

Jilli:

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Over at the pizza place, her co-workers stated their profound affection for the woman. Manager Dave Beaty said Smalley is a great asset to his team.

“The mood around here is different when she is not here,” he said. When she is present, the atmosphere is bright. When she is gone, less so.

In addition, he said, she is a hard worker. In contrast to some other employees, she approaches each task with single-minded focus.

“She’s a highly-valued employee, because she loves repetitive work, so she’s perfect,” her mother said.

A fellow employee, Kimberly Parker attested to Jilli Smalley’s drive.

“She is a bulldog in the dishwashing pit,” Parker said of Jilli Smalley. She added that Jilli Smalley will spray people with water on occasion when they get in her way.

Michele Kietzke, job coach with the brokerage, said that it is not all fun and games. There are times when Jilli Smalley will lose muscle control, succumbing to her seizure disorder. This trouble can last 20 minutes. While temporary, Kietzke said, it does necessitate the presence of a trained professional.

Kristi Smalley said her daughter is “pretty independent with her work skills,” but also needs assistance if something comes up that she doesn’t understand or if there are communication issues. On occasion, the communication issues are due to the Disney references she makes.

“Some of her communication is taking lines from Disney movies and trying to apply them to situations,” her mother said. “So, if you don’t speak Disney, it doesn’t make any sense.”

Kietzke is present, too, to help translate for her. She has been shadowing Jilli Smalley for 13 years. During that time, according to the job coach, they have become tight friends. They are together in social settings, as well as work. They cook and craft together, too. And of course, they watch Disney cartoons.

Asked about the Pizza Hut menu, Jilli Smalley said she does not eat pizza. Instead, she said, she likes eating the breadsticks. Along with French fries and hot dogs, they are among her favorite foods, she said.



Erick Peterson/East Oregonian

Jilli Smalley poses March 30, 2022, with tiny figurines that she fashioned herself.

A day in the life of Jilli Smalley

Even aside from her dishwashing job, Jilli Smalley leads a busy life. She said she wakes up at 5:20 a.m. and eats breakfast, packs her lunch and readies for the day. She goes to Trenditions Inc., an organization that teaches job skills to people with disabilities.

Shredding documents, she said, is among her favorite activities there.

After Trenditions, she will run errands. Then, she will meet with friends for games before going to work. On good days, she said, she will be able to attend Zumba classes.

“I love Zumba,” Jilli Smalley said, adding it’s fun because it lets her “shake the body.” Other favorite activities include swimming, bowling and walking. If she has time, she will do crafts, including bead making.

After work and activities, she returns home and gets ready for bed. Bedtime is 8:20 p.m., she said.

Kristi Smalley said she and her husband accompany their daughter on many of these activities, as the young woman would not be able to do these things on her own. Also, she gets help from the Eastern Oregon Service Support Brokerage, which has been helping people like Jilli Smalley for 20 years.

At the age of 18, Jilli Smalley was able to enter the brokerage. Three years later, after she graduated from high school, the EOSSB stepped up its assistance to her, helping her lead an adult life, Kristi Smalley said.

Kristi Smalley is on a board that oversees the

EOSSB. As such, she helps watch over the decisions of that organization, which is a personal matter to her because her daughter receives assistance from it.

Four EOSSB personal service workers supervise Jilli Smalley on activities, including her regular walks and her employment.

EOSSB helps people live regular lives

Laura Noppenberger, executive director, and Kristi Avery, Umatilla County lead personal agent, said EOSSB exists to help people with intellectual disabilities who are 18 and over. They receive assistance in their own homes and communities.

“We advocate for services and resources for those people we serve,” Avery said. “We help people live better, more positive lives. It’s interesting, and there’s something new every day. And the people we help are great.”

Noppenberger said she has worked for the EOSSB since it began, two decades ago. Among the many things she had done for others, Noppenberger said helping a person obtain a ramp for her home was one of the most satisfying.

Avery said she has helped many people during the 20 years she has been with the organization, including helping one Milton-Freewater resident move out of her parent’s home and into her own place.

People, they said, can receive a wide range of assistance. A helper may, for example, go to a person’s home to set up medication, aid in laundry, create meal plans or go to the store.

EOSSB helpers also may assist with employment, as with Jilli Smalley, they stated.

“A lot of the people that we serve have jobs in the community, so they might need support with getting to work, staying on task, being dressed appropriately for the job, getting ready to go and being successful,” Noppenberger said.

“We help them work if they want to work,” Avery said. “They learn how to handle money, work on being healthier and navigate health matters. And if they want to travel, see things or do activities, we help with all of that.”

Each person, Noppenberger and Avery said, is tailored to meet specific needs, as each person’s needs will be different.

“Essentially, we’re navigators, cheerleaders, helping to connect people with the resources in their community to be successful,” Noppenberger said.

Noppenberger said that the EOSSB is one of 14 brokerages in Oregon, paid for with state tax dollars and federal funds. It serves 471 people in the counties of Hood River, Wasco, Sherman Gilliam, Wheeler, Morrow, Umatilla, Grant, Harney, Union, Baker, Wallowa and Malheur.

The organization has 30 staff members, who are mostly based in their homes, near the people they serve. The EOSSB’s one office is in Hood River.

As EOSSB employees live near the people they serve, they said, they are better able to assess their needs and help them.

The Smalleys said they are grateful for this help.

STEM:

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Next, Sampson pointed out a mural displaying “men’s First Foods,” including salmon, deer and elk.

“The Creator assigned fish and big game to men, while women are responsible for gathering plant foods,” she explained.

Today, of course, women can hunt and men can pick berries.

On one wall of an arts, crafts and technology room, Sampson has posted photos of some key traditional plant foods.

“Eventually, I hope to have QR codes for each species,” she said, “with their Indian names, information on habitat and when to harvest them.”

In the photo of camas, Sampson indicated a single white specimen among the blue-flowered plants.

“Last year, we cooked the camas in the traditional way, in pits,” she said. “Now some have come up with white flowers. In another patch, there are 15. It’s a sign that the Creator approves of renewing our traditions.”

In the same room, circuitry in hardened cases with handles sat on tables.

“These can be carried out into the field,” Sampson noted. “They’re programmable. We’ll start with writing programs to turn on a light bulb, then go from there.”

She showed photos of a food plant that has just gone to seed.

“Early April is way too soon,” Sampson commented. “Normally it would just be blossoming. We need to study the effects of drought on First Foods. Maybe our years-long drought will end soon. It could be a natural cycle, but if it results from long-lasting climate change, then our preservation project will be even more important. Our kids are learning how to monitor CO2 with sensors provided by Amazon.”

Sampson explained supply chain problems and the chip shortage set back their schedule. But she showed off a single, hard-to-get component in a strawberry-colored box, which AWS had provided.

Miniature drones sat along a window.

“Who knows where this will end?” Sampson said. “Our student tribal members exposed to science and imbued with our traditions may make great contributions to improving the environment, to benefit everyone.”

Traditions and technology

The tribes had relationships with Amazon before the Think Big Space grant.

AWS helped put the tribes’ Sahaptin language

dictionary online. While not their own name for the language, dialects of Sahaptin were spoken from the now-drowned Celilo Falls, the lower Deschutes and John Day Rivers by the Tenino bands, through the Umatilla and Walla Walla tribes to the Yakama.

Sampson recalled Teara Farrow Ferman and other women tribal members brainstormed about how to preserve the language.

“We thought big and came up with a proposal,” she said. “We got a directive from the board. AWS gave us a \$50,000 grant for one year, with the possibility of renewal. We have a three-year project in mind. They’ve been great. We also have help from Whitman College physics prof Kurt Hoffman and other supporters.”

Alexa, Amazon’s virtual assistant technology, now can teach Sahaptin words.

“Whatever helps kids learn their ancestral language is great,” Sampson said. “It’s fun and educational. We’re deeply grateful to Amazon.”

And coming out of pandemic restrictions, she continued, makes the new technology and programs even more exciting.

“Now we can talk to indigenous peoples all over the world,” she said. “Our kids can Zoom with India. Our program could serve as a model for using science and technology to help preserve traditional cultures.”

Server farms throughout the world implement AWS technology. Amazon’s cloud computing division operates seven data complexes in Eastern Oregon — four in Umatilla County and three in neighboring Morrow County. The data centers need lot of water for cooling.

“AWS assured us that 97% of the water they use will be filtered and returned for irrigation,” Sampson said. “We went into this with eyes wide open. We know that Amazon relies on cheap hydropower for its servers. We don’t like the dams, because of their effect on salmon. But we also know that our Eastern Oregon neighbors like electricity, irrigation and shipping grain to Portland. Even small nuclear reactors and every present energy source has problems.”

But all this technology, Sampson stressed, cannot replace the real-world experience of gathering First Foods with women elders.

“They learned our language naturally at home and were taught our traditions by their elders, without need for school and technology,” Sampson said. “Still, our team is honored to contribute to preserving and passing on our language and culture, with the aid of science and technology.”

HIV:

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EOCIL provides HIV prevention and case management services in Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, Wasco and Wheeler counties. Among those counties, 222 people are living with HIV, according to the EOCIL press release.

As well as raising awareness with the intent of improving the number of tests administered in rural Eastern Oregon, Toombs said reducing stigma associated with the virus is paramount, and advances in medicine and technology have made living with the virus easier.

“It’s night and day from 30 years ago,” he said. “We’re coming up on the anniversary of the passing of Ryan White (Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act), and so it makes us look back at where we were 30 years ago, and where we are now. Science is just amazing, and (with) the medical care that people are getting now — we’re living longer and healthier lives.”

Those medical advances include PrEP, a prophylactic drug that reduces HIV transmission rates by 99%, according to medical studies. Therapy drugs HIV-positive individuals use also can completely eliminate the transmission of HIV if the virus is unde-

MORE INFORMATION

For more information about HIV testing, prevention and treatment in Oregon, visit endhivoregon.org.

tectable by tests, through a process called Undetected = Untransmittable.

“We shouldn’t have to fear having an HIV test or getting treatment,” Toombs said, “or having access to prevention tools that are available to us.”

Issak Garcia, HIV prevention specialist with Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living, Ontario, stocks shelves with home test kits for HIV.

Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living/
Contributed Photo



FREE EVENT

MORROW COUNTY SUICIDE AWARENESS WALK

Saturday, April 23 • 10am

Boardman Marina Park Shelter

We invite everyone to walk with us and show your support to those who have been affected by suicide or suicide ideation. Veteran or non-veteran, we welcome everyone!

Call to register for this free event and get a t-shirt on the day of the walk. Call 541-256-0400, leave your name & phone number. We only have a limited supply of t-shirts - please register early.

Sponsored by Morrow County Veteran Services, Oregon Dept. of Veteran Affairs, Community Counseling Solutions, Walla Walla VA Medical Center and other community partners

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