

# East Oregonian reforms newsroom

Turnover during past year provides way for new staff, fresh ideas

By ERICK PETERSON  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The East Oregonian's news staff has undergone almost a total change in the last year.

From last summer to this past spring, the newsroom had several staff members leave. East Oregonian publisher Andrew Cutler said those departures created holes the company has been working to fill.

The EO plugged the first hole in January with the hiring of Charly Hotchkiss as the news clerk, an essential position to the newsroom. Then reporter John Tillman came on in February. Another vacancy opened the door to photographer Yasser Marte joining the ranks in early June.

The latest additions are college and high school interns for the summer.

"It is, truly, a whole new newsroom," Cutler said.

The group is eager, passionate and excited about what they do, he added, and he has confidence in their ability to receive direction under news editor Phil Wright.

"Phil has that institutional knowledge, having grown up here and having worked at the EO for the past 15-plus years," Cutler said, and brings experience "you can only get by working somewhere."

Cutler spoke of Wright's "no-nonsense approach," which will be beneficial.

"That will make them better," he said.

Wright began with EO Media Group in October 2005 as a news clerk, then as a reporter starting in 2006. That led to his becoming the editor of The Observer in La Grande in 2019. He returned to the EO in May 2021 as the news editor.

In the time Wright has worked at the EO, he has overseen reporters who had been at the paper before he was an editor. Now, he heads a newsroom that was built entirely after his arrival.

"It's really exciting to shape a newsroom in a way that the EO hasn't had in a while," Wright said.

He said the changes mean the EO can consider revamping news coverage. Instead of a public safety beat, for example, there could be a social justice beat.

"So, very much, it's an experiment," Wright said. "There will be times where we'll fail, and there will be times when we succeed. We'll learn from those things we fail, and we'll build on what we do well."

## Cat mom explores region through work

Hotchkiss said she also is happy to be in the newsroom. "I love it," she said. "I get to start my day by reading for an hour or two."

Hotchkiss as news clerk juggles numerous tasks. She edits articles, communicates with readers, writes news briefs, processes letters to the editor and works with designers on newspaper pages.

"I absolutely never imagined working for a newspaper," Hotchkiss said.

Her past work includes botany in California and rare plant conservation in Hawaii.

Coming to Pendleton, Hotchkiss said, she is close to her family. The area also gives her opportunities to explore the natural world, something



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

The East Oregonian newsroom staff poses for a photo Wednesday morning, June 22, 2022, in front of the East Oregonian, Pendleton. From left standing, reporter John Tillman, news editor Phil Wright, news clerk Charly Hotchkiss, and kneeling in front from left, photographer/reporter Yasser Marte and newsroom intern Antonia Arredondo.

she said she enjoys.

She said she also loves her cats. She has an Instagram account, with more than 25,000 followers, for her kitties. One of her felines, Thumbz, ties a world record for having 28 toes.

## A worldly reporter arrives

Tillman was born in Pendleton and raised in Athena, the child of wheat ranchers. As such, he said he knows the area and its agriculture.

"As a kid, I worked on a ranch," he said.

He comes to his current job as EO reporter with varied academic and employment backgrounds. He said he went to college at Stanford, double majoring in history and human biology. Following that, he worked as an adjunct professor at Linfield University, lecturing in the biology department. Then, he attended Oxford on a Rhodes Scholarship to study the history of science.

After graduate school, he went into freelance reporting, he said. He wrote on natural resources and environmental issues for various other publications, but transitioned to reporting on defense issues during the 1980s.

He even wrote a novel, "The Sixth Battle," with his brother.

"It did quite well," Tillman said.

Further work in journalism took him to Afghanistan in 2005, where he was a war correspondent for the EO.

## 'Photography nerd' jumps aboard

Marte is from Lawrence, Massachusetts. Born of Dominican immigrants, he said he is from a close family, which includes two siblings.

He and his family moved to Miami by the time he entered high school. Later, he moved to Los Angeles and discovered photography.

"That's when I got really into learning photojournalism," he said.

Marte went to Santa Monica College, and he worked for a couple of newspapers, including the school's student newspaper, The Corsair. While there, the Santa Monica Daily Press picked up his articles.

"They taught me about hyper-local news and the importance of it," Marte said.

Then, he went to Florida International University, where he continued his studies, focusing on photography.

"I'm a photography nerd," he said. "My room is full of photography books."

Marte said he came to the EO to gain experience.

"I'm fresh out of school, and I want to dive into journalism," he said.

## Fresh-faced intern looks for experience

Antonio Arredondo lived in Canby and went to high school there before departing to attend George Fox University, Newberg.

"I was the last broadcast journalism major to graduate from that university," he said.

The school had discontinued the major after his freshman year, but he "decided to stick around with it."

He said his original dream was to be a television announcer. Working toward that end, he announced for George Fox. But he said he thought he should pick up some extra skills, which is why he started exploring photography and writing en route to obtaining his degree earlier this year.

A Snowden Intern, Arredondo plans to work at the EO for 10 weeks, ending in August.

"I'm here to not only further my experience in journalism but also kind of figure out what I want to do with my life," he said.

## More staff on the way

Interns Erin Picken and Summer Wildbill already are working at the EO. Picken is writing the "Days Gone By" feature of the EO. Meanwhile, Wildbill is learning to write public safety logs, community briefs and more.

Cutler also said a couple of additional interns are joining the team.

According to the publisher, Patty Hyatt, of the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce, approached him with two high school students who have enthusiasm for journalism. And the EO has an open reporter position it is trying to fill.

## Award-winning journalist says goodbye, sort of

Kathy Aney, EO writer and photographer, said she tried to retire a couple of years ago.

"It didn't take," she said.

This time, she said, she is "more committed" to her retirement. Aney said she is stepping further back from the newspaper. After finishing an assignment or two, she said she intends to take a break and then return as a part-time sports photographer.

"That's my passion, and it's not really work for me," she said.

She added she will be "definitely following" the EO and its new reporters, and she offered some advice for them.

"It's easy to get fatigued in this business and tempting to phone it in. We just need to pace ourselves and figure out how to give ourselves some self-care so that doesn't happen, but it's difficult sometimes," she said. "I figured out how to deal with all that."



Shannon Carlson/Contributed Photo

Pendleton High School student Tony Hernandez, left, on May 18, 2022, at Tamastlikt Cultural Institute, Mission, presents a \$5,000 grant to Kriss Dammeyer, founder and director of Made to Thrive.

# Pendleton area students become grant makers

By ANTONIO ARREDONDO  
East Oregonian

we really wanted."

Singer and her classmates worked under the guidance of Zach Brandsen in their assigned CommuniCare classes. Much like their Pendleton partners, they picked different nonprofits they were interested in supporting and narrowed it down. But with a full class dedicated to the program, they presented and eliminated groups during school.

PENDLETON — Pendleton area students last month became community grant makers, providing almost \$17,000 to charities and other organizations.

The students were taking part in CommuniCare, the Harold and Arlene CARE Foundation's program now in its 25th year that turns normal fundraising on its head. Instead of raising money for one cause, the students receive money for grants and choose where to allocate their resources.

"They look at potential nonprofits and then conduct interviews with each of them," said Shannon Carlson, director of marketing for the Jordan Schnitzer Family Foundation. "Then they need to determine where to put more of the resources for the community."

Students from Pendleton High School and Nixyaawii Community School met May 18 at Tamastlikt Cultural Institute near Pendleton to present checks to their grant recipients. Nixyaawii senior Keyen Signer participated in CommuniCare.

"This program honestly taught me how to look out for our community and consider all the concerns we came up with as a collective group with different perspectives," the recent graduate said.

"Communicating was a big key because it brought our class together to see what

The class is something Singer has been hoping to join since her freshman year. And finally, as a senior, she presented a check totaling \$7,000 to the three nonprofits of her class' choice.

In total, the program distributed more than \$683,000 to communities in the state. For Pendleton, this meant \$16,815 to local nonprofits from Pendleton High and Nixyaawii.

The CARE Foundation guaranteed each group \$7,500 for grantmaking. Students could double those funds by raising an additional \$750, which the foundation matched 10:1. Students had the option to reserve up to 25% of their CARE Foundation funds for in-school grants.

The year-long class and process is something Singer said she will never forget and one she wants other students to take.

"Yes, I definitely recommend it," Singer said. "You can work with other students to create change, then figure out who to grant money to and learn how to network with these

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