

Woman recounts her rescue from Umatilla River

By ANTONIO ARREDONDO
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Renata Burns on the afternoon of Tuesday, June 28, stopped by the Umatilla River in Pendleton to mourn the loss of her 18-year-old service dog, Mama, nine days prior. A moment later, she was in the river and worried she might not make it out until a bicyclist stopped and saved her.

Burns recalled she saw goats in the area, so she veered closer to the river to get a better look. While there, she sat down in the river to cool off, using a stick she found to keep her close to the bank.

“Pretty soon, before I knew it, the stick wasn’t holding on anymore and I found myself drifting down the current,” Burns said.

An inexperienced swim-



Renata Burns poses for a portrait Tuesday, June 28, 2022, along the Umatilla River near the Eighth Street Bridge, Pendleton, where she says she nearly drowned earlier that day before Gary Taber rescued her.

Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

mer, Burns finally reached an area where she could stand up. When she stood,

though, she ran into a problem: The quick current and slippery rocks made

her unable to walk.

At first, she suffered through the experience alone.

A paramedic firefighter for 15 years in St. Louis, Burns admitted the situation embarrassed her. So when several people rode past her on the Pendleton River Parkway above the river, Burns said nothing to them.

Fear, though, crept into the back of Burns’ mind. Finally, she began to worry and called for help, nervous she may become weak and drown.

“I was standing there, the current was too strong and the rocks were too slippery,” Burns said. “For an hour, I was standing there in the middle of the river.”

Gary Taber was the first person to ride by while Burns shouted for help, she said. Hearing the cry, he quit his ride and walked out into the river, grabbing a stick to help bring Burns ashore.

After the two slipped and stumbled a few times

each, Burns said they both emerged from the river, wet but alive. Burns is especially grateful for the rescuer that came in the nick of time.

“I could’ve died,” Burns said. “I was scared for my life, and he went out of his way to stop and help me.”

Following the incident, Burns thanked Taber again and again and snapped a picture of him to hold on to. She said she hopes the incident serves as a reminder to be careful around the Umatilla River.

After record rainfall from May through early June, the river has been running much higher than normal. While the wetness has receded in the latter half of the month, it is still swifter than usual.

“People need to be careful,” Burns said. “It might not look like the current’s so bad, but it can take you away in an instant.”

Pendleton house fire displaces two

By ANTONIO ARREDONDO
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Pendleton firefighters knocked down a fire in a house Monday, June 27, that displaced two people. And a Chihuahua also escaped.

Pendleton Fire and Ambulance Department at about 2 p.m. responded to reports of black smoke seeping out of a house on the corner of Southeast Byers Avenue and Southeast 11th Street. Firefighters were on the scene at 1005 S.E. Byers Ave. within a few minutes and extinguished the blaze in about 10 minutes.

“The fire appears to have started in the bedroom,” Fire Chief Jim Critchley said. “No investigation will be needed as it is accidental.”

Pendleton police knocked on neighbors’ doors to alert those next to the house, with the one occupant and one dog



Gear from a Pendleton firefighter on Monday, June 27, 2022, remains in front of 1005 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, after a fire broke out in a bedroom.

Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

safely outside. One other dog, a Chihuahua, still was in the house.

When firefighters arrived and entered the house, the

Chihuahua raced outside.

All occupants and pets of the house were safe and uninjured.

Critchley said the struc-

ture was a fourplex and the fire damaged only one unit, displacing two residents, and at least one stayed with the Red Cross for the night.

Echo receives infrastructure grants

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

ECHO — The city of Echo has received grants to upgrade its sewer and water systems, while a northern addition is in the works.

Echo received \$7 million in federal funds for infrastructure grants to update its sewer system last year, which the town has needed to improve since 2007, according to City Administrator Dave Slaght. The city also received \$5.9 million in water system grants this year.

Echo chose to build a water tower rather than drilling a well, Slaght explained.

“We’re putting in a 500,000-gallon tank,” he said, “which will bring us up to 845,000 gallons of storage. That’s enough to meet fire-fighting requirements. We’ve needed that for a long time.”

Echo aims to let bids

begin in the spring.

“There must be some people thinking that Echo is worthy of major investment,” Slaght said.

Echo lobbied the Oregon legislature for federal American Rescue Plan capital improvement funds for its water and wastewater systems, Slaght recounted. State Reps. Bobby Levy and Greg Smith and Sen. Bill Hansell supported Echo’s requests, he said, and the city was awarded \$5.53 million for its water system and \$1.5 million for its wastewater system improvement.

Echo also received \$450,000 in federal appropriation funds for its water meter service replacement, Slaght added. U.S. Sens. Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden championed this application.

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality approved a \$1 million loan

as well, Slaght reported. Up to half of the loan may be forgiven to offset wastewater upgrade expenses, which should cost around \$2 million.

“The city of Echo has been very blessed with this opportunity and is grateful for all the support from our county commissioners, state legislators and federal senators,” Slaght concluded. “The city council has been very involved and Mayor Chad Ray sat with me as we lobbied for the funds, and was huge in helping convince them how important this was to Echo’s future.”

Annexation application

The city council considered Kent and Laura Madison’s application to annex to Echo their 132-acre property, adjoining Interstate 84, at its June 14 meeting. The Madisons proposed withdrawing their application to submit a

corrected version. The council approved this motion and would welcome the new application.

If annexed, the Madison Addition would be connected to Echo by Thielson Road, which the Oregon Department of Transportation has approved, according to documentation presented to the council.

Residents of the county within Echo’s urban growth boundary spoke in opposition to the annexation at the May 10 city council meeting. James Shelton, Brad and Don Miltenberger, who has lived north of the city for 45 years, cited water and sewer issues. Shelton spoke as an individual, not as president of the Echo Citizens for Responsible Development. He was also concerned about housing, roads, open spaces and parks, according to the meeting’s minutes.

EASTERN OREGON REGIONAL AIRPORT



East Oregonian, File

John Honemann, former manager of the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in Pendleton, poses for a portrait Nov. 9, 2021, in a World War II era hanger at the airport. Honemann relocated from northern Colorado to Pendleton to start the job in July 2021. Less than a year later, he no longer works for the city.

John Honemann out as airport manager

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — John Honemann as of last week is no longer the manager of the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in Pendleton, City Manager Robb Corbett confirmed Monday, June 27.

Corbett would not say whether Honemann quit or the city terminated his employment.

Economic Development Director Steve Chrisman is serving as interim airport manager.

The city hired Honemann in July 2021 to oversee the airport, two industrial parks with more than 90 tenants and a 1,000-acre wheat farm.

He came to the city with a long career in aviation, having spent the eight years prior working for the Federal Aviation Administration in safety and compliance. Before that, his career includes stints as the general manager of a jet center in Montrose, Colorado, and as a flight officer and UAS pilot for the U.S. Navy.

Chrisman served as the airport manager before Honemann. Chrisman, however, had no experience in aviation. In November 2021, the city made the airport manager its own position again so Chrisman could focus more on economic development.

Harold Nelson, owner of Pendleton Aircraft Service, said he was “shocked” that Honemann no longer worked for the city.

“In my 53 years at the

airport, John was the first manager with a pilot’s license and an aviation background as a veteran,” Nelson said. “He was on a mission to save the airport. He came around to talk to businesses up here, to find out what he could do to help.”

Nelson’s son Curtiss Nelson said the Pendleton Airport Commission had an upbeat meeting June 22, and then “suddenly John was gone” a day or two after.

Airport commission member Gary Zollman commented that everybody liked Honemann, who had provided the airport budget to the advisory group, at its request.

Airport commission Chair Jim Webster said he was “surprised and disappointed” about Honemann’s departure.

“The commission felt that he was doing a good job,” he said. “We weren’t privy to the deliberations. It takes time to get a new person on board, so now we’ll have to go through that process again.”

The East Oregonian has tried to contact Honemann for comment but has not reached him.

Pendleton graduate buys Dutch Bros franchises

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — David Beamer of Walla Walla has bought Dutch Bros coffee shop franchises in La Grande and his hometown of Pendleton. He acquired two franchises in Walla Walla in 2008 and 2018 and another in Milton-Freewater in 2013.

“I was born in Walla Walla and lived in Athena through kindergarten,” Beamer said, “but moved to Pendleton for first grade, and graduated from high school there in 2000. It’s exciting to own a franchise in my home town.”

Beamer graduated from Oregon State University in 2004.

“I worked at Hill Meat, slaughtering hogs every morning,” he said. “In Octo-

ber 2002, I started working night shifts at Dutch Bros, and made manager in 2007. I never thought that pouring and handing out coffee was going to be my future. But it’s the easiest and funnest job I’d ever had, so I made a career of it.”

At a Dutch Bros meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, Beamer learned about the

opportunity to buy franchises in La Grande, Pendleton and Hermiston from their owner Marc Lee. A friend from the Tri-Cities purchased the Hermiston shop.

“I might be the only franchisee with a store in his hometown,” he surmised. “There may be only about 40 franchisees left. The company owns most of the stores. Dutch Bros’

target is 4,000 locations.”

Beamer has been amazed at the loyalty of his customers.

“We had regulars at the Milton-Freewater store who drove daily from Pilot Rock,” he said. “The Pendleton outlet has saved them a lot of time and money. It’s exciting for me to be on the road to Pendleton and La Grande every Wednesday and Thursday.”

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*Starts Thurs. July 7th

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Minions: The Rise of Gru (PG)
1:00p 4:00p 6:10p 8:20p
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Elvis (PG13)
1:20p 4:40p 8:00p
•••••

The Black Phone (R)
1:10p 3:40p 5:50p 8:30p

Top Gun: Maverick (PG13)
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