

PENDLETON

Pool sees big attendance bump first summer back

By ANTONIO SIERRA East Oregonian

PENDLETON — While Eastern Oregon still is in the dregs of winter, Pendleton Parks & Recreation is high-lighting sunnier times for the Pendleton Aquatic Center.

At a Tuesday, Feb. 1 meeting, the department shared a report showing a strong bounceback year for the aquatic center in 2021 after the pool took a gap year in 2020 in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

According to the report, the \$391,989 in revenue the aquatic center made in 2021 was a 20% jump from 2019. Revenue was up in nearly every category, including daily admission, season passes, swim lessons and merchandise. Total attendance rose by nearly 2,000 people compared to 2019.

Jeff Hamilton, who supervises the aquatic center as the department's recreation supervisor, said city staff weren't "wishy-washy" about how to operate the pool during the pandemic, committing early to closing it in 2020 and then doing the same when reopening it in 2021. He said he thinks the city's early decisions helped put the aquatic center in a good position to reap the rewards when people were ready to enjoy outdoor activ-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Poolgoers cool off June 29, 2021, at the Pendleton Family Aquatic Center as the temperature reached 117 degrees. Pendleton Parks & Recreation reported the aquatic center made \$391,989 in 2021, a 20% jump from 2019.

ities again after the COVID-19-induced shutdowns.

Parks & Recreation Director Liam Hughes said the aquatic center has long been trending in the right direction, a pattern he attributed to long-term investment from the department such as improved marketing to people outside the Pendleton area.

2021 saw the introduction of a senior pass program, which brought in \$3,585 in its first year. Hamilton said seniors were among the many new faces he saw last year.

"We had people swimming laps I had never seen swimming laps (before)," he said. "There were people that were just there enjoying

themselves."

The Pendleton Aquatic Center always has required a substantial subsidy from the city's general fund, but the success of 2021 brings it slightly closer to sustainability.

Hamilton said pool revenue has typically covered about half of its costs, and his ultimate goal is for it to cover around 70-75% of the aquatic center's expenses.

While the pool's revenue appears to exceed its expenses on paper, Hughes said there are long-term maintenance and overhead expenses that require additional funds from the city, Hughes said the pool likely won't ever reach full self-suf-

iciency because it aims to keep its fares affordable for Pendleton residents. He added the aquatic center's prices are much cheaper than private pools.

"There is a balance to be struck between making it accessible to the public and cost recovery," he said.

Once the weather gets warmer, parks and rec will begin hiring dozens of seasonal employees to staff the aquatic center's front desk, sell snacks at the concession stand and keep an eye on swimmers as lifeguards. A tight labor market has put pressure on low-wage employers to keep all their positions filled, and the parks and recreation sector has been no exception. Hamilton said he's spoken with other parks and recreation officials across the state, some of whom are turning to supervisors to fill empty lifeguard positions.

Hamilton said the aquatic center hired 57 seasonal employees last year and he doesn't anticipate facing a shortage this year. He added the pool has a "fun factor" he can sell to the high school and college students the aquatic center tends to hire, and because he personally hires and trains all his staff, he can foster the kind of relationships that brings employees back for future summers.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, Pendleton, houses approximately 1,700 adults in custody, according to data from the Oregon Department of Corrections. An officer at the medium-security prison is under investigation for supplying drugs to inmates.

EOCI correction officer is under investigation

By PHIL WRIGHT East Oregonian

to 25 inmates who tested positive, most for meth and marijuana.

PENDLETON — An officer at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, Pendleton, is under investigation for supplying drugs to inmates.

Jesse Myer, Milton-Freewater police officer and a detective with the Blue Mountain Enforcement Narcotics Team, or BENT, filed a search warrant affidavit Jan. 28 in Umatilla County Circuit Court explaining what set off the investigation.

EOCI in late 2021 and early 2022 saw an increase in the number of adults in custody who tested positive for drugs, specifically methamphetamine and marijuana, according to the affidavit. The medium-security prison from June to November had 20 inmates test positive for various narcotics. But in December, seven men in custody tested positive, and five were for marijuana. In January, the number jumped

The prison had shutdown visitation with inmates on Jan. 4 due to coronavirus restrictions, according to the affidavit, leaving EOCI staff as the only way for drugs to get inside.

One adult in custody, according to Myer's affidavit, provided information that one corrections officer was supplying meth and marijuana products. Then a second inmate came forward and named the same officer. In early January, a third inmate also named same officer as the drug supplier, saying he saw the officer exchange "balloons" containing meth, cocaine and marijuana with inmates.

A review of surveillance video, the affidavit stated, confirmed the transaction with the inmates.

The East Oregonian is not identifying the officer at this time because the investigation is ongoing and there have been no arrests.

Survey: How do you consume your news?

By ERICK PETERSON East Oregonian

HERMISTON — A University of Oregon survey is reaching out to Hermiston residents with questions about their media preferences.

Where do you go to learn of news? What type of information is most important to you? How informed do you feel about things happening in your community? All of these questions, and more, are on the survey, which is part of a larger initiative called Sustainable City Year Program, is available at bit.ly/uosurvey-hermiston.

Andrew DeVigal, professor at the UO School of Journalism and Communication, is one of the people behind the survey.

"Increasing our knowledge of how information is received and shared in a local information ecosystem would be good for our communities and information providers, such as news organizations and community organizations," DeVigal said.

He said he is teaching a class on how "journalism can authentically start with community first in its coverage of the community." Referred to as "participatory journalism" or "social journalism," DeVigal's work centers on communities.

He described a movement in journalism that has been influential to the work behind the survey. People within journalism, he said, are looking to better understand informational flow. Initiatives, such as the Listening Post Collective and this survey seek to learn how information passes from one

person or organization to another.

The survey asks for demographic information, name and contact information, if a person should want to answer. Ethnicity, home location and how long someone has lived in town also are questions on the survey.

Then, the survey gets into questions about media consumption — websites, social media use, etc. Also, it asks for physical locations, such as a farmers market or a church, where people obtain information.

In learning about how people receive their news, DeVigal said, researchers can discover the best ways to communicate to people. The survey also attempts to discover the information people want to know, which can be helpful to local politicians, too.

DeVigal said the survey will end by the second or third week of February, and he should have results by the end of March.

Sustainable City Year Program

The program has organized UO classes, such as

DeVigal's, to get a deep dive into understanding a particular city. The initiative now is focusing on Hermiston, collaborating with its city government. Information suggesting recommendations will be shared with the city.

The program has focused on other Oregon cities in the past, but this is the first time it has worked with an Eastern Oregon city, according to Megan Banks, the Sustainable City director.

"We want to span the entire state," Banks said.

Because Hermiston is the city with the largest population in Eastern Oregon, it made sense to select it for study, she said.

Banks complimented the town as forward-thinking and added her program has worked on other Hermiston projects recently. She said those collaborations have been productive.

"We're lucky to be working with Hermiston," she said. "A lot of this comes down to how the city approaches the partnership, and (Hermiston) has been very welcoming and extremely knowledgeable. I have nothing but good things to say about the city staff

and community."

Byron Smith, Hermiston city manager, said he is very happy with Sustainable City. Also, he said he is looking forward to the results of the survey.

"We are looking for ways that people get information so we can be a better source of information," he said.

Banks said UO will be doing more studies in Hermiston in the coming months.

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Advertisement for Michael's Fine Jewelry, Inc. Features text: 'Michael's Fine Jewelry, Inc.', 'We're closing our doors FOREVER!', 'After serving Pendleton for 20 years, it is time to retire.', 'All jewelry, watches, clocks and giftware drastically reduced for IMMEDIATE SALE'.

Advertisement for Valentine's Day sale. Features text: 'EVERYTHING MUST GO! including cases, furniture, displays, even some tools and equipment', 'ALL SALES ARE FINAL!', 'Take advantage of these great deals just in time to buy for Valentine's Day!'.

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