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PENDLETON UAS RANGE

Pendleton responds to reporting on crashes

Drone range conducts more than 500 operations per month

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Pendleton city officials are pushing back against a Bloomberg News article that reported several drone crashes at the Pendleton Unmanned Aerial Systems Range.

According to an article published Sunday, April 10, Bloomberg reviewed internal documents, read government reports and spoke with 13 current and former employees associated with Amazon Prime Air, a drone package delivery project that has conducted tests in Pendleton, among several other sites across the country. The news agency's reporting revealed safety concerns and crashes hampered Amazon's testing program.

"While experimental aircraft are expected to crash during test flights, current and former employees say pressure to get the program back on track has prompted some managers to take unnecessary risks that have put personnel in harm's way," reporters Spencer Soper and Matt Day wrote.

Bloomberg reported Amazon drones crashed five times during a four month period in 2021 and obtained a 911 record that details a fire in a wheat field that a drone crash set off near the Pendleton airport.

An Amazon spokesperson told Bloomberg that Pendleton city officials hadn't previously made public comments about the crashes. But during an interview Wednesday, April 13, with the East Oregonian, City Manager Robb Corbett and Economic Development Director Steve Chrisman, who oversees the airport and UAS operations, talked about the Bloomberg article and how transparent they should be about drone crashes.

Chrisman touted the growth of the test range from an entity that saw few operations in its early years to a busy hub for drone activity that frequently attracts the world's top tech and aviation companies. Chrisman didn't mention Amazon or other companies by name, citing nondisclosure agreements the city signed, but he said "a very small number of mishaps" paled in comparison to the thousands of operations the range has hosted.

"Those were disgruntled employees that had an ax to grind," he said, referring to the sources in the Bloomberg article. "As far as reporting, I don't know that we've ever called (the East Oregonian) when

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JOBS ON THE CHOPPING BLOCK

BMCC plans deep cuts to faculty in new budget

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — After warning about impending budget cuts for months, the other shoe has dropped at Blue Mountain Community College.

At an April 25 budget committee meeting, BMCC administration will propose shuttering three programs and eliminating 10 full-time faculty positions in addition to several part-time positions. Should the BMCC Board of Education approve the move, the college would lose its criminal justice, college prep and industrial systems technology programs while also dropping instructors from its business, English, humanities/fine arts, math/computer science, science and social science departments.

In a Wednesday, April 13 interview, Blue Mountain President Browning said the budget cuts need to be made to help close a \$2 million shortfall in the 2022-23 budget.

"We have to start living within our means," he said. "That's the bottom line."

The news was not well received by the Blue Mountain Faculty Association, the union that represents the college's instructors.

Union President Pete Hernberg described the list of proposed cuts as "extraordinary and shocking" and raises questions about the college's commitment to the community.

"These cuts are shocking," he said. "They are arbitrary. And they are unnecessary."

Hernberg questioned why BMCC administration wanted to cut the college's criminal justice program at a time when law enforcement was trying to recruit skilled personnel. He added that eliminating the industrial systems technology department represented a "broken promise" to Boardman, which would still have its Workforce Training Center but not one of the signature



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Blue Mountain Community College, Pendleton, will consider proposals to shutter three programs and eliminate 10 full-time positions and additional part-time positions.

programs the center houses.

Browning was prepared to defend his administration's choices.

He said a degree from the college's criminal justice program isn't a requirement to enter the law enforcement field, and while he admitted the industrial systems technology had been a "good idea" when it was started, the program's low enrollment meant it can be replaced in Boardman by the higher-demand diesel tech program.

Browning turned his focus to the English program, which would lose one of its instructors under the administration's proposal. He said the department's four-person staff is the same size as it was a decade ago, even though enrollment has shrunk 65% over the past 11 years.

BMCC, and other community colleges across the state, have seen significant enrollment declines in recent years, and Blue Mountain staff are starting to see the effects of that trend.

Since 2019, the college has reduced its workforce by 39 positions, albeit under different presidents. Those figures don't include additional staffing cuts made when Blue Mountain was forced to renegotiate its prison

education contract with the Oregon Department of Corrections during that time period.

This round of proposed cuts differs from previous years because it mostly focuses on making cuts to faculty. With previous staff reductions focused on administration or classified staff, Browning said there was little room to cut in those areas.

But Hernberg argued that BMCC was using its budget to deprioritize instruction and programming in favor of contracts with consultants and tech companies.

"What our community needs is jobs and training for those jobs," he said. "What our community needs are degrees and classes toward those degrees. That's the promise that our taxpayers expect us to keep. They don't expect us to hire some consulting firm. They don't expect us to send a giant chunk of cash to some tech company."

Browning contested Hernberg's interpretation of the proposed budget, saying they were one-time investments in improving the college's website and conducting a review of Blue Mountain's programs, moves that will better position the college for the future.

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Gang-related graffiti is spreading in Milton-Freewater

By SHEILA HAGAR
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

MILTON-FREEWATER — When Wes Koklich began paying close attention to the gang tagging and graffiti over the winter in Milton-Freewater, it was seemingly everywhere.

Koklich, a city councilor here, raised the issue at February's monthly meeting.

With business growth in the rural agricultural town garnering positive press, the spray painting on buildings around town is like an "outbreak" of negativity, he said then.

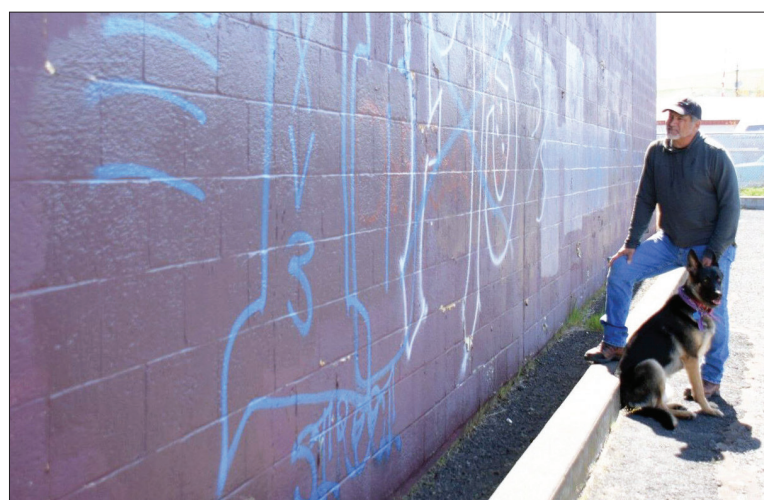
Last month, Koklich said in an interview he worries graffiti now appearing on buildings and fences could be a deterrent to people thinking about moving to the community and to businesses considering investing here.

"I don't like the looks of it," he said. "Economically, things are starting to happen here, and when people drive through to look around, they are not impressed."

The spray painting that used to largely be kept to the North Main Street area of town seems to have migrated to "all over," Koklich said, and he imagines visitors wonder if the gang tagging they see is out of the ordinary or business-as-usual for Milton-Freewater.

Arguably, nearly every city in America struggles with unwanted spray painting. While many people separate gang-tagging from the street art of graffiti, unsolicited painting on walls haunts businesses and home owners everywhere.

Social activists applaud wall and street art to bring attention to community and societal issues, but they also acknowledge graffiti is one of the most visible forms of crime and disorder in a town.



Contributed Photo

Pastor Tim Sanchez of Faith Bible Church, accompanied by his dog, Ji-reh, examines a tagged wall at the north end of Milton-Freewater on April 6, 2022.



Greg Lehman/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

Graffiti mars the side of a building Feb. 16, 2022, on North Main Street in Milton-Freewater.

"As well as causing damage to the property targeted, graffiti also plays a significant role in affecting entire communities," noted a November article in ArtRadarJournal.com.

A U.S. Department of Justice report found the presence of graffiti can seem like a sign of anarchy, that government officials are failing "to protect residents

and control lawbreakers."

Tagging can signal the presence of gangs and gang violence, especially those that identify turf boundaries and contain threats, Deborah Weiselas wrote in the DOJ report.

Weiselas reported that in 2009, an estimated \$12 billion was spent yearly in cleaning up graffiti in the United States.

The writing on the wall

No one needs to tell Milton-Freewater's police chief how damaging gang tagging is. Even here, with a population that hovers around 7,000, this issue can be big, Doug Boedigheimer said in March.

Boedigheimer works with Jason Schaffner, the city's code enforcement officer, to deal with gang tagging.

Here, younger teens do the tagging, the chief said, while older teens are getting into more serious trouble.

Certainly not all markings his staff comes across can be identified in one realm or another, Boedigheimer said.

"Someone sees painting on a wall, and they assume it's gang related," he said. "We see an awful lot that isn't."

The issue is almost impossible for small law enforcement agencies to solve, but Boedigheimer said he has seen success when parents have been pulled in as part of the solution.

Moms and dads, especially those working long hours, are first surprised and then aghast when told their child has been spray painting walls, he said, "Or that it is gang related."

In Milton-Freewater the most-used color of tagging paint is blue, and the most often identified gangs are 18th Street, Florencia and 13th Street, Schaffner and Boedigheimer said.

Catching such taggers is the exception rather than the rule, they agreed.

"We have to catch them literally blue-handed," Schaffner said.

Security cameras help, but most taggers know to wear hoodies pulled close to their face, he said.

Not every tagging incident

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