

EAST OREGONIAN

TUESDAY, APRIL 12, 2022

146th Year, No. 73

WINNER OF 16 ONPA AWARDS IN 2021

\$1.50

EASTERN OREGON

HIV testing campaign ramps up

By ALEX WITTEW
EO Media Group

PENDLETON — A campaign to raise awareness about HIV testing is underway in Eastern Oregon.

Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living, based in Ontario, has partnered with End HIV Oregon for a new advertising campaign between April and July that will focus on Pendleton, Hermiston, La Grande, Ontario and their surrounding towns.

“We’ve seen an uptick in HIV-positive cases in rural Eastern Oregon, and sexually transmitted disease cases, and so we thought it was just perfect timing,” said Kirt Toombs, CEO and founder of EOCIL. “We’ve been working on this campaign since 2012, and we thought this was a good time to raise awareness.”

According to the press release, national physician groups recommend that everyone be tested for HIV at least once. But most adult Oregonians have never been tested for HIV. People in more rural parts of the state are even less likely than people living in urban areas to be tested in a timely manner, according to the press release.

Toombs said testing and awareness are especially important because of the increase in positive cases in Eastern Oregon.

“It’s almost quadrupled,” he said. “Even though the numbers are low, we’ve gone from three cases to almost, I believe, 12 cases. And so that’s quite a bit, and that’s definitely made us take a look at what needs to happen around raising awareness and making tools available.”

The campaign will utilize radio ads, billboards and newspaper ads to raise awareness about testing. Toombs said testing already is available, but awareness has been lacking.

“We serve 13 counties here in Eastern Oregon and so we have the tools available, but I think what was missing is that we needed to make people aware that they’re available,” he said.

One of the major points of the campaign is to highlight that everyone has an HIV status, whether they’ve been tested or not.

“We all have an HIV status, and we should all be tested for HIV at least once, if not more frequently,” said Joseph Fiumara, director for Umatilla County Public Health, in a press release. “I’m thrilled to see this campaign launch here to continue building healthier communities in our part of the state.”

See HIV, Page A9



Rosa Salinas/Amazon

Officials of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, state and local public officials and representatives of Amazon Web Services Inc. participate in the ribbon cutting March 30, 2022, of the AWS Think Big Space at the former Nixyaawii Community School building. This is the first Think Big Space in Umatilla County.

Adding ‘Culture’ to STEM

Tribes open Amazon Think Big Space with a focus on traditions

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

MISSION — Amazon’s latest Think Big Space in Oregon is operating on the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

This is Amazon’s first Think Big Space in Umatilla County and the second in the region. Amazon Web Services Inc. opened the first space on the West Coast in 2021 at the SAGE Center at the Port of Morrow, Boardman.

The new Think Big Space, which Amazon has named after one of its leadership principles, is in the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation’s After School Center and provides a colorful and stimulating education atmosphere, with access to 3D printers, drones and Kindles with augmented reality. The goal of the partnership between AWS and schools is to prepare students for jobs and careers that don’t even exist yet.

Think Big Spaces allow K-6 students the opportunity to tackle real-world problems through programs focused on science, technology, engineering and math. But the tribes is pioneering a new approach to the Think Big Space.

This new educational lab will focus on what the tribes call “CSTEM,” where the “C” stands for “culture.” They will use this innovative space to connect their cultural traditions, including First Foods, with scientific ecological study. Eastern Oregon enjoys several AWS InCommunities programs designed to make a positive impact, but this is the first with a tribal-based curriculum.

Amazon Web Services is an Amazon



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Darryl Joe McKay, 7, on Wednesday, April 6, 2022, inspects one of the drones he will learn to fly in the new Think Big Space, funded by Amazon Web Services and inside the former Nixyaawii Community School. The space, a so-called educational incubator, is part of the CTUIR after-school program.

subsidiary providing customers on-demand cloud computing platforms and application programming interfaces. AWS selected the Umatilla Indian Reservation as the first Indigenous community to receive a Think Big Space grant. It also is the first such award using STEM disciplines to stimulate learning on environmental topics and traditions stretching back countless generations.

The tribes and AWS cut the ribbon to open the education lab on March 30. The ceremony included speakers and officials from the tribes and AWS.

Inside the Think Big Space

A week after the ribbon cutting on the sunny afternoon of Wednesday, April 6, about two dozen children and adults busied themselves at the After School Center.

Linda Sampson, lead teacher, conducted a tour of impressive upgrades to the old school gym building. The tribes is paying for a new kitchen while the Think Big Space program is funding the construction of well-equipped science classrooms.

Indoors, some children engaged in crafts, others sat at computer monitors and a few played basketball and soccer. Outside, staff and students were setting up a small greenhouse.

“It’s expandable,” Sampson said. “It came without instructions. Just a picture. Good thing we’re visual learners.”

The greenhouse will nurture seedlings of First Foods, such as elderberries, chokecherries, huckleberries and camas. Sampson explained the environmental threats to traditional collection sites, such as pollution, dams and development of wetlands.

“Kids flip cookies in our First Foods meadows,” Sampson said.

She drew attention to the room in which seedlings were being sprouted for transplantation to the greenhouse.

“The kids will measure the plants as they grow, record data on soil pH, moisture, humidity and sunlight to determine optimum growing conditions,” she said.

See STEM, Page A9

Autism, seizures don’t slow down Hermiston’s ‘Snow White’

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Jilli Smalley is open about her abilities. The 31-year-old Hermiston resident smiled broadly prior to a recent exercise session, and she boasted of her ability to make friends.

“Even Grumpy likes Snow White,” Jilli Smalley said.

Her mother, Kristi Smalley, explained that her daughter, who is autistic and has seizure disorder, loves Disney and often communicates with references to Disney movies. She will refer to herself as Snow White, though she sometimes calls herself Doc or Sleepy, depending on the situation.

Speaking in a soprano-like, melodious tone, the younger Smalley

indeed sounds a bit like Snow White of the Disney movie. Also like the young princess, she is warm and draws people near her. At the exercise session, a gathering of people at The Arc Umatilla County, she met with several other Zumba practitioners. Before rushing over to join the Zumba crowd, she talked about her life.

The first thing she mentioned was her work at Pizza Hut, employment that she said she enjoys. She works as a dishwasher four nights a week, 3.5 hours per shift.

“I wash dishes and mess around,” she said.

She added she likes the people there, and she sometimes makes sugar cookies for them.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Jilli Smalley, who has autism and a seizure disorder, loves her job at the Hermiston Pizza Hut where she has worked as a dishwasher for 11 years.

See Jilli, Page A9

