

Flight:

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Since 2016, JCS has been preparing students interested in aerospace to take flight in its New Heights Aviation Program. Students develop skills for aeronautics both in the classroom and through hands-on experiments and construction of aircraft. They also are encouraged to develop skills that are necessary to be successful in the field such as communications, logistics and thinking outside of the box.

Construction of the Career and Technical Education Building at the school began in early April 2019. A Federal Aviation Administration-approved simulator was added. Wallowa and Enterprise high school students and community members were to be able to use the facilities by appointment.

Toby Koehn, a former instructor at JCS, got the program off to its start in 2016. Primarily a vocational agricultural instructor, he extended the program into aviation and manufacturing/engineering technology.

Koehn, who retired midway through last year, was followed by J.D. Clay, who kept the program going last year, Homan said. The program was cut back to just one class because of the COVID-19 pandemic, he said.

Rindfleisch said she has only 15 students in the two aviation classes — Aviation 1 and Aviation 2 — as the program was on hold until she was hired.

“They didn’t know if they were going to have an aviation teacher, so they weren’t sure how many classes they would be able to offer,” she said. “Hopefully, next year the schedule will be designed so that the classes will be available to more.”

The first-year class caters primarily to freshmen and sophomores, while the second year is for juniors and seniors.

Aviation background

Rindfleisch always wanted to be a pilot, but she wanted more than that. “My dad’s a pilot and he did a lot of backcountry flying when I was a kid in Idaho, mostly in the Frank Church/River of No Return Wilderness,” she said. “We lived about 15 miles upriver from Riggins. ... I wanted to fly. ... But I like to understand it. I took ground school in Hood River. ... I told my dad, ‘I need to know how they work.’ If I fly in the backcountry and something breaks down, I need to know how to fix it.”

That led her to the two-year



Bill Bradshaw/EO Media Group

A metal lathe, left, and a drill press are two of the machines aviation students learn to use in Lexi Rindfleisch’s aviation classes at Joseph Charter School.

Aircraft Maintenance Technology program at Idaho State University in Pocatello.

“When I moved back to Idaho, I bought a house ... and decided I was going to go back to school to continue my education,” she said. “Eight weeks later, I was accepted into the program at ISU.”

Rindfleisch was eager to get the job at Joseph.

“My husband’s cousin, who lives in Enterprise, said, ‘I’ve got this perfect job for you.’ So I talked to Lance Homan, the superintendent here, and sent him my resume, and he was like, ‘When can we meet?’”

Her husband, Josh Rindfleisch, is a freelance videographer/photographer, she said.

She also is working on her pilot’s license, but still lacks several hours in the air before that’s achieved.

The program

Rindfleisch said that even once she gets her pilot’s license, she’s not sure she’ll be able to teach flying as part of the school program. She did say it’s conceivable she could teach the ground school portion of learning to fly.

“I don’t know if that’s something we can do on school time, but we may be able to introduce them to pilot’s certification and if that’s something they want to do, we could help them get scholarships,” she said. “Obviously, that would be working

with their families.”

In addition to the simulator — which still needs to be calibrated before it’s usable — there are “parts of” three aircraft in the CTE Building. One of them is a Fisher Experimental with a Subaru automobile motor that has been retrofitted for use in the aircraft.

The students will be learning about aircraft mechanics in a truly hands-on way at the school. Rindfleisch said that once a plane is airworthy, the wings can be removed and it can be taken to the Joseph State Airport to fly. But that’s still in the future.

She hopes to see the school’s aviation program expand to K-12.

“The goal is to expose kids to all types of aviation, from the mechanics side, the NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), the weather side, the pilot’s side, air-traffic control — all of those pieces,” she said. “That would be a beginning-aviation course work and classes and then actually dive into what they’re really interested in. Eventually, I’d like this to be a K-12 aviation program.”

Plans for the latter are underway.

“We’re already working on little lesson plans for (younger students) for this year, but hopefully it will be something that they do more often,” she said.

‘Community of aviators’

Two of the students with Rindfleisch during the Sept. 23 interview covered the gamut from “would like to” take aviation to one who already is.

“I have pilots in my class,” Rindfleisch said.

“I remember graduating from aviation my freshman year,” said Jett Peterson, who proudly showed off his student pilot’s license. “It’s just like a learner’s permit only to fly.”

Savanah Seeley, on the other hand, has yet to try her wings in the program.

“I want to take it, but I haven’t yet,” she said.

The two youths — and the other aviation students — are part of an active aviation community in Wallowa County. Although there are but the two public airports — in Joseph and Enterprise — there are a number of private landing strips scattered around the county.

“This is such a community of aviators. After I get myself a little more with them and their vision for it as well, and where they see themselves fitting,” Rindfleisch said. “I certainly am not an expert in all things aviation and I want the people who are helping, as well, and involved with the kids and getting them excited. It’s going to be a community process. In terms of the ground school, they can take ground school and take flying lessons at the same time.”

Kitchen:

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She said the business would need to consistently exceed \$1,000 to get by. Henshaw said she would need to cut labor to pay herself. But that’s not an option. She only has three employees: her mother, sister and sister-in-law.

And she has to be extra careful not to get sick.

“Staffing is just scary in general with COVID right now,” she said. “I have to be so careful and so responsible, because if I get sick, this place has to close, because no one else can be me right now.”

A national supply shortage has made things even harder. Henshaw said she often has to race to Walla Walla and back to get meat, lemon juice and many other supplies.

“I feel like I’m trying to beat all the other business owners to Cash & Carry before they take the last turkey or the last whatever,” she said.

Henshaw said she wants to give customers the quality experience the restaurant has dished out for years. She isn’t willing to settle for meager supplies. So, like several other Pendleton businesses, she’s upped her prices.

Meanwhile, she’s tried to spread word about her business, talking to locals and posting on social media. She said she continues to be surprised how many people don’t know about the business, but said Pendleton Round-Up week helped bring notoriety, even if it was stressful and busy.

“I want to eventually start paying myself,” she said. “I want to get us T-shirts with the business name on



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Loaves of bread line a shelf Wednesday, Oct. 6, 2021, at Eden’s Kitchen in Pendleton. The local eatery changed ownership in June.

it. We’ve never had uniforms or anything. I want to build a brand

for the place. We have big plans.”

Part of those plans is to expand

the business to a new section of the building, which would extend Eden’s lobby. Henshaw said she isn’t sure how much that would cost, but she’s made the expansion a goal.

“We’ve been outgrowing this building for years,” she said, adding the current layout often fills with customers quickly and is too small to work in.

“It’s really tiny for how much production we do,” she said.

Growing up in a family where homemade meals were a tradition at big family gatherings, Henshaw has aspired to cooking high-quality dishes for residents. She said she has come to care deeply about the restaurant since becoming an employee several years ago.

“I know I’m not going to get rich doing this,” she said. “I just do it because I love it and I love making people happy with food.”

Cases:

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OHSU researchers underline that each forecast is just that — a model based on data. Each week’s forecast includes a graph overlaying prior forecasts.

Graven said the model was at a “tipping point” driven by both the resilience of the virus and weariness of the population. Oregon is wobbling in a “fright and fatigue” cycle in the pandemic.

When the delta variant skyrocketed in July, many parts of the state returned to masking and limiting contacts. The slow growth in immunization rates started to increase in July and August, even in counties where vaccine hesitancy or resistance was widespread.

OHSU said “breakthrough” cases of infection in people who had been vaccinated has risen to 20% of new cases. But the worst outcomes have remained steady, with stark differences for the vaccinated and those who are not. OHSU

said unvaccinated people accounted for 95.5% of severe cases and more than 99% of deaths.

Those numbers hold up as September’s 498 COVID-19 deaths statewide make it the second most deadly month in the 19-month pandemic.

While hospitalizations have taken a steep dive, it is from the highest point in the COVID-19 crisis. If this forecast holds up, it will take over a month just to get below the peak of the 584 hospitalizations a day during last winter’s surge.

The OHSU forecast pointed to some troubling areas. Estimated mask usage dropped from 84% to 81%. Based on an analysis of social media traffic, people are becoming more active and getting together in larger groups. With the colder weather starting to take hold, researchers worry that will drive activity indoors, where the virus can spread more rapidly.

Vaccinations also slowed their pace of growth. A quarter of all adult Oregonians — just less than 1 million people — remain unvaccinated more than nine months after

COVID-19 vaccines first became available.

The state is seeing a drop in infections and hospitalizations overall. But parts of Eastern Oregon are seeing an increase in infections, which some local health authorities have tied to outbreaks from the Pendleton Round-Up in mid-September.

An exception to the drop in hospitalizations is Region 7, which includes Deschutes, Crook, Jefferson, Grant, Harney, Klamath, Lake and Wheeler counties. After showing a decline along with the rest of the state, hospitalizations edged upward in Region 7 while declines continued in other regions.

Part of the region has some of the lowest rates of vaccination in the state. Lake has the second lowest percentage of eligible adults who have been vaccinated, 41.7% as of Thursday, according to Oregon Health Authority reports.

Grant is one of the four counties in the state where less than half of eligible adults have been vaccinated. It’s at 47.1%. Harney, at 50.3%, just crossed the threshold last week, nine

months after vaccines first became publicly available.

After seeing two consecutive weeks of a decline in cases, Grant County quadrupled in cases from 30 to 116 between the weeks ending Sept. 15 and Sept. 22. The case rate per 100,000 people — a way to measure the level of infection between areas with different population sizes — was 1,596. The percentage of tests that were positive tripled from 5% to 14.6%.

The highest infection rate in the state is in Harney County, where one out of every four tests was positive. Harney’s infection rates remained high for the month of September, the the survey at the end of the month showed it with a state-leading 1,675.8 cases per 100,000 people.

Deschutes County has the fifth highest vaccination rate in the state at 77% of eligible adults. Jefferson is at 62%, while Crook is 58%. The positive infection rates continue to be high in all three, according to a recent OHA County Covid-19 Community Transmission Report. Crook is at 15.1%,

Jefferson at 12.1% Deschutes at 10.8%. The statewide average is 8.9% and OHA has said throughout the pandemic that any positive test rate above 5% allows for significant growth in cases.

The statewide impact of the Pendleton Round-Up outbreak that began last month still is not completely known, state officials said last week. While many of the Eastern Oregon counties have low populations, they can be a harbinger of new statewide spikes because of the large percentage of unvaccinated residents.

That’s what happened with the Pendleton Whisky Music Fest outbreak in July.

With infection rates at a low point in early summer and the statewide adult vaccination level near 70%, Gov. Kate Brown on June 30 lifted most restrictions on businesses and events across the state.

The move came despite wildly different levels of vaccination and infection among the 32 counties at a time when the highly contagious delta variant had swept across the country and into Oregon.

The Whisky Fest, an

Homes:

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With buildable, bare land hard to come by in Pendleton, the city has long targeted the area for housing. In February, the council agreed to donate land for the South Hill Commons, a 70-unit affordable apartment project also located east of Highway 11. But building the new road has the potential to bring an even larger development. Patterson said the road and utilities opens up 250 acres for development, estimating developers could fit 1,500 to as many as 2,100 single family homes. In comparison, the city of Pendleton serves 4,800 residential units currently.

But there’s still hoops to jump through and questions that need to be answered before developers can break ground on new homes.

“We have a lot of work to do,” Patterson said.

The city won’t pay any money for the easements, but the deal between the city and the land owners is contingent on the city surveying the land and documenting exactly what easements it needs. Patterson said the land is a mix of residential, commercial and light industrial land, and the owners would need to rezone some of it before proceeding.

But the city also will need to determine how to pay for the road. While the city is planning to pay for the booster station with a Business Oregon grant, the city is considering several options on paying for the road, including securing an appropriation from one of the infrastructure bills being debated in Congress or having a future developer reimburse the city for the costs.

Unlike previous major developments, the city isn’t leveraging one of its own properties for housing. Patterson said the land owners are in negotiations with developers on acquiring their properties, but when and how the land will be developed is at their discretion.