

Woodgrain takes over 3 Boise Cascade mills in NE Oregon

■ Fruitland, Idaho, company running sawmills in La Grande and Pilot Rock as well as a particleboard plant in Island City

By Cherise Kaechele
The (La Grande) Observer

LA GRANDE — Woodgrain Millwork has officially taken over three Boise Cascade mills in Northeastern Oregon.

According to Tanner Dame, corporate marketing manager for Woodgrain, which has its headquarters in Fruitland, Idaho, officially began production Nov. 5 in the La Grande and Pilot Rock sawmills as well as the

particleboard plant in Island City.

Woodgrain announced in mid-September that it was in the process of purchasing the three Boise Cascade operations and began a 60-day due diligence period. During this time, Woodgrain reviewed Boise Cascade's financial information. That period is now over and the transaction has been finalized.

"There have been some

logistical headaches, but we are making sure everything is crossing over well," Dame told The Observer. "There are things we knew were going to be trouble and some things taking a little more effort. But it's been good."

Dame said there have not been any layoffs during the transition. There are approximately 250 employees who stayed on after the shift of ownership. He also said Woodgrain wanted to offer the employees the same compensation and benefits they were receiving under Boise Cascade — if not better.

"There wasn't a decrease," he said. "We tried to match benefits, if not improve them. We wanted to make the transition as easy as possible."

Woodgrain is also hiring more full-time employees, Dame said. Those positions include administrative assistant, Human Resources representative, procurement/purchasing manager, maintenance superintendent, IT



Submitted photo

Woodgrain Millwork of Fruitland, Idaho, recently took over ownership and operation of three Boise Cascade plants in Northeastern Oregon.

site administrator, multiple millwright positions and multiple entry-level laborers at all three mills.

Dame said one of the biggest priorities for Woodgrain in this transition is streamlining operations, and the new owners are asking for input from their employees.

"We know we're not experts within the industry," he said. "We don't have a huge past in lumber and sawmills. We let (the employees) know they have been in the industry and their roles (longer and know more about it), and our expectation is to get the feedback and make improvements."

Dame said that includes capital improvements on the

buildings and the equipment.

"They have to present the opportunities, but as we get familiar with things we'll find places to improve as well. We just want to make sure what we're doing works. They know what's working and what's not," he said.

Kelly Dame, Woodgrain's CEO, said he's excited about the acquisition because Boise Cascade aligns well with Woodgrain's strategy of growth through vertical integration.

"Even more important, I am excited about the talent of the individuals who will be joining the company," Dame said in a press release sent last week. "We have

been impressed with the caliber of people who will be coming over in the acquisition. It says a lot about Boise Cascade, the individuals and the community. We plan on resuming full production at each facility ... with minimal delays in production and delivery."

Tanner Dame said the company is happy to be a part of the community. He said despite Woodgrain being in a different state, the communities are similar.

"We're expanding the footprint," he said. "The new associates and people who came over we're excited to get to know, and we've been impressed with the skill set and attitude."

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Lawmakers ponder longer school year

SALEM (AP) — Among the policy ideas lawmakers are considering for Oregon's troubled education system are longer school years, limited class sizes and more access to state subsidized preschool.

The Statesman Journal reports that since January, the Joint Committee on Student Success has been meeting

with educators, families and business leaders across the state to figure out what is going well in schools, and what isn't. The bipartisan panel is made up of 14 legislators.

The primary task of the committee is to address Oregon's four-year graduation rate, which, at 77 percent, is the third lowest in the country.

Preliminary policy recommendations from the committee were made public this week — including some specific funding recommendations that would total in the hundreds of millions — but they are expected to change significantly before the start of the 2019 legislative session in January.

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