

Umatilla adds parks department, director

Chris Waite from Montana to helm Parks & Recreation

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

UMATILLA — For the first time in six years, the city of Umatilla is planning to add a new department.

David Stockdale, Umatilla city manager, said Parks & Recreation is set to receive final approval from the Umatilla City Council on June 7 and then begin operations on June 16.

“This will be fantastic,” he said.

Stockdale said the department has a human resource budget of \$230,000. The new director, Chris Waite, is to receive the lion’s share of this money, \$140,000 in salary and benefits. He will oversee two recreation coordinators.

Other costs for the department include \$45,000 for programming and \$45,000 for community gardens. Plans are for the department to occupy space in the same building that houses the Umatilla Police Department.

New director expresses enthusiasm

Talking about the new position Monday, May 23, Waite said he was looking



East Oregonian, File

A sign welcomes walkers to the StoryWalk at Hash Park in McNary on April 16, 2021. The city has plans for this and its other parks, starting with the creation of a Parks & Recreation Department.

forward to applying his experience to Umatilla parks.

“I have a little background in parks and recreation,” he said.

He is leaving his position as the parks and cemetery supervisor for the city of Billings, Montana. Prior to that, he was the parks and rec volunteer coordinator for five years. For eight years before that, he was the parks and rec director in the Greybull Recreation District in Greybull, Wyoming.

Growing up in La Grande, he said he is very familiar with the area and has many family members around here. “It still feels like home,” he said.

The last time he was in

Umatilla, he said, was a few weeks ago for his job interview. While in town, he visited the parks.

“I thought there was a lot of incredible potential,” he said. “Some of the parks are in the process of being updated, and then there are a few still to go, but there are definitely a lot of good things happening in the city there.”

Umatilla has major parks projects coming for Hash Park, Nugent Park and Umatilla Marina & RV Park. Waite said he has seen plans for these projects.

“The work that’s been done to build those plans is pretty solid,” he said.

He added he will assess where the city is in its work

and then intends to assist where he can. Waite said he does not, however, expect to alter those plans. Instead, he will work to implement those existing plans, which still will be a challenge.

Another challenge is building this new program, he said.

“For each of my career steps, when I was the Greybull rec director and then when I came here to Billings as the volunteer coordinator, both of those were kind of starting programs from scratch,” he said.

He said these situations are an opportunity for him to apply his creativity.

Setting down roots

He said he and his wife are putting their Billings home up for sale this week, and they plan to buy a home in Umatilla. Waite added he heard the local housing market is “a little bit tight,” so it might be difficult to find a place for them and their three children, ages 16, 14 and 11.

The benefits of the new position more than compensate for this trouble or others, he said. Yes, he said, it is hard leaving his friends, but he is looking forward to rejoining his family here and making new friends. Also, he said, he is happy to be part of a community that is growing and making wonderful progress.

Vescio takes helm of Athena-Weston School District

By SHEILA HAGAR
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

ATHENA — Ann Vescio has been appointed as superintendent of the Athena-Weston School District.

Vescio has been interim head of the district since July 1, 2021, as she and former superintendent Laure Quaresma operated under an unusual agreement that allowed Quaresma to mentor and support her successor for the past school year.

Removing “interim” from Vescio’s title happens July 1.

Now with more than 20 years of classroom experience, Vescio began teaching for the district in 2005 and became principal of Weston Middle School in 2016. During her time here, she’s developed strong ties to the district and the community it serves, Vescio said, noting her two children graduated from Weston-McEwen High School.

“I am constantly impressed by the time, attention and support that all of our staff give to each student. There is a real sense of family and

community in the Athena-Weston School District. It is the million, every-day, positive actions of our staff and community that add up to one outstanding school district,” she said.

The school board has clearly seen that connection and investment, said its president, Scott Rogers.

“One of her real strengths is, she is a wonderful communicator. While there were frustrations with state COVID mandates

by community members, Ann has been thoughtful about engagement with the community and about coming back into our schools,” he said. “She makes sure we are communicating effectively.”

While there have been challenges, the district’s staff has “huge faith” in Vescio, both as an educator and as a leader, he said.

Vescio lives in Pendleton with husband Mike Vescio, a meteorologist who oversees the National Weather Service office there. The couple has two children — Michael Vescio in Portland and Katie Vescio, who will begin her senior year at Washington State University next fall.



Vescio

MILTON-FREEWATER

Downtown Alliance receives \$200,000 grant

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

MILTON-FREEWATER — Oregon Heritage has awarded the Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance a \$200,000 grant to rehabilitate two vacant properties — a bakery and coffee shop at 620 N. Main St. and for interior renovation and roof repair of 514 N. Main St.

Both properties are in an area with some of the highest vacancy rates in MFDA’s Main Street District, covering South Main, Broadway Avenue and North Main. The Downtown Alliance hopes these property improvements may bring in new businesses to occupy vacant properties and create a vibrant retail district. The area can support the needs of the community and generate more foot traffic to established businesses in the district.

“I was really excited when we were notified of the award,” said Julie Culjak, MFDA executive director. “I got out of my chair and jumped and hollered. Luckily I was alone in the shop at the time.”

Culjak co-owns Three Divas Beads.

“I want to thank the two property owners who applied,” Culjak added. “The grants

require matching funds. Our 2019 survey found that a bakery and coffee shop were high on the public’s wish list. The remodeled building’s present physical therapy and massage clients will soon be attracted to by the smell of bread baking and coffee making.”

Oregon Heritage, a division of Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, awarded 28 matching grants worth \$5

local economic development, while fitting the community’s needs and long-range plan for downtown vitality.

Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance reported its revitalization project is among 10 in Oregon aiming to bring long vacant buildings in their Main Street districts back into use. Other grant projects are new or improved housing, refurbishing properties to support local businesses, roof

initial monies from the sale of lottery bonds. The Legislature included the Oregon Main Street Revitalization Grant in the lottery bond package approved in 2021. An additional grant round is slated to occur in 2023. The funds must be used to award grants to participating Oregon Main Street Network organizations to acquire, rehabilitate or construct buildings to facilitate community revitalization.

The program also requires that at least 50% of the funds go to rural communities as defined in the bill.

Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance and Milton-Freewater Area Chamber of Commerce in November last year joined forces to form the Milton-Freewater Chamber Downtown Alliance, which seeks to create a vibrant and prosperous Milton-Freewater where everyone benefits. According to the MFDA, receiving this grant for the renovation of properties on Main Street is a major step towards achieving the MFCDA’s goals.

Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance also reported it has 11 applicants for its director position. The search closed on Monday. The first round of interviews to winnow down applicants is June 8 to 10.

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— Julie Culjak, Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance executive director

million to Oregon Main Street Network organizations across the state for building projects that encourage economic revitalization, according to a press release from state parks. Projects range from facade improvement to basic facilities and housing, with awards from \$23,850 to \$200,000. The department funded applications that could best stimulate private investment and

and electrical improvements to commercial locations, repairing historic theaters and restoring premises destroyed by fire.

The grant program, created by the 2015 Legislature, was placed within the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. According to the state parks department, legislation established a permanent fund for the Oregon Main Street Revitalization Grant, and provided

LOCAL BRIEFING

Tribal homicide case underway

MISSION — Umatilla Tribal Police on Wednesday, May 25, arrested a man for the stabbing death of another man earlier that day.

Kawlja Nicoah Scott, 25, is in custody in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, for criminal homicide. Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation in a press release May 27 reported Scott is the suspect in the stabbing and slaying of Gabriel David Freeman at his residence on

the reservation.

Scott, a CTUIR member, fled the scene, but tribal police soon caught and arrested him on a tribal charge of homicide. Umatilla Tribal Police is investigating the case with assistance from the FBI.

“Given the nature of the allegations both the CTUIR, pursuant to its inherent jurisdiction, and the United States, pursuant to the Major Crimes Act, have concurrent jurisdiction over this case,” according to the press release.

— EO Media Group

Victor Baros



Stanfield Secondary School

“Congratulations Bub, we love you!”

Love, mom, dad, Dillan & Micah

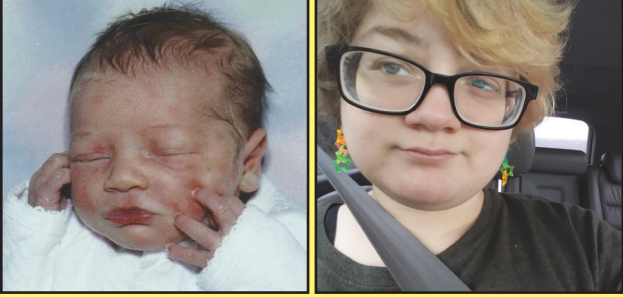
Brielle Youncs



Pendleton High School

“We are so proud of you Brie! Congrats & best wishes for the future.”
We love you! Mom, Dad & Shae

Jack Hess



Pendleton High School

I love you to the moon and back!
Cant wait to see what your next adventure is.
Love Mama

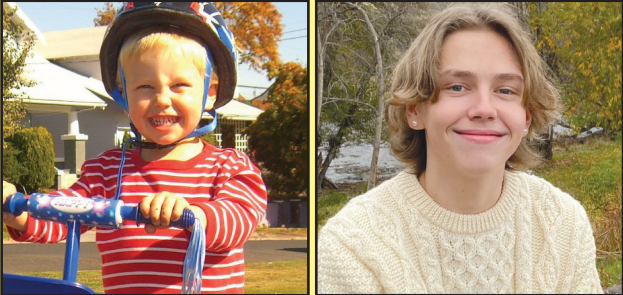
Gabriel Cleveland



Pendleton High School

“We are so proud of you!”
Love, Mom, Dad, Wyatt, Christina, Joanna, Dan, and Lamar

Caleb A. Picken



Pendleton High School

“You make us proud!
Knowledge and adventures await!”
Love from Mom, Dad and Erin

Kensie J. Skultety



Inspire Connections Academy & Boise State Univ.

Assc. Degree of Criminal Justice

“We are so proud of you Kensie! Congrats!” Love, your families

Jade Atkins



Pilot Rock High School

Congratulations Jade!
We are proud of you...
love, from all your family.