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INSIDE FIND OUT ABOUT PIONEER DAY IN GO!



BOARDMAN FOODS TAKES THE SPOTLIGHT

Sam the Robot waits to carry more onion boxes Monday, Aug. 15, 2022, at Boardman Foods in Boardman. The company named the robot after Vice President of Operations Debbie Radie's father, who was the first employee at Boardman Foods.

Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

Oregon Business & Industry's manufacturing roadshow rolls into the Port of Morrow

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

BOARDMAN — Boardman Foods at the Port of Morrow in Boardman was center stage Monday, Aug. 15, for Oregon Business & Industry's 2022 statewide manufacturing and innovation roadshow.

OBI asked elected officials, industry leaders and economic development partners from across the state to join its tour Aug. 3-17 of more than 2,000 miles and 20 stops. Boardman Foods and the Port of Morrow were the lone highlights in Northeastern Oregon.

The Port of Morrow is the second busiest of Oregon's 23 ports. Among its diversified industries are food processing plants; frozen, refrigerated and dry warehousing and Amazon Web Services data centers.

Boardman Foods' facility processes fresh and frozen onions, peppers and other produce and is at the intersection of two interstate highways, adjacent to a major rail line and the Columbia River. These transportation links support convenient shipping to regional, east coast and international markets.

It is a family business, not a subsidiary of a giant food company, Boardman Foods President Brian Maag explained.

"When my grandfather and his brothers came from Ireland around 1918, all the best land in Oregon had already been homesteaded," Maag said. "They took out some of the last claims on juniper, hard rock and rattlesnake land, but managed to make a go of it by raising sheep. One brother went back to Ireland. The others managed to buy out other scrub land claims and raise cattle."

The now predominantly onion processor employs 250 to 300 people, depending upon the season. The premises cover 15 acres. Floor space is devoted about equally to manufacturing and storage.

"In 1990 we moved to the Port of Morrow to be closer to potatoes," he said. "We were a private-public partnership, but it was hard to get ordinary commercial loans. U.S. Bank eventually took a chance on us."

The onion business comes in three main product lines, selling to about 50 companies, including giants such as Conagra Brands.

State-of-the art operations

First, Boardman Foods packs premium fresh onions to suit customers' specific quality, size and packaging needs in all



Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

Boardman Foods President Brian Maag hosts a tour of the facility Monday, Aug. 15, 2022, for the Oregon Business & Industry bus tour group at the Port of Morrow in Boardman.

colors, package sizes, flavors, varieties and ring specifications. Boardman Foods' state of the art storage facility enables the company to supply customers a quality fresh northwest onion year round. Its slogan is, "We give you the best, because we have a home for the rest."

Two other processes add value. Fresh whole peeled onions provide a firm, succulent product ready to slice and dice. Peeled onions are ideal for use in soups, sauces or any recipe needing a flavor kick. Upon entering the facility, the latest vegetable processing equipment sizes, tops, tails and

peels onions to customers' specifications.

Individually quick frozen onions provide food manufacturers a steady, consistent year round supply at a competitive price. Sweet Spanish or Grano onions are cut to customers' specifications using the latest vegetable processing equipment.

"It takes a lot of energy to freeze onions and store them in a warehouse kept below freezing," Maag said. "Going from 33 to 32 degrees is a lot less energetic than making the state change from liquid to solid."

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Grain Craft team visits Pendleton after mill fire

Structural engineer assesses facility to determine extent of damage

By JOHN TILLMAN AND PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Officials from Grain Craft on Friday, Aug. 12, visited Pendleton in the aftermath of the fire that ravaged the company's flour mill two days earlier.

Grain Craft confirmed President and CEO Pete Frederick, Senior Vice President of Operations Wade Blalock and Chief Human Resources Officer Jeff Zierenberg all came.

Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock reported the Grain Craft team were on hand to assess the damage at the mill and meet with local officials. Grain Craft officials also met with the 22 employees of the mill to provide them reassurance.

Grain Craft spokesperson Natalie Faulkner said while many variables remain in play, Grain Craft continues to focus on its team members and the community.

Fire on Aug. 10, tore through the mill. Fire departments around the region responded to help Pendleton Fire Department take on the blaze. There were no reports of injuries, but Pendleton Fire Assistant Chief Tony Pierotti reported silos were at full capacity of finished grain, so the fire fuel load was extreme.

County Commissioner John Shafer

said he asked the Grain Craft team a few questions, including about the future of the mill. But he said it was too early to provide any conclusions.

A structural engineer planned to assess the facility on Aug. 17. Shafer said the grain elevator and the flour storage house at the mill might be OK, but the structural assessment will make that determination.

James Reeder of Athena operates The Outlying Perspective, a drone aerial photography and inspection service. He said he is creating a 3D scan of the mill for the assessment.

"It'll output a 3D model of the building, or what's left of it," he said.

The data can help figure out how to pull down structures and find if there are hot spots inside.

Smoke from the fire continues, and Pendleton Assistant Fire Chief Tony

Pierotti said there have been a few flare ups. The city put up a chainlink fence around the mill, blocking access to it, and some streets near the mill now are open to traffic. However, Southeast Emigrant Avenue remains closed between Fourth and Sixth streets, as does Southeast Fourth Street between Emigrant and Frazer avenues.

Former Pendleton Flour Mill official Tony Flagg moved back to Pendleton from retirement in Florida on the Fourth of July this year and weighed in on the fire.

"The fire is quite a tragedy," he said. "The business has been around for 112 years."

Flagg was the Pendleton Flour Mills vice president of grain operations from 1983 to 2003. He was

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