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SEARCH GOES ON FOR MISSING BOARDMAN WOMAN **A3**

PGG EYES THE END

Former ag cooperative aims to dissolve in mid-2022

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The end of an era is coming to an end.

Pendleton Grain Growers announced Thursday, Dec. 16, it had distributed more than \$12 million to its more than 1,000 members as it fully winds down operations. PGG members who didn't pick up a check in person at the Dec. 15 meeting will get their checks in the mail.

Members were paid in "patronage." PGG Board President Tim Hawkins explained that before the grain cooperative shut down most of its operations, a portion of its proceeds were put into a patronage account that was paid out to members on a revolving basis every 10-12 years. But instead of members getting a cut of operational profits, PGG was distributing money from the co-op's methodical sale of all its assets and properties.

It's been five years since Pendleton Grain Growers members voted to dissolve the once-venerable co-op, but PGG remained in operation as the organization looked to pay back debts and find buyers to fill in its vast footprint.

According to "PGG — The Story of a Cooperative," a 1979 history by Virgil Rupp, PGG was conceived on Dec. 21, 1929, by a group of local farmers looking to address cratering wheat prices brought about by the Great Depression. PGG was officially incorporated the following year.

"The farmers had more faith and hope than money, as they signed up 500,000 bushels of production to take part in the new cooperative," Rupp wrote.

PGG turned a profit in its first year and only grew from there.

At its height, the co-op had thousands of members and not only offered services in grain, seed, agronomy, energy and irri-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

The Pendleton Grain Growers logo sits illuminated Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021, on the agricultural cooperative's former headquarters in Pendleton. PGG announced that morning it paid more than \$12 million to its more than 1,000 members as it heads to dissolution.

gation but also retail stores and vehicle service centers. The PGG logo could be found on buildings across Eastern Oregon and was a sponsor and contributor to scores of community organizations, businesses and events.

But by 2016, the co-op found itself in a much more precarious financial situation.

PGG overstated its earnings in 2010 and 2011, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture temporarily suspended the co-op's warehouse license in 2012 because of discrepancies in its audits. PGG ran in the red in 2013 and 2014 and soon found itself millions of dollars in debt.

By the time members voted to dissolve the cooperative, Pendleton Grain Growers already was in the process of selling off its retail property and agronomy division. The vote opened up the door for PGG to sell off the rest of its divisions.

PGG sold its grain division to United Grain Corp. and then swiftly sold many of its non-Pendleton retail buildings to businesses and nonprofits. But some of PGG's most prominent Pendleton properties stayed with PGG until the dominos began to fall in 2020 and 2021.

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

The setting sun casts a warm glow across the former headquarters of Pendleton Grain Growers Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021, in Pendleton. The cooperative announced that day it has paid its debts, paid its members and is wrapping up operations.



Sams faces 'huge task'

List of challenges is long for first American Indian director of National Park Service

By **CHRIS AADLAND**
Underscore.news and Indian Country Today

WASHINGTON — Record annual attendance numbers. Low morale among employees. Billions of dollars in maintenance needs.

Those are just some of the challenges Chuck Sams will have to tackle as director of the National Park Service after officially taking leadership in a swearing-in ceremony Thursday, Dec. 16.



Sams

Sams becomes the first Native American to hold the position and the most recent Indigenous person to hold a high-ranking position in the federal government since Joe Biden became president. His boss will be Deb Haaland, Laguna Pueblo, the Interior secretary and first Indigenous person to hold a cabinet-level position.

Sams' background and citizenship with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation also means some are optimistic he'll work to improve how the agency and its hundreds of national parks, historic sites, monuments and recreation areas work with tribal nations and incorporate their history and culture.

"Everyone should have access to the outdoors no matter where they live, how much money they have, or what their background is," Haaland said in a press release announcing the swearing in. "Chuck Sams understands the importance of connecting people to nature, and I am thrilled to work with him as the Interior Department works to make our national park system accessible to all Americans."

Kat Brigham, chair of the CTUIR Board of Trustees, said Sams has a big challenge tackling the needs of the park service but she is hopeful he also will prioritize improving the agency's work and coordination with tribal nations and Indigenous people.

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All aboard!

Christmas Express unites locals to bring food, toys to families

By **ERICK PETERSON**
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Volunteers wrapped presents and packed food boxes Wednesday, Dec. 15, at the Hermiston Community Center, for the Christmas Express.

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said the annual drive to provide goods for needy families gathered enough food, toys and more to provide for 500 families. Schools, social services and churches were among the groups

that identified the families. Each food box weighed nearly 100 pounds and contained a turkey, potatoes and onions.

The Hermiston Police Department was the organizing group, but the department's chief was not taking all the credit.

"Donations came from everywhere," Edmiston said, and the canned food donations from local schools was "huge this year."

Traditional donors included the Walchli family (both sides — John and Skip), the Troy Betz family, the Alan Cleaver family, and several clubs — Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions and Altrusa.



Nickolas L. Oatley/Umatilla County Fire District No. 1

Umatilla County Fire District No. 1 Chief Scott Stanton, center, volunteers Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2021, with Richard Cearns, left, the division chief of emergency medical services and training for the district, and his wife, Whitney Cearns, at the Christmas Express in at the Hermiston Community Center.

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