



Agriculture science instructor Matt Liscom, center, discusses body characteristics of a pair of horses Thursday, Nov. 18, 2021, during an introduction to equine science class at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton.

## BMCC:

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soon to predict how 2021-22 enrollment would affect the budget because high school enrollment through BMCC's dual credit program won't be counted until the winter and spring terms.

Blue Mountain's long-term enrollment decline is indicative of a wider trend across the state. Over the past decade, Oregon's community college system student enrollment has fallen by 40%.

Cam Preus, the executive director of the Oregon Community College Association and a former BMCC president, said those numbers don't take into account the four or five years before 2012 when community colleges saw a huge jump in enrollment. Although no community colleges have recovered to pre-pandemic levels, she also pointed to a few community colleges, such as Oregon Coast Community College in Newport, saw growth in both headcount and full-time equivalent enrollment.

But she added community colleges will have to alter their recruitment strategies to stabilize their



Agriculture science instructor Matt Liscom, right, and student Matt Orem examine a horse's teeth Thursday, Nov. 18, 2021, during an introduction to equine science course at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton.

enrollment long term. Citing a study from the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education, Preus said Oregon's high school population is projected to decrease starting in 2025. If that trend comes to bear, Preus said colleges should begin focusing on bringing in adult students and partnering with local employers on workforce training as potential sources

of enrollment.

Browning said BMCC is already looking at ways to boost enrollment long-term. After a few months on the job, Browning said he would like to revive the college's communications and marketing department.

Former President Dennis Bailey-Fougner eliminated the vice president of college relations in 2020. The following year, the BMCC

Board of Education agreed to outsource marketing services to the InterMountain Education Service District under the recommendation of Green.

Browning said needs to be able to spread its message if it's going to improve enrollment, and he would like to bring communications and marketing services in-house as soon as the budget allows it.

## Sams:

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Indian to head the service in its 105-year history, Sams was in Pendleton as a representative of the Oregon Cultural Trust at a dedication ceremony for a mural of Pendleton cowboy George Fletcher.

A former naval intelligence officer, Sams shared a short message on Facebook with his friends and family following his confirmation.

"I am so deeply honored to be appointed by President Biden and to be confirmed by unanimous consent by the United States Senate to be the 19th Director of the United States National Park Service," he wrote. "Thank you all who have supported me in my life's journey. I look forward to being of service to this Great Nation once again."

Prior to his appointment to the Pacific Northwest Electric Power and Conservation Council, Sams was best known for his work in CTUIR tribal government, where he worked as a communications director, deputy executive director and interim executive director.

His former colleagues in tribal government offered him support and pride in a CTUIR press release.

"Chuck knows the outdoors," CTUIR Board of Trustees Chair Kat Brigham said in a statement. "He understands the importance of helping families develop



Chuck Sams speaks Nov. 3, 2021, at a ribbon cutting for a mural of cowboy George Fletcher in downtown Pendleton.

a relationship with the land." CTUIR tribal elder Antone Minthorn called him "honorable, loyal and accountable" while Bobbie Conner, the director of the Tamastlikt Cultural Institute and a tribal historian, said he was "unflappable."

"(He) is known for being steady at the helm and taking challenges in stride," Conner said. "Chuck was raised to always consider future generations."

Teara Farrow Furman, the second person to succeed Sams as interim executive director of the CTUIR, is one of the many tribal leaders to grow up with him and then serve with him as adults in tribal government. She said she texted Sams throughout the confirmation

process, sending him words of encouragement.

"I texted him all along the journey," she said. "I told him, 'Our ancestors are looking down upon you and guiding you.'"

Farrow Furman said she and Sams are both Cayuse descendants and understand their tribe's historic role in fighting for their land. She said Sams will understand his role in preserving park land to ensure its accessible to every American resident and visitor.

"He's a good leader," she said. "He'll do well."

During the confirmation process, Sams had some powerful supporters, including Gov. Kate Brown and U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon.

The vote came after Wyden went to the Senate floor and asked the Senate to pass the nomination by unanimous consent, according to a press release from Wyden's office.

"Chuck Sams is the right nominee to lead the National Park Service as it addresses these challenges. I know Chuck. He is hardworking. He is committed," Wyden said in the press release. "Chuck is a role model in the stewardship of American land and waters, wildlife and history. And now thanks to the Senate's unanimous decision to confirm his nomination, Congress and parkgoers will have someone steady and experienced to rely on in the years ahead."



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

The Montero family plays in the pool July 7, 2020, at the Hermiston Family Aquatic Center. The possibility of an indoor aquatic center in the city was one of the items that came up for discussion Tuesday and Wednesday, Nov. 16 and 17, 2021, during the Hermiston 2040 survey labs.

## Survey:

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Smith said preliminary studies on the aquatic center show it would cost about \$30 million, though, upon hearing this price tag, no one at the lab wanted to take it off the list. If agreed upon, the earliest the center could be ready for people to use is five years from now, Smith said, possibly 10.

The most popular requests, more shops and restaurants, could be more immediate, Smith said. He expressed confidence those could become a reality next year. Most likely, he said, these would not be big-box stores, but small shops. For this, he stated that the Chamber of Commerce could help with recruiting new businesses or delivering classes for local people to become entrepreneurs.

According to Smith, Hermiston has made plans like this in the past.

"Twenty years ago,

there was one like this," he said.

Created in 2000, the people expressed their feelings for what the city would look like in 2020. Smith said such actions are extremely valuable for putting issues on "the community's radar screen" help goals become a reality.

He said the one around 20 years ago included items the city acted on, though a few that were not. He said he thinks the aquatic center, which has yet to be constructed, was on the old list, too.

Now that opinions have been gathered and discussed, a consultant will return with a draft of what the 2040 plan could look like. The plan will be shared with the public on Dec. 2 as part of the tree lighting event in Hermiston. Then a steering committee will review it, make changes and recommend adoption by the council. The council will then adopt the plan, Smith said.

## Fritsch:

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move forward.

After the meeting, Fritsch said he is parting Pendleton on good terms, a sharp distinction from the Adrian School District and Newberg School District, where board firing of superintendents stirred controversy.

"This is a great district," Fritsch said, "and I want to do whatever I can to help them find the very best person to join this team."

In a statement he sent shortly after the board meeting, Fritsch tried to head off any rumors about the circumstances surrounding his departure.

"Hopefully this will remain low-key with little attention," he wrote. "Once it becomes public there may be a few who claim to know the real story or misrepresent truth and reality. Unfortunately for them, there is no backstory, there is no conspiracy, it's just my time."

In an interview after the meeting, Fritsch said he had always been upfront with the board that he intended to stay five to seven years before retiring. With Fritsch originally hired by the district in 2017, he will have met his goal by the time he leaves the district on June 30, 2022.

With school boards and superintendents across the state sometimes clashing over curriculum and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Fritsch said he wanted to make clear the decision was purely about his desire to retire. Although he admitted that navigating the district through the pandemic the past two years has been challenging, he said it was not a factor in his retirement.

In his statement, Fritsch praised the administrators, teachers and community members he worked with and added that announcing his retirement now put the district in a good position to hire a consultant and identify his successor.

Lieuallen said Fritsch informed her and other

executive members last week about his decision. She added Fritsch always had been transparent about his timeline, with the board hoping it extended closer to the seven-year mark.

The district hired Fritsch to succeed former Superintendent Andy Kovach, who resigned after less than a year on a job and a poorly rated evaluation from the school board.

Prior to moving to Pendleton, Fritsch spent nearly his entire career at the Longview School District in southwestern Washington, about 50 miles north of Portland. While in Longview, Fritsch worked as teacher, principal and central office administrator, culminating in a position as Longview's assistant superintendent.

Fritsch already had been a finalist for several superintendent positions across Washington, but he broke through in a 21-candidate field to land the job in Pendleton.

Prior to the pandemic, Fritsch helped lead the district's effort to identify how to spend new funding made available by the state's Student Success Act, which led to new teachers and support staff focused on mental health and behavior. Fritsch also made his mark at the building level, replacing principals at Sherwood Heights Elementary School, Washington Elementary School, McKay Creek Elementary School and Pendleton High School as vacancies arose.

Lieuallen said the next step for the district is to hire a search firm to help find Pendleton's next superintendent. She added that the board's executive committee — Vice Chair Dale Freeman, board member Julie Muller and herself — will begin looking for a firm and hope to have one hired within the next few weeks.

After soliciting applications, holding interviews and narrowing down the field to a set of finalists, Lieuallen said the board intends to make a hire in the spring, well before Fritsch's retirement date.

— East Oregonian news editor Phil Wright contributed to the article.