

Education from 9A

combined show up that evening. They had gone here, or their child or a cousin. An employee. Everybody has some sort of connection. Most of the community has some tie with LCC.”

Currently, LCC’s enrollment population has an average age of 31. This ranges from students who are looking for a career path to adults who never finished their GEDs.

“We have students who come out of high school, but we also have students who are coming to retool or find another career or upgrade their skill set,” Pierson said.

When students graduate from LCC, there are jobs waiting for them in the Siuslaw region. A quick view of listings on Oregon’s employment department website shows a whole host of them. CNA. Respiratory therapist. Diesel mechanic. Production worker.

The lumber industry isn’t dead. In fact, it needs more employees. One logging industry member, who preferred to remain anonymous, said, “It’s not just logging. Manual labor jobs are almost impossible to fill in industries that require hard physical work.”

But these jobs need a certain amount of skilled training, and the employers often come to Pierson for help.

“I have had conversations with employers not able to find workforce,” Pierson said. “Unfortunately, those needs are usually immediate. It’s like, ‘Please, do something!’”

The problem is, many times he can’t “do something.” Like Grzeskowiak, Pierson has a problem with funding.

“A lot of it is the tax measure. In basic tax economics, people talk about a three-legged stool: Property tax, income tax and sales tax. Well, we’ve got two out of three, and one is severely hampered after Measure 5. We’re running on one and a half legs. I’ve been in Oregon much longer than I’ve been anywhere else. I’m not a big fan of sales tax either, I like not paying sales tax. But honestly, at some point, we have to raise some tax. Or do something to repair the property tax the way it was gutted.”

Pierson does what he can with the funding he has. LCC Florence is an extension center. Unlike a satellite campus, which can provide some complement of full degree programs, extension centers are more limited in their offerings. But that doesn’t mean that they can’t get a student what they need.

“A student can come here and graduate, but it’s going to be some onsite classes, a few online classes, probably a couple of video classes,” Pierson said. “It does open it up. I think of it as another tool in the tool belt. When a student decides to come here, we’ll work with that student to tailor our offerings, literally, almost to the student. I do wish we had the community size to support a full-on satellite campus, as that would be wonderful.”

But Pierson, along with Mapleton and Siuslaw school districts, are looking to expand the educational options in the region. And in the process, create the symbiotic relationship between schools and businesses that existed before.

“BINDING BUSINESS AND EDUCATION”

In 2016, Measure 98 was passed, requiring the Oregon Legislature to fund dropout prevention and career and college readiness programs in Oregon high schools. Grzeskowiak is using this as a jumping off point to rebuild the technical career courses in the high school and, in the process, rebuilding industry in the Siuslaw region.

One of the first obstacles that Grzeskowiak is facing is a severe teacher shortage that is hitting America.

An August article in the

Washington Post explained the problem: “Teacher shortages are nothing new ... but the problem has grown more acute in recent years as the profession has been hit with low morale over low pay, unfair evaluation methods, assaults on due-process rights, high-stakes testing requirements, insufficient resources and other issues.”

Because of that, Grzeskowiak has to poach teachers from different trades.

“When we talk about filling a position next year, like woodshop, we’ll probably be recruiting someone who is currently working in the industry,” he said. “Somebody that is a general contractor who is looking to make a change into education. We would be sponsoring them to get a professional/technical teaching license.”

Once Grzeskowiak is able to find these instructors and get them trained, the work of building a Siuslaw workforce can begin.

“We have contractors in town who are looking for kids who have some skills to begin with. They’re willing to teach the rest of those skills on the job site. They want to be able to turn those kids into contractors themselves and then be able to have the ability to subcontract out parts of their jobs to those kids so they can start building their own companies.”

Companies that could stay in the region.

And it’s not just contracting companies that could be built. These worksites would train roofers, framers, electricians, plumbers — all of them working together and starting their own businesses.

These are the types of jobs that can last year-round. If there is a lull in workload, Grzeskowiak said, they can use the skills they learned to do general repair around town.

“Here are people that make a great living going around taking small jobs for people that don’t know how to do those specialty pieces,” Grzeskowiak said. “Especially in a small community with a lot of senior citizens.”

While staying in the region after graduation is not a desire for most high school graduates, there are those who prefer to stay.

“We have a lot of kids who want to stay local,” Grzeskowiak said. “They want to jump right into a family business and a regular job and get going on a life and a family. There’s nothing wrong with that. They just need the opportunities to have a wage-earning job to support that. That’s coming back to getting the construction/engineering program back and running. Somebody can learn onsite with getting a little training coming out of school.”

One obstacle Pierson and Grzeskowiak have is getting younger generations interested in the blue-collar sector again.

There have been multiple studies pointing to millennials’ lack of excitement about these industries. An April 2017 article from Builder magazine

“Is Coastal Living in Jeopardy?”



This series covers the current housing and employment crisis facing the Siuslaw region. Through in-depth interviews with government officials, volunteer organizations, property managers and employers, the series examines the problems facing the region, the solutions that the community is working on and what the community can do to help.

The series is available online at thesiuslawnews.com, or in print by request.

Series List

- Nov. 15: SOS
- Nov. 22: State of housing
- Nov. 29: How we got here
- Dec. 6: Time to step up
- Dec. 13: Volunteer economy
- Dec. 27: Jobs and workforce
- Jan. 3: Economic development
- Jan. 10: Education

This exploration of the Siuslaw region will conclude on Jan. 17.

described the problem after conducting a survey. It stated 63 percent of surveyed youth said there was little to no chance that they would ever consider a profession in the trade field, no matter how much it paid. They thought it was too physically difficult.

“Lazy” is a typical way millennials are described.

“I’ve seen those statistics too,” Pierson said. “I think it’s just a bunch of crotchety old boomers making stuff up. I am not a millennial basher. I’m a boomer. We were all going to San Francisco in the Summer of Love. We went through our time. And every generation does.”

For Pierson and Grzeskowiak, it’s not that younger generations are inherently against these types of jobs, it’s just that they haven’t been exposed to it.

“We need to do a better job in letting the students know those are great paying jobs and good careers,” Pierson said. “There are a few happy plumbers in this town that make more than me. There’s potential for growth and right out of the chute, a good paying job. As opposed to someone who goes to a four-year university, depending on what they’re going into, they have to pay their dues for years. With trade work, your dues are paid once you’ve got that trade certificate. There are some that you can do in a year or less. CNA is just six weeks. That’s the lowest rung of the healthcare trail, but it will get you started and get you a job. You’ll get job benefits.

“It’s nothing to sneeze at.”

Ultimately, it’s about giving students choice. Give them as many hands-on options in grade school as possible, which will then prepare them for a future that is uncertain. In this

case, uncertainty is a good thing, according to Grzeskowiak.

“To think that everybody’s going to make the same jump at 17 or 18 when some people may not figure out the path until their 20 or 30 is not realistic,” Grzeskowiak said. “We created a funnel point directly to four-year colleges. And now, coming back, taking the funnel, we’re really widening it. Community college, universities and vocational ed, whatever path you pick, it’s the same. It works. Go ahead and pick one. And if you want to cross over later, you can. And I think that’s the message that’s been lost. The decision we make at 16 or 17 doesn’t lock you in forever. It’s rare that people stay in one career their entire life. Pick one, and then if you want to move around, go right ahead. It gives kids a little more hope for the future.”

“THE OLD COLLEGE TRY”

On the post-high school level, Pierson is working hard to build the kind of programs that Grzeskowiak is gearing up for.

“We’re bringing CNA training here to the Florence Center,” Pierson said. “Folks can enter in, get their CNA certificate, find a job locally. We’re actually partnering with Peacehealth Peace Harbor on this program. Employers will want people to upgrade their skills. There’s a pretty clear pathway from CNA to RN certifications.”

Pierson is also helping current business owners run their business more smoothly. LCC offers classes through its Florence Small Business Management Program, via the Oregon Small Business Development Network (SBDC). The three-year pro-

gram, taught by instructor Gary Smith, covers everything from marketing and strategic planning to sales management and fraud prevention.

At the main LCC campus in Eugene, the course costs \$600, but Pierson was able to get funding to reduce the price to \$349.

Interest in the program has been high.

“We had 12 people initially sign up,” Pierson said. “They also did the same offer at the Cottage Grove center. Nobody signed up in Cottage Grove. And we had 12 students.”

The course is now entering its second year, and participants like Florence Area Chamber of Commerce President Bobby Jensen sings its praises.

But future classes were put into doubt because of budgetary concerns. The funding to discount the class was delayed.

“We hoped to do the same thing the second year, and unfortunately, we got no information about the funding until

it was too late,” Pierson said. “I had to tell people, ‘We have this program, maybe it’s \$600? Maybe it’s \$349? Would you sign up until we know?’”

Because of the funding confusion, they missed the first class, which was scheduled for September.

That doesn’t mean that Pierson is giving up on local entrepreneurs.

“We could certainly get one of the small business coaches over here,” he said. “I’m also a fan of the Regional Accelerator and Innovation Network (RAIN), which has a series of pub talks where people can talk about what they’re going through. They’ve had special speakers come in and talk about financing. And that would apply to anyone.”

Pierson is set to be the next president of Florence Area Chamber of Commerce.

“The Chamber makes a concerted effort, too. We have our noon forums that touch up on different aspects of business, and they’re open to the public. And we’ve also played around with pub talk series. And all free. There are a lot of free resources available.”

He’s also working with both local school districts to expand LCC’s offerings into the high schools.

“We don’t have any technical trade space here at our facilities,” Pierson said. “Closest thing we have is an art lab, so we’re at a disadvantage in offering those things. But I’m convinced that we can work some things out with the high schools ... so we could offer classes in their spaces.

See **EDUCATION 11A**

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