

Neal: 'We lost a key member of our port family'

Continued from Page A1

of Morrow — Oregon's second-largest port district — in 2018, following in the footsteps of his father, Gary Neal, who was the port's director for 30 years before retiring.

The port operates several industrial parks in Morrow County, including the Boardman Industrial Park along the Columbia River near Boardman, which includes major food processing companies such as Lamb Weston, Tillamook Cheese, Oregon Potato

Co. and Boardman Foods.

According to the port, its businesses provided 8,452 permanent jobs and \$2.77 billion in total economic output in 2017. Morrow County boasts the third-highest average wage in the state, due in large part to economic development at the port, Russell said.

State Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, said Neal was "a strong advocate for ports throughout the United States, and his work in economic development at the Port of

Morrow has made our economy stronger in Eastern Oregon."

"Ryan has left a legacy of hard work, professionalism and goodwill throughout our region and will be missed by all of us," Smith said.

Lisa Mittelsdorf, the port's economic development director, said port commissioners will meet to discuss filling Neal's position.

Marv Padberg, vice president of the port commission, said everyone at the port is adjusting to the news of

Neal's death.

"We lost a key member of our port family," Padberg said. "His loss leaves a big hole. It won't be easy."

Rick Stokoe, president of the port commission and Boardman police chief, said he admired Neal's dedication to the region and port industries.

"I know this will be a huge loss," Stokoe said. "My heart goes out to the Neal family."

Neal graduated from Oregon State University in 2004 with a degree in busi-

ness management. He began his management career with Knight Transportation in 2006 as operations manager for the national trucking company, and was promoted to regional sales manager in 2011.

In 2012, Neal was hired as director of operations for Haney Truck Line LLC in Yakima, Wash., managing day-to-day operations for staff and a fleet of more than 400 trucks.

Neal spent two years at Marten Transport as an area

sales director before returning to Boardman with the Port of Morrow. He took over as general manager of the port's freezer warehouse in 2016, where food processors store frozen vegetables before shipping them to stores.

The port's board of directors hired Neal as executive director from a pool of 33 applicants.

"He really wanted to move back to this area after he went to college," Russell said. "He was trying to make a difference in his community."

BMCC:

Continued from Page A1

which administrators have heard from students, past and present, about their attendance. The meetings included students who dropped out or changed their academic plans due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"There is a lot of uncertainty," he said.

The student body is conflicted, he said, with some students wanting in-person classes and others preferring distance learning. He said he has heard from students who are concerned about COVID-19 exposure and others who need attention they can only get from face-to-face instruction.

Many other students, Browning said, are expressing they do not know what to do and are fearful of committing to academic programs. Rather, they are sitting out school until they can develop their career intentions.

"Traditionally in community colleges, we've been able to serve that role in which students can explore different career options," he said. "And we still serve that, but it's different under COVID."

Browning explained the pandemic has made students unsure of what they want to do with their lives. But the



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Students participate in classwork during an anatomy and physiology lab Jan. 14, 2022, at Blue Mountain Community College in Hermiston.

community college president also stated there are other reasons why enrollment at the school is down — namely, the economy. Right now, he said, the economy is good, and this is something that typically lowers college enrollment.

"We have one of the hottest economies anyone has ever seen," he said.

This being the case, workers are not inclined to return to school for further retraining or study, according to Browning.

To bring back students, BMCC is doing things that many other schools are doing,

Browning said.

Students may take asynchronous online classes, in which they download content and complete their studies on a flexible schedule. There also are synchronous online classes in which students all join classes at the same time. Other classes combine these options.

"We are much more fragmented in the way we are approaching delivery, but that's what the student/consumer is asking for," Browning said. "They want that flexibility."

There still are actions the

BMCC president would like to do to entice prospective students. For instance, he said, he would like to create new course programs for students and would like to do more to make the internet accessible to people in the area.

Browning said he hopes to find even more ways to encourage students to return to his school. In the meantime, he will continue promoting the school's efforts. As more students become aware of Blue Mountain's wide range of class options, he said, they should be interested to enroll.

Graduation:

Continued from Page A1

where most Pendleton-area American Indian students attend high school. A charter school on the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Nixyaawii largely operates independently from the rest of the district.

In the short term, Yoshioka said a handful of students who didn't graduate have already received an alternative certificate or GED. He said other students are still enrolled in Pendleton with the intent of graduating.

In the long term, Yoshioka pointed to Pendleton High School Principal Pat Dutcher, who was hired ahead of the 2021-22 school year, and some of the work he and staff are doing to work with students who are falling behind well ahead of the senior year. At a recent presentation to the Pendleton School Board, Dutcher said every grade level now has regular meetings to identify students who are struggling academically or socially with the hope of addressing their issues long before their senior year.

Pendleton wasn't the only district to see their four-year graduation numbers take a hit: Milton-Freewater and Umatilla both saw decreases from the year before.

Hermiston, Morrow County see growth

But other districts defied state trends and saw an uptick.

The Hermiston School District posted an 88% graduation rate, more than four points better than the previous year. Scott Depew, Hermiston's director of secondary education, said he wasn't surprised.

"It ended up where we

hoped it would be," he said.

Hermiston saw sharp growth in its English language learner graduation rate, which jumped more than 20 points to 74.2%. Depew said raising English learner graduation rates has been Hermiston's focus over the past three years, but the class of 2021 was the first group of students to reap the rewards.

Depew said English learner students previously struggled to complete all of their English language arts credits by the end of their senior year. Hermiston's solution was to begin connecting these students with bilingual teachers and assistants to provide instruction in Spanish when needed.

The Morrow County School District also saw another strong graduation year, boasting a 96.3% graduation rate. Broken down by school, both Riverside Junior/Senior High School and Heppner Junior/Senior High School graduated all of their seniors while Irrigon graduated all but one.

In a press release, Morrow County noted its graduation rate increased 20% since the 2010-11 school year. Superintendent Dirk Dirksen attributed the improvements during the 10-year span to a number of factors, including commitment from parents, internship opportunities and early college programs.

The press release also noted the district was able to maintain at least limited in-person classes throughout the majority of the school year.

"I know that the staff in all the buildings have put in a lot of effort over the last three years in particular, working with students and families on an individual level to help them succeed while dealing with the challenges we are facing with COVID," Dirksen said in a statement.

Poster:

Continued from Page A1

competition. The winners of the international competition will be announced on Feb. 1, with the winning poster artist receiving a \$5000 scholarship and an expenses-paid trip to Lions Day with the United Nations in New York.

At the district level, Brown's poster faced competition from throughout District G, which encompasses most of Eastern Oregon and covers about two-thirds of the state's geography, according to Elgin Lions Club member and District G Peace Poster Chair Gerald Hopkins. Hopkins said he could not recall the number of posters submitted to the district competition but there was at least one for each of the Lions Clubs throughout the district.

"We're very excited and it's such an honor for our district to be represented at the international level," Hopkins said.

Hopkins said he can't remember the last time a member of District G advanced to the international competition.

"It may have happened, but I can't recall when or who

it would've been," he said. "We've had some score at state but I can't recall anyone internationally."

Each year, students between the ages of 11 and 13 design posters using a theme announced by the International Lions Club. This year's theme was "we are all connected." Students are encouraged to dive into the meaning of the theme and use it to design their posters as a way of promoting global peace.

"I started out with the dove and tried to incorporate all of the countries," Brown said. "I wanted to bring together one idea to symbolize everybody coming together around peace."

Brown's poster features a ribbon of flags from various countries wrapping around a dove.

"I first went over with a colored pencil and then over with markers to make the shine on the ocean," she said.

Brown said she always has been interested in art but began to see it as more of a hobby than just a class in the last year. She said her success in the poster contest has been inspiring after doubting her placement in an advanced art class earlier in the year.

"I've always been interested in it," she said. "But I've never taken it that seriously until now."



Pendleton Lions Club/Contributed Photo

Pendleton eighth grader Avery Brown's poster is competing on the world stage in the 2022 International Lions Club Peace Poster Contest.

Ready For a Home Loan?

Lee Ann Ottosen

HOME LOAN OFFICER | CONSTRUCTION CERTIFIED



NMLS 277636 CALL 541-304-6112
LeeAnnOttosen@UmpquaBank.com
www.UmpquaBank.com/Lee-Ann-Ottosen

UMPQUA BANK

Member FDIC Equal Housing Lender NMLS 401867

Nixyaawii Community Financial Services

Join our team!

Nixyaawii Community Financial Services is currently hiring a Business Services Manager. This position works with our small business clients and community members interested in starting or expanding their existing businesses and leads frequent classroom and direct client interaction for business aspects along with youth entrepreneurial events. The Business Services Manager is the point person for NCFS marketing and communications including the NCFS website, client software, and social media. Advanced computer skills are highly desirable.

Salary range is \$45-\$65,000 annually.

Applications are now posted on the Wildhorse Resort & Casino's Careers page, in the Current Open Positions, under Business Service Center.




NCFS
NIXYAAWII COMMUNITY FINANCIAL SERVICES

www.nixyaawii-cdfi.org
541.304.2387
46440 Kusi Road #A-3
Pendleton, OR

Nixyaawii Community Financial Services (NCFS) is a developing Native Community Development Financial Institution loan fund that provides loans, homeownership assistance, business development services, youth and adult financial education to members of the Umatilla Confederated Tribes, Reservation residents, and Tribal employees.





DEPENDABLE LONGEVITY

SINCE 1997

ELKHORN BARN CO.

Tobias Unruh, owner • 600 David Eccles Rd • Baker City, Oregon

Custom Barns and Storage Sales 541-519-2968 • Elkhornbarns@gmail.com • 509-331-4558