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The new entrance to the Camp Umatilla military facility near Hermiston is under construction Wednesday, July 27, 2022.

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Camp Umatilla enjoys building boom

Backup operations center for the Army Corps of Engineers also in development

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The Oregon Military Department's Camp Umatilla at the former Umatilla Chemical Depot west of Hermiston is enjoying a building boom.

Remodeling and renovation of existing facilities are underway, as well as new construction to house and feed infantry trainees.

"We've had \$56 million in construction so far," said retired Col. Todd Farmer, now civilian installations manager for the state military department. "We'll spend about another \$22 million over the next two years."

U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley on Friday, July 29, announced they secured funding for community projects across Oregon in the fiscal year 2023 Senate appropriations bills, including \$6 million to Camp Umatilla for housing construction.

The Oregon Military Department also is renaming Camp Umatilla as the Raymond F. Rees Training Center in honor of Maj. Gen. Fred Rees of Helix, four times former Oregon National Guard adjutant general.

"It will be the premier Guard infantry training facility in the western region," Oregon Army National Guard Chief of Staff Col. Alan Gronewold said. "The



Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

An infantry squad trains Wednesday, July 27, 2022, in a tactical formation at Camp Umatilla near Hermiston. The military facility serves as an Army National Guard Regional Training Institute and soon will house a backup operations center for the Army Corps of Engineers.

renaming ceremony is Sept. 29."

A new entrance to Camp Umatilla was under construction Wednesday, July 27, amid several more projects on the base. An arborist was operating on 80 year-old patients providing shade on the busy camp's streets and exercise yards.

"There will be an interchange between the entrance and the railroad

tracks," Farmer said. "One exit will be for Morrow County, and the other will take you to Umatilla County."

Continuity of operations centers

A backup operations center for the Army Corps of Engineers also is in development at Camp Umatilla. "It's a continuity site for both Seat-

tle and Portland," Gronewold said.

The Corps and the Oregon National Guard share two buildings on the base. In an emergency, the Corps can use one structure for administration of its Seattle, Portland and Walla Walla districts, while the other is suitable as a helicopter hangar and aviation command center. The airport in

Pendleton could participate as well. A Magnitude 8 or 9 Cascadia zone earthquake or other major emergency might temporarily knock out the Guard's Salem operations center.

"It's designed to operate for 72 hours with its own resources," Gronewold said. "Then air and ground assets would arrive from all over the country, in a Katrina-like operation."

Gronewold also said the Guard plans on building its own backup emergency operations center at Klamath Falls, home to the 173rd Fighter Wing at Kingsley Field Air National Guard Base.

The southeast tip of Camp Umatilla lies near the intersection of Interstates 82 and 84. It is in both Umatilla and Morrow counties. Its southern boundary skirts the railroad and Gun Club Road westward.

Ongoing projects at the base include construction of new barracks and security checkpoints and renovation of World War II-era structures. A shortage of concrete supplies has slowed building, Farmer said.

Camp Umatilla received approval for construction of \$27 million barracks buildings in the National Defense Authorization Act in 2020 and 2021. The barracks will increase the National Guard's ability to house visiting soldiers by 448 beds, according to a 2021 press release.

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IMESD plans for August school safety summit

By SHANNON GOLDEN
The Observer

PENDLETON — In the wake of May's deadly shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, American school districts, government officials and law enforcement are searching for solutions to school safety issues.

The InterMountain Education Service District, in partnership with local law enforcement and regional school districts, aims to address safety in Oregon schools Aug. 8 during a School Security Summit.

"Uvalde rocked us, just like Sandy Hook did," IMESD Superintendent Mark Mulvihill said. "As we go back to in-person instruction, we want the public to be assured that we're working hard to deal with active shooter

situations."

IMESD serves almost two dozen school districts in four counties — Morrow, Umatilla, Union and Baker — and aims to have representation from each one. According to Mulvihill, almost 150 people will be in attendance at the summit, from police officers and sheriff deputies to educators, superintendents and school mental health providers.

The agency's last school safety summit took place in 2016. Mulvihill acknowledged the tremendous turnover of law enforcement and district staff that may have occurred in the six years since as a motivation for this year's event.

He also noted the pandemic's impact on school safety issues.

"We've been so focused on COVID safety protocols that our active shooter training has been on the back burner," he said.

For Mulvihill, the implementation of this common language between schools and law enforcement is a crucial aspect of making emergency responses in schools more efficient.

"It's critical that we agree on the same vocabulary terms for emergency situations," he said.

The service district led a region-wide effort in 2016 to encourage all school districts in the area to adopt the same security terminology that could be used in the event of an emergency. This Standard Response Protocol, created by the "I Love U

Guys" Foundation, aims to improve communication between school administrators and law enforcement officers in emergencies.

Although not every district has adopted this new terminology, Mulvihill credited local law enforcement for their continued commitment to school safety.

"I cannot be more impressed by the response of law enforcement at this time," he said. "Their commitment to schools in this area has been stunning."

Pendleton School District Superintendent Kevin Headings said the school is excited to take part in the summit.

"With the recent events in Uvalde and Buffalo, we can never take the eye

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