

Schools:

Continued from Page A1

programs. This gives the building a total of 28 classrooms. The maximum occupancy will be 600.

This is needed, Mooney said, because the area is growing and the district would otherwise have difficulty keeping up with Hermiston's population. Already, as she pointed out, the current Rocky Heights has five modular buildings, each of which house five classrooms a piece.

No modulars are planned for the new buildings, though, she said.

The addition of these new schools even will allow Highland Hills Elementary School to get rid of its modular buildings. The new schools will be able to accept students who are overflowing Highland Hills.

She added the new buildings will offer greater security, as each school will keep its students under a single roof. People entering the buildings will have to pass through vestibules, where they will be met by office staff.

Hearing that students will benefit from his work, Aparicio said he felt glad. He has worked on many different projects, but most are not as satisfying as schools, he said. According to the Wenaha manager, building a school is



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Framing nears completion Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022, on the library at the new Rocky Heights Elementary School, Hermiston.

special because it serves children and their development.

"There's an extra incentive to deliver a good product," he said. "There's nothing like seeing the smiles on children when they step into their new building."

Fowler shared this sentiment. The Kirby Nagelhout superintendent said this project is exciting, as it is his first elementary school construction, and he is happy to be working for the benefit of young students.

He said many Rocky Heights students, who are studying out of the old build-

ing, adjacent to the construction site, often check out the ongoing work. They stand outside the fence, and watch their new school take form, he said.

"It's gratifying to see the kids, playing next door, peeking through the fence and watching it come up," he said.

The teachers, too, he said, have a gander at the work and also seem excited. As often he does not even meet the people who take possession of his projects, he said this one is special; he gets to see his customers.

The Hermiston schools

superintendent said Rocky Heights staff have toured the new building several times and seem to like what they have seen.

Standing in the principal's future office, Aparicio pointed out one of the reasons why the school's principal might be enthusiastic; it has a full view of the Hermiston Butte, across the street, in Butte Park.

Josh Browning, Loma Vista principal, likely is happy also, Mooney said, because he will soon have an office.

"He's just been going from place to place, itinerant," she said.

The challenges of construction

Life is not just sunshine and rainbows, Aparicio and Fowler said. Sure, they said, people are excited, but this does not mean work has advanced without challenges.

This year's snowfall made additional work; laborers had to remove snow from parts of the project that were uncovered and subject to the elements. Aparicio and Fowler, however, stopped short of saying the snowfall created a delay in the project. Rather, they said, the snowfall forced them to redirect labor to other tasks.

Snow and cold weather have not been their biggest worry, they said. They said material acquisition was a much bigger concern, but they had a solution to this problem.

According to Aparicio, he has heard from some distributors, contractors and suppliers who have struggled to secure materials on other projects. Some things, which would ordinarily take six weeks, are delayed by up to three months, he said.

"Our team worked frantically to get what we needed before anyone else got to it," Fowler said, and they were able to "escape the volatility of the market" through early purchasing.

"Procurement is complicated at this time," Aparicio said. "We jumped on stuff way

earlier than we would've to make sure that we had it when we needed it."

Some of these things have been stored on site and are moved as needed.

"We'd rather deal with the issue of moving things around that is already here as opposed to not having it when we need it," he said.

Moving on in

Mooney said she has concerned herself with obtaining extra staff for the schools. In addition to the new principal, new custodial staff and secretaries will be needed. Some staff, including teachers, will transfer to the new schools.

Mooney calls the movement of staff, classes and students a "shuffling around the district." Some students, who are attending one school, will be moved to new schools, as new lines are drawn within the district.

Students who will enter the new schools are in for a treat, according to Aparicio. Exposed wood, polished concrete floors, a wavy roofline and wide windows will add to the aesthetics, he said.

"They're going to be beautiful," Aparicio said of the schools.

Mooney added her own description — "amazing." She said the schools will host tours for the public prior to their opening, if their schedule permits.



Mark Seder/Seder Architecture

A rendering shows the Pendleton Children's Center's plans for the former Active Senior Center of Pendleton.

Home:

Continued from Page A1

"Pendleton could be 'The Most Child-Friendly Community East of the Cascades' — but it will take all of us working together to make this dream a reality," the email announcing the acquisition stated.

The center's announcement ends a months-long process to find a home for the nonprofit. Opportunities to build a child care center on an empty lot across from the Pendleton Early Learning Center and at Stillman Park were scuttled after the school board voted against the proposal and the city realized its historic preservation code prevented it, respectively.

Kathryn Brown, secretary-treasurer of the children's center board, said the group heard back in October that the Pendleton senior center board was readying to part with its main building. By Dec. 1, the children's center board submitted a proposal to the senior center with a number of letters of support from some of Pendleton's top employers, including endorsements from St. Anthony Hospital, Blue Mountain Community College and Interpath Laboratory.

"It was probably overkill, but we really wanted it," Brown said.

In the eyes of the children's center board, the senior center offered a central location and close proximity to the Pendleton Early Learning Center, which serves an overlapping population.

In the coming months, the children's center plans to launch a capital campaign to fund several renovations the building will need before it can open, including adding a playground, classrooms and more bathrooms. While there weren't specific details in the email on how much the nonprofit would need to raise, the email states that the campaign will include multi-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Christine Funk, left, offers a tour Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2022, of the former Active Senior Center of Pendleton to Kathryn Brown, Pendleton Children's Center board secretary-treasurer, after the senior center transferred ownership of the facility to the children's center.

ple sponsorship levels and donor recognition options.

Brittney Jackson, a consultant for the children's center with years of experience as a Pendleton child care provider, said the nonprofit will need to conduct a detailed assessment of their new asset before they can formulate a specific goal for their capital campaign.

Nor does the children's center plan to solve Pendleton's child care shortage overnight. Although the group has set a tentative goal of opening later this fall, Jackson said they will start with a modest enrollment before ramping up to their ultimate goal.

Senior center remembered for the good times

On Jan. 12, the building that will become the Pendleton Children's Center looked equipped to handle a room full of seniors.

The folding chairs and tables still were set up for meal time, the senior center's small thrift shop was stocked and an overhead disco ball gently glistened over the main hall.

Senior center board members Christine Funk and

Rachel Eastman provided a tour of the building to Brown and Jackson, one of the final items on their checklist before completely handing over control to the children's center.

The Quonset hut at 510 S.W. 10th St. served a number of purposes since the 1940s: a Seventh-day Adventist church, a recreation hall, a school gym and a furniture store. But since the 1980s, the building belonged to the seniors.

Funk and Eastman said the senior center not only provided a hot meal every day, but also a sense of camaraderie and community for its patrons.

Eastman said she and her husband went a few times, but her husband didn't like going, because there were too many "old people." After he died, Eastman started attending more frequently and was able to connect with other widows who understood what she was going through.

Funk also took to the senior center, where she met her long-term partner. But the good times couldn't prevent modern economic reality from setting in.

Even before the pandemic, the senior center was struggling to keep up with the costs of providing meals and paying utilities. After COVID-19 completely shut down the senior center's operations, the board made the decision to donate the facility.

Funk said the board received an offer to buy the property, but members preferred to donate it to another nonprofit. The board unanimously supported the children's center proposal, especially since many of their patrons were watching grandchildren or even great-grandchildren because their family couldn't find child care.

Funk and Eastman will miss the people they met and commiserated with, but they are glad to pass on the building to an organization that will serve the community. And should the children's center outgrow its environs at some point in time, the pair hopes the organization will pay it forward again.

— *Editor's Note: Kathryn Brown is the vice president of the EO Media Group, the parent company of the East Oregonian.*



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, speaks to a group of residents during a meet-and-greet Jan. 6, 2022, in La Grande.

Bentz:

Continued from Page A1

Democratic ties.

"That money was used to prompt Democrat voters to vote," he said. "And it was used to design and translate ballots. It was used to staff curing and counting ballot operations. Those kinds of things, all according to various articles you can easily find, trended toward turning out more Democrats than Republicans."

Both groups Zuckerberg donated to are 501(c)(3) nonprofits, which are legally prohibited from political campaign activity. The Center for Election Innovation and Research advertises itself as a group with "a proven track record of working with election experts from around the country and from both sides of the aisle."

Bentz said their actions during the 2020 elections could lose them their 501(c)(3) status, an important designation that exempts them from taxes.

"As a lawyer I have helped form 501(c)(3)s and I've been involved with 501(c)(4)s ... I'll just say that the fact that you enjoy that designation does not mean it does not in any way prove that you've complied with the requirements of such a designation," he said.

The inflation distraction

Bentz spoke in La Grande on the one-year anniversary of the day Trump supporters rioted at the Capitol Building in an attempt to reverse the results of the 2020 presidential election. Bentz said he believes Democrats are blowing the Jan. 6 riot out of proportion in an attempt to divert attention from the issues people really are concerned about.

"It is a huge opportunity for them to distract the nation from inflation," Bentz said.

In the interview, Bentz said he condemned the violence that afflicted the

Capitol a year ago, but he reiterated that Democrats were focusing on a partisan investigation into Trump's role in the insurrection rather than important issues, such as inflation or the border.

The Garland memo

Bentz also spoke about U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland asking the FBI to investigate a rise in harassment and threats of violence against school board members nationwide.

Bentz told the audience in La Grande that it is not the FBI's place to do this.

"This is what communities should be looking into," he said.

On Oct. 4, Garland released a memo directing the FBI to meet with federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement to develop strategies to address "harassment, intimidation, and threats of violence" against school board members and school employees.

Later that month, Garland defended the memo at a Senate Judiciary Committee meeting after Republicans accused the attorney general of overreach, according to The Associated Press.

"The obligation of the Justice Department is to protect the American people against violence and threats of violence and that particularly includes public officials," Garland said.

In the interview, Bentz said he did not condone threats of violence directed at school officials. But as a former school board member for both a private Catholic school and the Ontario School District, Bentz said he was concerned that Garland's memo would have a "chilling effect" on parent participation.

He added if people threatened or harassed school officials, local law enforcement could handle those situations without getting the federal government involved.

— *The Observer reporter Dick Mason contributed to this article.*