Polar Plunge raises more than 60 coats for kids

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Angie Cooke, left, leads a pack of polar plungers out of the water Saturday, Jan. 8, 2022, at the Umatilla Marina Swim Beach during the Coats for Kids Polar Bear Plunge in Umatilla. The event collected more than 60 coats for the program, according to organizers. If your family is in need of a winter coat, contact Rita Campos at 541-969-3338 or rcampos@umchs.org.

Port of Morrow and BMCC launch new forklift program

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

BOARDMAN — On Monday, Jan. 10, the Port of Morrow announced a new partnership with Blue Mountain Community College to offer free forklift training classes in Boardman.

"We have heard from employers and job seekers that there is a need for short term bilingual training," Port of Morrow Director of Workforce Development Kalie Davis said in a statement. "We are excited to partner with Blue Mountain Community College to make these opportunities easily accessible and free."

The noncredit classes will be at the BMCC Workforce Training Center and won't require students to be enrolled at Blue Mountain to attend, according to a port press release.

The curriculum will include courses in Microsoft Word and Excel offered in both English and Spanish. A forklift simulator also is available during the center's business hours and can be accessed in a number of languages.

The new programming also got plaudits from BMCC Workforce Training Center Director Anne Morter, who said the college's Boardman campus is now a "regional training hub" for Morrow County residents.

As BMCC looks to grow enrollment and boost its presence across the region, its sought out partnerships with other organizations. Last summer, the college launched a new unmanned aerial systems by starting a noncredit program with the Volatus Group, a company based at the Pendleton UAS Range. And in December, Blue Mountain signed an agreement with Washington State University Tri Cities to make it easier to transfer between the two schools.

Morning and evening class times have been set through May. More information on the courses and registration info can be found at www.portofmorrow.com/workforce-training/home.

NCFS earns U.S. Treasury certification

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

MISSION — The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation announced the U.S. Department of Treasury on Jan. 3 certified Nixyaawii Community Financial Services as a Community Development Financial Institution.

Nixyaawii is a tribally owned nonprofit that provides loans, homeownership assistance, business development services plus financial education to CTUIR members, reservation residents and tribal employees. According to a press release, the Treasury's certification means Nixyaawii will be recognized as an institution that helps communities typically left out of banking and investment. There are more than 1,000 Community Development Financial Institutions and about 70 are associated with American Indians.

"This is truly a milestone for our organization and the Tribal community," Nixyaawii Board President Kelly George said in a statement. " So many people have worked hard and held confidence that an economic development tool such as this could happen."

Nixyaawii Community Financial Services has been years in the making, but only opened last year.

In 2015, the CTUIR began exploring the concept of starting a loan fund and created a business plan under the direction of Wildhorse Resort & Casino CEO Gary George. In February 2020, the tribes' board of trustees approved the plan, which called for the consolidation of several tribal services, including business development, the homeownership program and tribal credit under one entity. Although Nixyaawii officially opened for business on July 1, 2021, and held a ribbon cutting ceremony the next month, staff stayed at their prior workplaces due to the pandemic and supply chain issues.

In individual statements, Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden, chair of the Senate Finance Committee, and Jeff Merkley congratulated the tribes on its new certification.

"Big congratulations to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation for earning this designation as a formal Community Development Financial Institution and their work to establish this financial mainstay to help tackle historic injustices that have blocked credit for Native communities," Wyden said.

"CDFI's like Nixyaawii Community Financial Services are crucial to building equitable economies and opening the doors of opportunity to all," Merkley added, "and I am so pleased to see them receive this formal certification from the Treasury."

LOCAL BRIEFING

Snowpack boosted by wet December

UMATILLA COUNTY — After a relatively warm fall, colder temperatures are having a restorative effect on the snowpacks that feed the basins that supply water to Umatilla and Morrow counties.

In its monthly Oregon Basin Outlook Report, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service reported recorded snowpack levels for the Umatilla, Walla Walla and Willow basins. As of Jan. 1, the three basins' snowpack was 111% of the median, jumping up from 30% the month before.

December precipitation remained strong, the USDA reporting it 124% of normal for the basins, an increase from 103% the month before. But reservoir storage remains below their normal levels: McKay Reservoir was 66% of the median and Cold Springs Reservoir was 47%

These totals do not include the several snow storms that hit the region after New Year's Day, which coated many areas with several inches of snow.

— EO Media Group

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Snow covers the Tollgate Store Friday, Jan. 7, 2022, as a snowstorm blows through the Weston Mountain region in Umatilla County.

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$2 SHOP LOCAL CHALLENGE

By trading in $100 at Columbia Bank or US Bank for $2 bills and spending those bills locally, you showed your support!

CONGRATULATIONS TO TERRY D! Terry is the winner of a $100 gift certificate to a local business of his choice! Terry D. used $100 in $2 bills from Columbia Bank in stores around the area in December, including: Pendleton Art Center, Buckin' Bean, Bi-Mart and El Charrito Mexican Restaurant

Thank you to Erika M and Angel A, who also participated in the $2 Challenge

Erika M. wrote:

"I spent $50 at Cecilia's Art and Crafts, $30 at Rae's Dayz Diner and $20 at Java Junkies.

We love our local businesses!"

Angel A. wrote:

"Participating in this challenge was a great experience all together. I spent my money on gifts at local businesses and meals at restaurants, as well as a haircut. I had the pleasure of going to multiple businesses including Ranch & Home, Hales Restaurant and Zila's Salon."

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Thanks for your support of the $2 Challenge! We're proud of our community.