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PORT OF MORROW

Feeling the loss

POM is not ready to choose a new director

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

BOARDMAN — The Port of Morrow is operating under an administrative team in the wake of the recent death of its executive director.

Former port boss Ryan Neal died Jan. 17 at age 40 after suffering a heart attack. Rick Stokoe, president of the port's board of commissioners, said Friday, Feb. 4, the port has no immediate plans to fill the vacancy.

"Ryan was a very smart young man," Stokoe said. "He led the port in a very positive direction, so the loss that the port has in losing him has been extreme."

Stokoe, who also is the Boardman chief of police, said the loss extends beyond the port; the entire region

is suffering from losing a leader who was "very good at what he did."

The commissioner said the passing of Neal has "hit staff" as well as people who benefited from Neal's work in the community.

"He was an important leader," he said of Neal. "He was very involved in education. He cared about education for youth, not to mention he was a loving father."

At the port, according to Stokoe, there is an administrative team covering for the absence of an executive director. The team members are experienced, Stokoe said, and have been able to manage.

"Ryan was instrumental in creating a team environment that keeps the rails on. And two of those individuals, senior leaders of the team, have stepped up and they are fully involved until we go through a process (of hiring a new executive director)," Stokoe said.

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Elite Taxi, Uber drivers allude to compromise

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — While there are important details to hammer out, both sides in the debate over allowing Uber in Pendleton are showing a willingness to compromise.

In January, Pendleton resident Alicia Reynen went before the Pendleton City Council to request the city amend its taxi ordinance to include ride-hailing companies such as Uber, which city law prohibits from operating within city limits. The council met Tuesday, Feb. 8, to hear out Reynen some more but also invited the owners of Elite Taxi, who had expressed some opposition to the proposal.

Reynen recapped some of the points she made from the January meeting, including the need

for more transportation options in the city and the potential customers it could service. She also said there are communities where Uber and traditional taxi companies have coexisted and suggested the council adopt a six-month or year-long trial period to see if it's feasible.

"A great majority of the community has commented, reviewed and (written) letters on all the concerns with the options currently offered," she said, "and there should be sufficient evidence to suggest that Elite Taxi is no longer able to keep up the great demand and additional service should be considered to fill these voids."

Reynen said she already knew a group of drivers willing to commit to Uber, but Councilor Dale

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POWER PLAY

Idaho Power goes to courts to gain access to private property

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

Richard and Jean Hemphill can look out the window of their Pilot Rock home and see where massive towers will stand and carry the Boardman to Hemingway transmission line.

Those towers will stand 100-140 feet tall, according to Idaho Power Co., the primary force behind the 500-kilovolt line that would stretch almost 300 miles from a substation in southwestern Idaho to Boardman.

The Hemphills traced the route with their hands. They said they felt bad about a line they believe will mar the beauty of the area.

"I love it," Jean Hemphill said. "In the summertime, I sit out on the deck in the evenings and enjoy this beautiful view all the way around. I'm always sorry when winter comes and I can't do that anymore. I truly love it."

She and her husband are the respondents in a petition for precondemnation that attorneys for Idaho Power filed. The petition, if a judge grants it, would allow Idaho Power to enter and survey their property.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Jean Hemphill flips through a folder of information on the Boardman to Hemingway transmission line Wednesday, Feb. 2, 2022, at her home near Pilot Rock.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Richard Hemphill on Wednesday, Feb. 2, 2022, indicates where the Boardman to Hemingway transmission line will cut across his property near Pilot Rock.

The petition is one of seven Idaho Power filed in Umatilla County to gain access to private property, according to state court filings. The company has filed six petitions in Morrow County and about two dozen more in Malheur, Baker and Union counties.

Jean Hemphill said her family moved to a nearby

property in 1942, and she has lived there all of her life. She and her husband moved into their home after its construction in the early 1970s.

"For us, who have lived here all our lives, we cherish our lands and our views," Jean Hemphill said.

While many areas nearby have grown a great deal,

they said their own view has changed little, by comparison, since they moved in roughly half a century ago.

The region means a great deal to them, they said. Both Hemphills trace their family tree to ancestors who farmed the land with their hands.

The land also is meaningful to the Hemphills because of their dreams for the future.

"My granddaughter's starting a sheep herd," Jean Hemphill said. She said it would be nice to have this land available for her granddaughter and future generations.

Idaho Power claims surveys necessary

Sven Berg is Idaho Power's communications specialist. He said permitting on the project will conclude sometime this year, and geotechnical, cultural and biological surveys are underway now. These surveys will reveal important information, he said, such as area wildlife and archaeological sites.

"We're working with landowners along the route to try to negotiate rights of entry to their property and easements," he said.

These easements would give Idaho Power and its partner on B2H, PacifiCorp, rights to land use on properties where they may someday build a structure, Berg explained.

He said there are 98 parcels that 47 landowners own where the companies

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The setting sun silhouettes transmission lines Thursday, Feb. 3, 2022, near the future starting point for the 290-mile Boardman to Hemingway transmission line in Boardman.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Pendleton gets Sears Hometown Store

Appliance store to move into old J.C. Penney Co. building

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — One legacy department store brand name will replace another in downtown Pendleton following a nearly five-year gap.

Charles Denight, the associate director of the Pendleton Development Commission, confirmed Sears Hometown Store, a spinoff of the national department store

chain that focuses on appliances, tools, mattresses and other home goods, is moving into the space at 124 S. Main St., which has been vacant since J.C. Penney Co. closed the retail space in 2017.

Several washing machines now are visible from the main entrance, although no one appeared to be in the building during the late morning or mid-afternoon Monday, Feb. 7. Sears Hometown already is advertising four part-time positions online.

Denight said the new Sears Hometown store could increase foot traffic on a part of Main Street that has had several empty storefronts in recent years. Following J.C.

Penney's closure, two neighboring businesses — Wicked Kitty Tattoo and Piercing and Mosa — also shut down. At 41,000 square feet, the former J.C. Penney space is much larger than most retail and restaurant spaces on Main Street. Before the Hometown moved, Denight said he had talked with the building owners about filling the space with multiple vendors.

But with a future tenant now set, Pendleton residents soon will get their first look at Sears Hometown, a much different store than the main chain of Sears department stores. Sears Hometown was spunoff from the main



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Appliances sit inside the new location of the Sears Hometown Store on Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2022, in downtown Pendleton. The location was the former home to J.C. Penney Co. until 2017.

company in 2012 before Transformco, Sears' parent company, acquired Hometown and reunited the brands in 2019. In 2021, there were about 312 Hometown stores

across the country, mostly in rural areas and most operated by independent contractors, according to the White

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