



East Oregonian, File

Vern Nelson works on a sign on the newly constructed Pendleton Grain Growers headquarters in early 1951 in Pendleton.

PGG:

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La Grande-based Hines Meat Co. acquired the former PGG Energy building, The MacGregor Co. took on the McKennon Station and Eastern Oregon Rentals, in an auction, bought the old PGG headquarters.

Hawkins said it's been a long road from the dissolution vote until now, but he feels good about PGG's position. The co-op avoided bankruptcy, paid off all of its debt and has now sold most of its properties. Hawkins said he expects PGG to dissolve completely in mid-2022 after it finishes selling its final three properties and resolves some patronages it has with other companies that should lead to more payments to members.

If PGG sticks to its antic-



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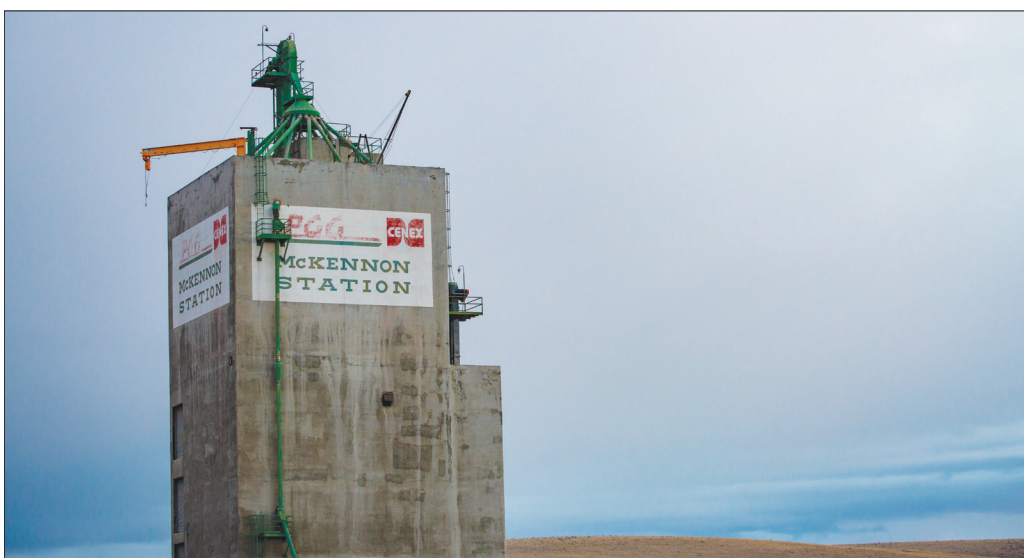
A two-page spread announces the opening of the new Pendleton Grain Growers headquarters in the March 1, 1951, issue of the East Oregonian.

ipated timeline, it will go out of existence eight years shy of its 100th anniversary.

For Hawkins, having the end in sight is a bittersweet experience. His father was once on the PGG board, and Hawkins never liked the idea of PGG closing for good. But

he said the board worked hard to match the properties it sold with strong organizations, and PGG is ending its life by putting money back into the pockets of farmers.

"It makes you feel like what you did the last six to seven years was worth it," he said.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Branding for Pendleton Grain Growers faintly remains on McKennon Station on Thursday, Dec. 16, 2021, in Pendleton. The agriculture cooperative that once was a major force in Eastern Oregon is in the final stages of winding down.

Express:

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The program usually costs \$15,000-\$18,000, he said, and has received \$14,776.44 in donations.

Volunteers used to be "historically limited to the police department," Edmiston said, but other groups joined in recent years. Nowadays, the effort to collect and pack goods is city-wide, with government officials, firefighters and family members all helping.

Umatilla County firefighters are grateful to have been included in the Christmas Express, said Nickolas Oatley, Umatilla County Fire District No. 1 recruitment and retention coordinator. On behalf of the district, he expressed appreciation to the local community, the police department and the city of Hermiston.

Oatley was careful not to make too much out of the fire district's involvement. He said Hermiston police remain the leaders of the effort; firefighters played a supporting role. Jim Forquer, the fire district's deputy chief of administration, teamed with Tim Miers, police training officer, to involve firefighters.

Ten member of the fire district plus their family members helped at the Dec. 15 packing party, and it donated a large box of toys from community member donations, according to Oatley.

"We hope to be a part of this event in the coming years," he said.



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

Food donations sit ready for packing into boxes Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2021, at the Hermiston Community Center.

Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith was at the Hermiston Community Center as well and packed food boxes. He said in addition to police, firefighters and other community members, the large group of volunteers included other city employees.

"The Christmas Express is a longtime tradition that started with the police department, and a number of years ago we expanded as an opportunity for the whole city staff and their families to participate in a great community project," he said.

There were two things that he especially liked about Christmas Express, Smith said. For one, he said he likes to help the community. For another, he said he likes to see city staff come together.

"It gives me a chance to know people from departments that I don't see on a daily basis," he said. "We work side-by-side, and I get to meet them and their families."

In past years, Smith said, all the food boxes have been filled in 40 minutes. This year, volunteers were not nearly as fast, he said, laughing.

"I think we were a bit slow this year," he said.

Still, they got all the work done in a single night, just like Santa Claus. And Smith said their hard work shows there are people in this community who care and are trying to help.

Even with all of the other volunteers, Edmiston said Christmas Express remains special to the Hermiston Police.

"Everyone at the police department inevitably has something to do with the program each year," he said. "Myself, Cpl. Tim Miers, chaplain Terry Cummings and communications manager Amanda Hartsteen start the planning each year in September."

Edmiston said Agape House also is a major partner,

Sams:

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"He's got a huge task," she said. "But I hope, eventually, that he'll be able to help us tell our story about our traditions and our culture within the national parks area."

Sams has a 25-year background in tribal administration and nonprofit natural resource and conservation management. That work has included facilitating land transfers and donations to the park service, in addition to working on park system lands with volunteers on conservation and invasive species management, among other related roles in public lands and conservation.

Sams will take over a park service that hasn't had a permanent director since 2017.

Before he was confirmed in late November, a Senate committee tasked with vetting Sams questioned him about his priorities and how he would address some of the more pressing needs of the agency and the 85 million acres it manages. Those priorities, he said, include tackling the agency's \$12 billion maintenance backlog. In 2020, Congress passed a \$6.5 billion bill that aimed to address that backlog after years of underinvestment.

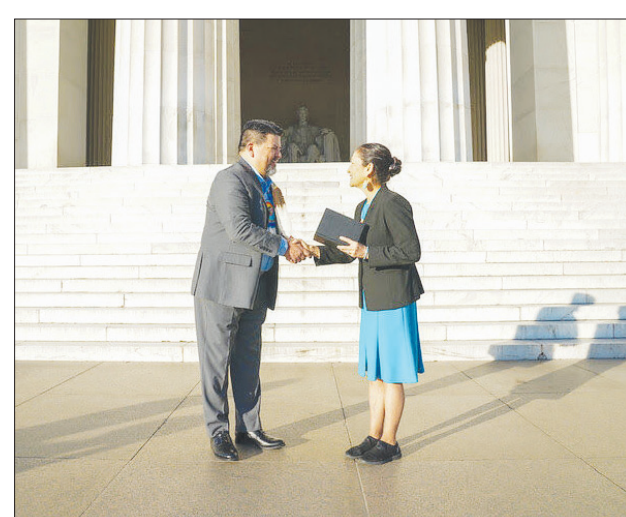
But for David Lamfrom, one of the most immediate issues is the mood among park service employees. Lamfrom is the vice president of Regional Programs for the National Park Conservation Association and works on community-building and reaching more diverse constituents.

He'd like to see a more diverse park service workforce. But first, he said, the workplace culture and concerns about harassment and gender discrimination have to be addressed, which Sams has recognized as a priority.

"I think building back that trust and morale within the agency is going to be a really top priority," Lamfrom said.

The morale concerns and other staffing issues come amid surging popularity for the park service, with many national parks — such as Zion and Glacier national parks — having experienced record attendance numbers in recent years.

"There's a lot of other



National Park Service/Contributed Photo

Chuck Sams, the new director of the National Park Service and an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, shakes hands in this undated photo with U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland. Sams is the service's first permanent director in five years.

issues that he's gonna have to deal with, like the fact is that during the pandemic, America fell in love all over again with our national parks," Lamfrom said.

In addition to ensuring people can access the parks while making sure they're adequately protected in the face of heavy attendance, he said he'd like to see the agency engage with groups who aren't flocking to park service units and make them more welcoming for all.

"The demographics tell us that that flocking is not consistent across all communities," Lamfrom added. "So there's attention and care that needs to be put into ensuring that communities who have felt disengaged from the parks, or have never felt engaged with the parks, can connect and feel welcome."

Regardless, he said, Sams is "absolutely up for this" and is taking over at an important and potentially "transformational" moment.

In the press release, Sams said he is honored to serve and "incredibly proud to work with the dedicated employees of the National Park Service."

"I have no doubt that together, we'll be able to expand access to the outdoors, protect America's public lands, and upgrade our nation's infrastructure system," he said.

Organizations such as the National Congress of American Indians and other tribal leaders have been pressuring the park service to improve tribal consultation, improve access to historic and culturally significant sites or better protect them and include Indigenous history and

culture as part of each park's experience.

Brigham, who has years of experience working with Sams from his time as an administrator with the tribes, said he has the knowledge and experience to do just that.

"Chuck knows why the land is important to the tribe; we have been taught the need to take care of the land, so the land can take care of us ... he knows the importance of family connecting to the land, traditionally, culturally, and in taking care of the land," she said. "Those are things we don't have to educate him on, as we have had to try and educate other people."

For his part, Sams said engaging with Indian Country is a top goal, whether that's through improved consultation with tribal nations or incorporating traditional Indigenous ecological knowledge into agency management decisions or incorporating Indigenous history and culture into park experiences.

"As the Park Service's first Native American director, Chuck is well-positioned to balance recreational uses and stewardship with our tribal nations' needs to maintain our traditional and ancestral ties to these lands," NCAI President Fawn Sharp said after Sams was nominated in August.

At the same time, Brigham said she and other tribal leaders are eager to help if he asks for it.

"We're willing to help, because it is going to be a huge task," she said. "We know it's not gonna happen overnight."



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

Hermiston City Councilor Phillip Spicerkuhn packs food boxes Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2021, at the Hermiston Community Center as part of the annual Christmas Express.

as that organization hands out the boxes and presents to people from Dec. 17 to Dec. 20. Leftover presents are saved for the following year. And Agape House uses any remaining food.

Mark Gomolski, Agape House executive director, said while volunteers were busy at the community center, he also was busy, working with 30 missionaries who were getting the food distribution center ready.

He said there was a lot of work to do, which included setting up tables, retrieving stored gifts from last year and making room for food boxes. He added he was looking forward to the distribution, which would benefit many people.

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