2021, between Tubbs Ranch Road and Highway 11 near Adams. Fire crews from East Umatilla Fire & Rescue, the Pendleton Fire Department, Umatilla Tribal Fire Department and the Bureau of Indian Affairs responded to the burn after confusion surrounding its origins. According to East Umatilla Fire & Rescue Deputy Fire Chief Mark Moore, the controlled nature of the fire was not communicated within the district and fire crews were dispatched to the scene. “It wasn’t ever out of control,” he said.

Hermiston hires first in-house city attorney

Former Morrow County prosecutor Richard Tovey starts new job Thursday

By **ERICK PETERSON**
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Hermiston’s first in-house city attorney begins working Thursday, Sept. 30.

The Hermiston City Council at its Sept. 13 meeting approved Richard Tovey as the successor to Gary Luisi, who retires after 23 years from his role as the city’s attorney the day Tovey starts.



Tovey

Luisi, however, is a private attorney with his own local office. As city attorney, Luisi was under contract but was not working in city hall, so he was not at the “beck and call” of city employees, Tovey said. For city staff to reach Tovey, all they will need to do is stop into his office, call or email.

Tovey said he is looking forward to serving Hermiston, and he is earning high praise from both his future and his past employers.

“We are very excited to have Richard start his service as our in-house city attorney,” Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith, said. “It is a great time in our growth and movement forward as a community.”

Tovey leaves his position as the deputy prosecutor in Morrow County Sept. 28. His former boss, Morrow County District Attorney Justin Nelson, said he was pleased with Tovey.

“We’re greatly going to miss Richard,” Nelson said. “That’s not just me, as

district attorney, but all my staff.”

Tovey became deputy district attorney to Nelson shortly after Nelson took office in 2010. Nelson called him a close colleague, an equal and a friend. Tovey’s departure, according to Nelson, is a loss for the county, but a gain for Hermiston.

Nelson said he wants Hermiston to know it is lucky to have him.

Tovey: past, present and future

Tovey, who grew up in Irrigon, went to Riverside High School in Boardman. After graduating high school, he went to Linn-Benton Community College and later Oregon State University. While there, he majored in history and anthropology.

“I thought I would become a history teacher,” he said. Instead, he decided to attend the University of Montana School of Law to become a lawyer.

He took the bar exam in 2004 and passed. This began his career in law. He worked for the district attorney’s office in Coos County, starting in 2004 and lasting until his employment for Morrow

County more than five years later.

“It was a good opportunity to come back to the area,” Tovey said about returning to Eastern Oregon. He liked being the deputy district attorney, and he admitted his latest move is a bit unconventional.

“It’s not the most common career move,” he said.

Becoming city attorney involves a pay cut, according to Tovey. Still, there are benefits and the city job is attractive. One plus to the new work, his new office is only a few miles from his Hermiston house.

He said the city council and others in Hermiston have been very warm in welcoming him. Throughout the interview process, he felt accepted and appreciated. It made him feel comfortable with this job.

Tovey, like Luisi before him, will represent the city council at meetings and assist the policy body when needed. He also will work with the city manager and city departments in reviewing contracts and providing legal advice.

He will have in office in the Hermiston Public Library for now, which is

located as the temporary location of Hermiston City Hall. When the new city hall is complete, Tovey said he believes he will move into that building.

He will have no other jobs while serving as Hermiston’s city attorney, he said.

Tovey is married and has four children. His oldest child, a boy, graduated from Hermiston High School in 2020. He has three daughters — a high school student, a middle school student and an elementary school student.

Describing himself as “boring,” he said he is a 46-year-old family man without many hobbies. His main interests, he said, are helping his children in their sports. Sometimes, he serves as assistant coach.

He also is an active and involved member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Hermiston.

Tovey said he is happy about working for Hermiston. He said he expects to stay in the position throughout the time his children are in school. He may even continue as the Hermiston city attorney until his eventual retirement.

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