

## Small-business & Ag HAPPENINGS

### Kick off new year with free ag safety seminars

HERMISTON — Annual ag safety trainings will be held in 16 cities between October and March and — for the first time — online as a webinar. Whether operating large farm equipment or spraying chemicals, agricultural workers face a lot of risks on the job.

SAIF will be presenting free, half-day seminars on agriculture safety and health Jan. 8-9 (the seminar on Wednesday will be in Spanish) at the Hermiston Conference Center located at 415 S. Highway 395. Each seminar is held from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., and includes lunch. The seminars are designed primarily for people working in agriculture, but are open to anyone interested in ag safety and health.

“We see about 1,500 injuries in the ag industry a year,” said Reva Hartenstein, senior safety management consultant at SAIF. “We created these seminars to help reduce those numbers—our goal is for every ag worker to go home safe and healthy each night.”

This year’s sessions will focus on four safety topics: training new employees, best practices for chemical use, conscious decision making, and safe driving on and off the farm.

“Motor vehicle accidents account for some of the most severe injuries in the ag industry — and across Oregon industries,” said Hartenstein.

Each of the one-hour seminar topics will be presented via webinar in March. Participants are encouraged — and required if seeking an exemption for random OSHA inspections — to watch all four presentations. The webinars will be available at [www.saif.com/training](http://www.saif.com/training).

Registration details and the list of speakers can be found at [www.saif.com/agseminars](http://www.saif.com/agseminars). You can also register by calling 800-285-8525.

### Avista’s Tom Lienhard recognized with Leadership in Energy Efficiency Award

SPOKANE, Wash. — On Dec. 4, the Board of Directors of the Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance honored winners of the 2018 Leadership in Energy Efficiency Awards in a ceremony held in Portland. The awards recognize outstanding collaboration, innovative solutions and significant contributions to advancing energy efficiency in the Northwest.

“Collaboration and innovation are at the heart of the alliance’s work to advance energy efficiency in the region,” stated Susan E. Stratton, NEEA’s executive director. “These award winners exemplify the leadership in energy efficiency that the Northwest is known for.”

Avista’s Tom Lienhard was among the members of the Commercial + Industrial Lighting Regional Strategy Pricing Data User Group who were recognized with the Leadership in Energy Efficiency Award for Innovation.

This team collaborated to create an interactive dashboard giving utility planners, program managers and implementers access to real-time pricing data for commercial lighting products. It’s already being used to inform the region’s lighting programs.

The other contributors were Jessica Aiona, Bonneville Power Administration; Mike Bailey, Energy Trust of Oregon; Christian Douglass, Northwest Power and Conservation Council; Debbie Driscoll, NEEA; Harvey Mathews, NEEA; Elaine Miller, NEEA; and Kenji Spielman, Energy Trust of Oregon.

“It’s an honor to be a part of the team and play a role in this project,” said Lienhard, chief energy efficiency engineer at Avista. “I’m excited about how this new tool can be used to build programs that can help our customers save money.”

#### Submit an event

Tell us about events, meetings and awards in Union and Wallowa counties. Service clubs, support groups and other nonprofit organizations are encouraged to notify us of regular meeting times. Email [news@lagrandeobserver.com](mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com) or fax a letter to 541-963-7804 and include the event name, date, time, location, cost and contact information.

# ‘Shop local’ movement drives sales of American-made yarn

By Shireen Korkzan  
The Associated Press

It began when Debbie McDermott allowed her daughter Jamie to raise two sheep for a 4-H project. Eventually, her 165-year-old farm was transformed into a successful, family-run, custom fiber processing mill.

McDermott’s Stonehedge Fiber Mill, which opened in 1999 in East Jordan, Michigan, now produces more than 700 pounds of yarn monthly for customers in 38 states and Canada. It produces an additional 15,000 pounds monthly for its personal lines of yarn, including Shepherd’s Wool, which is milled and dyed in-house before it’s shipped

and sold in about 300 shops.

“I really think the appeal is our yarn’s made in the U.S., and people are more and more going toward U.S.-made products as a support for U.S. companies,” McDermott said.

Most garments worn in the United States in the first half of the 20th century were American-made, but the decline of the American textile industry began after World War II, according to knitting and wool industries expert Clara Parkes. She’s a member of the American Sheep Industry — an industry trade group — and author of several books on knitting.

In recent years, how-



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There’s been a rise in American-made items, including yarn. Some think it could be the environmental risks of microplastics in garments.

ever, there’s been a slow-growing demand for wool yarn that’s completely produced in the United States, from sheep to skein, Parkes said.

One reason, she thinks, could be that consumers are turning back to wool because of the environmental risks of microplastics

in garments made from synthetics like acrylic, nylon and polyester. The microplastics are released into waterways  
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## Idaho lab protects US infrastructure from cyber attacks

By Keith Ridler  
The Associated Press

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho — It’s called the “Dark Side” because the 50 workers there prefer to keep the lights low so they can dim the brightness on their computer screens.

Or maybe it’s because of what they do in cyber research and development.

Questions about exactly what goes on at the heart of one of the United States’ primary cybersecurity facilities at the Idaho National Laboratory aren’t always answered, and photos by outsiders aren’t allowed.

What is shared is that the U.S.

is rushing to catch up with what cybersecurity experts say are threats by hackers to systems that operate energy pipelines, hydroelectric projects, drinking water systems and nuclear power plants across the country. Hackers opening valves, cutting power or manipulating traffic lights, for example, could have serious consequences.

Scott Cramer, who directs the lab’s cybersecurity program, said current efforts mostly involve “bolting on” cybersecurity protections to decades-old infrastructure control systems amid concerns they’ve already been infiltrated by malicious entities

waiting for the opportune time to strike.

“This is no joke — there are vulnerabilities out there,” he said. “We’re pretty much in reaction mode right now.”

The Idaho National Laboratory is mainly known as the nation’s primary lab for nuclear research. But in the past decade, its cybersecurity work has put it on the leading edge there as well, and it’s expanding.

A new 80,000-square-foot (7,400-square-meter) building called the Cybercore Integration Center will hold 20 laboratories and 200 workers. Another 67,000-square-foot

(6,200-square-meter) building called the Collaborative Computing Center will house one of the nation’s most powerful supercomputers. They are expected to be finished next fall at a cost of about \$85 million.

“We’re almost out of space, and we’re hiring like mad,” Cramer said. “So having that (integration center) building in a year is going to be incredible for us.”

The lab’s focus is on what are called critical infrastructure control systems, as opposed to cybersecurity systems intended to protect information, such as banking or personal health

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## Did 2018 usher in a creeping tech dystopia?

By Matt O’Brien  
AP Technology Writer

We may remember 2018 as the year when technology’s dystopian potential became clear, from Facebook’s role enabling the harvesting of our personal data for election interference to a seemingly unending series of revelations about the dark side of Silicon Valley’s connect-everything ethos.

The list is long: High-tech tools for immigration crackdowns. Fears of smartphone addiction. YouTube algorithms that steer youths into extremism. An experiment in gene-edited babies.

Doorbells and concert venues that can pinpoint individual faces and alert police. Repurposing genealogy websites to hunt for crime suspects based on a relative’s DNA. Automated systems that keep tabs of workers’ movements and habits. Electric cars in Shanghai transmitting

their every movement to the government.

It’s been enough to exhaust even the most imaginative sci-fi visionaries.

“It doesn’t so much feel like we’re living in the future now, as that we’re living in a retro-future,” novelist William Gibson wrote this month on Twitter. “A dark, goofy ‘90s retro-future.”

More awaits us in 2019, as surveillance and data-collection efforts ramp up and artificial intelligence systems start sounding more human, reading facial expressions and generating fake video images so realistic that it will be harder to detect malicious distortions of the truth.

But there are also countermeasures afoot in Congress and state government — and even among tech-firm employees who are more active about ensuring their work is put to positive ends.

“Something that was heartening this year was that accom-



“We were just trying to get it to work. But now that it’s in the hands of the general public, there are people who ... want it to work in a way that obviously does harm, or benefits themselves, or disrupts the political system. So we are going to have to deal with that.”

— Internet pioneer Vint Cerf said of his worldwide network of connected computers

panying this parade of scandals was a growing public awareness that there’s an accountability crisis in tech,” said Meredith Whittaker, a co-founder of New York University’s AI Now Institute for studying the social implications of artificial intelligence.

The group has compiled a long list of what made 2018 so ominous, though many are examples of the public simply becoming newly aware of problems that have built up for years. Among the most troubling cases was the revelation in March that political

data-mining firm Cambridge Analytica swept up personal information of millions of Facebook users for the purpose of manipulating national elections.

“It really helped wake up people to the fact that these systems are actually touching the core of our lives and shaping our social institutions,” Whittaker said.

That was on top of other Facebook disasters, including its role in fomenting violence in Myanmar, major data breaches and ongoing concerns about its

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## It’s time to fix Social Security’s tax burden

People on Social Security need a tax break. The rest of us need to make sure they get it — for everyone’s sake.

When Congress made Social Security benefits taxable in 1983, lawmakers didn’t index the tax thresholds to inflation. They “forgot” inflation again when adding a second layer of taxation in 1993.

That means the proportion of recipients who have to pay federal income taxes on their benefits keeps increasing. Initially, only 1 in 10 Social Security recipients had to pay any federal tax. Now,

it’s over half.

Not indexing to inflation is a sneaky way of boosting taxes. Lawmakers can count on growing federal revenue without the politically uncomfortable act of repeatedly voting for those increases.

The taxes are based on combined income, which is a taxpayer’s adjusted gross income, plus

any tax-exempt interest (such as interest on mutual bonds) and half of her Social Security benefit. Based on that:

- Single people with combined income over \$25,000 a year, or couples with over \$32,000 a year, face taxes on up to 50 percent of Social Security benefits.
- Single retirees earning over \$34,000 and couples earning over \$44,000 may pay taxes on up to 85 percent of benefits.

Because of the way Social

Security benefits are taxed, many middle-income retirees face a “tax torpedo,” where their marginal tax rate can more than double. (If you’ll have retirement savings of roughly \$200,000 or more, consider talking to a tax professional or financial planner about how and when to claim Social Security benefits to minimize the tax effects.)

In many cases, we’re punishing people who saved for retirement. That isn’t fair, and it isn’t smart.

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