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## Firing prompts feud

By BRYCE DOLE  
East Oregonian

ARLINGTON — A simmering feud between ambulance service volunteers and a local health district board in Gilliam County is placing emergency medical services along a particularly hazardous swath of Interstate 84 at risk.

The dispute, first reported by The Times-Journal in Condon, began when the North Gilliam County Health District board suddenly fired a longtime health care administrator, David Anderson.

Since becoming a clinic and ambulance service administrator in 2014, Anderson played an essential role in emergency services for the rural county of roughly 2,000 people, emergency responders and sources said.

Anderson said he was fired shortly after a month-long battle with COVID-19 beginning in August. He was hospitalized and then intubated in the intensive care unit at Oregon Health & Science University, Portland, in September. Due to his risk of blood clots, his provider had urged him not to get the vaccine.



Anderson

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## Hermiston residents give sendoff to local Guard

By ERICK PETERSON  
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — A smiling and sometimes tearful audience Thursday, Nov. 4, gave a send off in Hermiston to 75 Oregon Army National Guard soldiers heading for overseas service.

The ceremony at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center was an opportunity for soldiers and well-wishers to say their goodbyes.

The citizen-soldiers, under the command of Capt. Sean Povravak, are assigned to Bravo Company's, 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry Regiment. The regiment along with maintenance support members from the 145th Brigade Support Battalion left within hours for Boise, Idaho, where they linked up with task force groups in Montana.

From Boise, they travel Fort Bliss, Texas, to complete the remainder of their mobilization training.

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## MURAL STIRS MEMORIES OF 'THE PEOPLE'S CHAMPION'

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Cowboy George Fletcher rides again in Pendleton.

A mural of Fletcher astride a bucking bronc at the Pendleton Round-Up has adorned a whitewashed wall near the intersection of Southwest Dorion Avenue and First Street since September. But Travel Pendleton on Wednesday, Nov. 4, unveiled the latest tribute to the cowboy, complete with tourism promoters, local government officials and organizations celebrating the art and its addition to the Oregon Mural Trail with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

A competitor at the famous 1911 Round-Up, Fletcher was never truly forgotten: The Pendleton Round-Up and Happy Canyon Hall of Fame inducted him into its inaugural class in 1969, he was fictionalized in Ken Kesey's 1994 novel "Last Go Round" and his likeness was cast in bronze and erected on South Main Street in 2014.

But his legacy was kept alive by the people who told his story as a part of oral history.

Seeing as he is in the final stages of the confirmation process to become the next



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian  
Mariotta Gary-Smith, the chair of the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs, speaks Wednesday, Nov. 3, 2021, in Pendleton during a ribbon cutting for a mural featuring cowboy George Fletcher.

National Park Service director, Chuck Sams may have been the most high profile speaker at the ceremony. But Sams wasn't there as a representative of the federal government, but as the immediate past president of the Oregon Cultural Trust.

Sams, a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, also had stories about Fletcher to share. His grandfather was Fletcher's contemporary and would tell stories of riding with Fletcher as they transported cattle or broke horses at the Sams ranch.

Born in 1890 in Kansas, Fletcher, who was Black,

moved to Pendleton as a child and learned to ride broncs on the Umatilla Indian Reservation while facing discrimination and racism from Pendleton residents.

He entered the bronc riding competition at the Round-Up in 1911, making it all the way to finals. While Fletcher's final ride was a crowd favorite, the judges awarded first place to white cowboy John Spain. Fletcher was quickly dubbed "the people's champion" and an impromptu fundraiser in the stands garnered him \$700 for his efforts. Fletcher remained in Pendleton until his death in 1973, although he stopped

competing after he was injured in World War I.

Fletcher's story resonated beyond Pendleton. Mariotta Gary-Smith, the chair of the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs, went up to speak about her own grandfather. Gary-Smith's grandfather migrated from the Deep South to Portland during the Jim Crow era. A huge rodeo fan, her grandfather would frequently take his family to the Round-Up and share stories about Fletcher.

Those stories of the people's champion made their way down to Gary-Smith's mother and eventually Gary-Smith herself. It was something on her mind when the Oregon Cultural Trust asked for ideas for its new license plate. The plate features a scenic Oregon vista, but on closer inspection, the scenery is composed of smaller pictures reflective of the state's culture and history.

Gary-Smith submitted Fletcher, and she was pleasantly surprised when she saw the final design came out and Fletcher's cowboy hat was near the top right hand corner, right under a wagon wheel signifying the Oregon Trail. Gary-Smith said she planned to take a picture of the mural to send to her mother.

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Photos by Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian  
Pendleton Mayor John Turner, center left, Rep. Bobby Levy, R-Echo, and Travel Oregon CEO Todd Davidson cut a ribbon Wednesday, Nov. 3, 2021, for Travel Oregon's new "still only slightly exaggerated" mural of George Fletcher in Pendleton.

## Eastern Oregon food banks see a surge of clients

By ALEX WITTMER  
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Food banks across Eastern Oregon have reported an increase in the number of clients they served this year as compared to the previous year.

Boardman Food Pantry, which serves residents of Morrow County, reported that an increase in the number of individuals served from 3,470 to 8,570 — a nearly 150% increase since 2020.

"It was quite shocking to see the increase that we've had," said Mary Killion, president of the Boardman pantry.

Killion said the need is not likely to let off.

"I honestly think that we will continue to see an increase, unfortunately," Killion said. "I really wish we wouldn't, to be honest, but with the current economic climate I see people having more issues being able

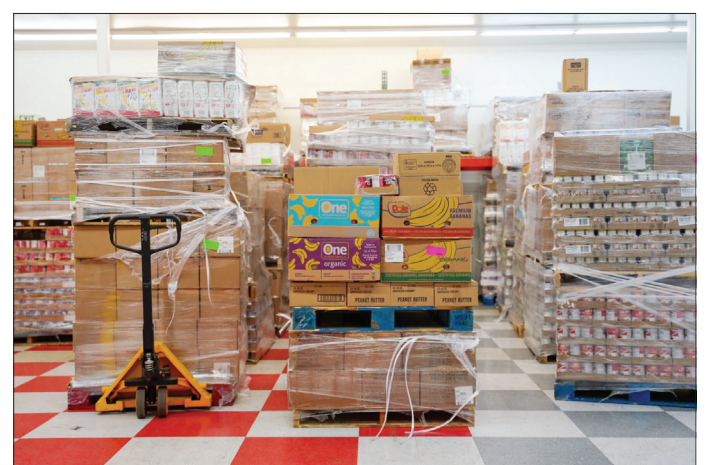
to purchase their gas, for instance. They're going to have to make harder choices on how they spend their money. So I unfortunately see this as a trend."

The increase in clients also meant the Boardman Food Pantry is flirting with the idea of hiring staff to handle the new demand.

"We've been a 100% volunteer organization from the beginning, so we don't have anybody on staff, and we are looking to add that in the future because our numbers are growing," Killion said. "We see that as an opportunity to improve those supply chain issues, somebody to make those contacts and get those items more efficiently."

Across Eastern Oregon, the Salvation Army reported it also saw an increase of roughly 50% in the number of individuals served. But not all food banks shared the bounty equally.

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Alex Wittmer/EO Media Group

Pallets full of food sit within the storage facility of Community Connection of Northeast Oregon Inc. on Thursday, Nov. 4, 2021, in Island City. The regional food bank, which services Grant, Union, Baker and Wallowa counties, has seen a small increase in demand as the holiday season approaches.