

Local & State

What's new at the Baker County Library

• 2400 Resort St.

FICTION

- "Wolf Pack," C.J. Box
- "The First Lady," James Patterson
- "Cemetery Road," Greg Iles
- "Malta Exchange," Steve Berry
- "Winter in Paradise," Elin Hilderbrand

NONFICTION

- "Sasquatch: Legend Meets Science," Jeff Meldrum
- "Island of Vice," Richard Zacks
- "Facebook for Dummies," Carolyn Abram
- "The Lost Men," Kelly Tyler-Lewis
- "The Flying Tigers," Sam Kleiner

DVDS

- "Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald" (sci-fi/fantasy)
- "Free Solo" (documentary)
- "Green Book" (drama)
- "Mary Queen of Scots" (drama)
- "Ralph Breaks the Internet" (family)

LIBRARY HOURS

- Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m.-7 p.m.
- Friday, 9 a.m.-6 p.m.
- Saturday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
- Sunday, noon-4 p.m.

Television translator district bill passes Oregon Senate

By Casey Crowley
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A bill endorsed by the Baker County Commission and the Baker City Council and intended to benefit the district that supplies TV signals to some rural areas in Baker and Union counties, passed last week in the Oregon Senate with no opposition.

Senate Bill 394, which permits television translator districts to distribute emergency alerts, operate television channels and more, passed with 25 votes in favor and none opposed in the senate. Five senators weren't present for the vote.

The bill was sponsored by Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, at the request of the Blue Mountain Translator District, which operates in Baker and Union counties.

A second bill, also under consideration in the Legislature, would allow the district to ask Baker City voters whether they want to be annexed into the district.

Although the translator district operates in Baker and Union counties, it doesn't operate in Baker City. Another bill before the Legislature would enable city governments to approve annexation into the district.

The translator district is supporting a third bill, Senate Bill 901, which would allow the district to work with cities, including Baker City, to have a code enforcement officer determine which homes are actually using the district's TV signals, which can be received with an antenna.

Alex McHaddad, the district's executive director, said that although Senate Bill 394 breezed through the Senate, he thinks the two other bills are likely to face more opposition.

He said Senate Bill 901 is the least likely of the trio to become law.

THREAT

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Ash and Baker County Sheriff's deputies searched the area around the sheriff's home but found no bomb.

As part of his guilty plea, Butler admitted to leaving the phone message with the intention to frighten or impede law enforcement, according to a press release from the U.S. Attorney's Office in Portland.

In a press release from the sheriff's office, Ash said he is not deterred from his commitment to duty by the actions of criminals, but that the 2016 threat by Butler was quite

traumatizing for his family.

In January 2011 Butler, then 23 and living in Boise, was sentenced to one year in jail for calling in a bomb threat to Baker High School in December 2009.

Butler pleaded guilty to one count of first-degree disorderly conduct for claiming that bombs had been placed in four rooms at BHS. Baker High School, which at that time also housed kindergartners, was evacuated due to the threat. No bomb was found.

Butler admitted making the phone call from Des Moines, Iowa. He told a Baker City Police officer that he didn't intend to scare anyone.

WATERSHED

Continued from Page 1A

The work focused on the south end of the watershed near Elk Creek, and on some south-facing slopes around Salmon, Marble and Mill creeks.

The council on Wednesday also discussed possibly appointing someone to be responsible for coordinating with the Forest Service on the watershed project.

Councilors hope to have monthly meetings with the agency. They also want to include the Oregon Department of Forestry, as well as owners of private forest land adjacent to or near the watershed, in future meetings.

"We want to hear from you, what are your priorities, what would you like us to focus on," said Travis Mason-Bushman, a public affairs officer for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, who attended Wednesday's work session.

Umatilla Army Depot could be open for new development

By John Notarianni
Oregon Public Broadcasting

HERMISTON — The giant metal lock is nearly rusted shut on bunker A-903 at the Umatilla Chemical Depot in Northeastern Oregon. Once we're able to pry it loose and open the 10-foot tall concrete door, we're walking into a literal time capsule.

Inside the cavernous room, we find boxes and boxes of sealed U.S. Army biscuits, toilet paper, can openers and potable water. One box dates back to January 1964.

A-903 is only one of a thousand identical bunkers sprawling in every direction as far as the eye can see at the depot. The rolling hills of the bunkers can be seen for miles from Interstate 84. The entire site covers nearly 20 square miles; for comparison, that's about the size of the Central Oregon city of Bend.

The depot was built in the ramp-up to World War II. For nearly 50 years, 7 million pounds of deadly chemical weapons such as sarin, mustard gas and VX nerve agent were stored here.

Bill Elfering is a Umatilla County commissioner and member of the Columbia Development Authority, the regional board working with the U.S. military to transfer the depot back to local control. He refers to the endless rows of bunkers as "igloos," a strangely cute name for rooms built to house weapons of war. As we tour the site, Elfering points out how they were built in staggered rows.

"There was a concern that one might set the whole thing off and it would be like a string of firecrackers on the Fourth of July," he said. "All of a sudden it just went 'pop, pop, pop.'"

The staggered design was proven to work in 1944 when one of the igloos did explode, killing six people. At the time, the depot's administrators were only able to tell who had been killed in the blast by having everyone on site clock out after the explosion and then tracking which time cards were left.

"I think the Earth would still be shaking if they were to all go off," Elfering said.

A Time-Consuming Transition

It's been years since weapons were actually stored at the Umatilla Chemical Depot. A 1993 United Nations resolution banned all use and storage of chemical weapons. In 2004, a massive furnace was built on the property, and all of the weapons were incinerated. The depot officially closed in 2012.

The property was supposed to return to local control in 2015, but even today, much of the land remains in the hands of the military.

That could be about to change. After years of negotiations, locals are cautiously optimistic that much of the depot's land will soon be back in local control.

Dr. David Drotzman is the mayor of the nearby town of Hermiston. Hundreds of people from the neighboring community worked at the depot when it was in operation, and a lot of those jobs are gone.

"Were those some good paying jobs? Absolutely," he said. "And have they been replaced

with the same level of jobs? Maybe, maybe not."

He's eager to see new development.

"Everybody's wish list is Costco. 'When can we get a Costco out there?'" he said. "I think any employer that provides an opportunity for good paying — above you know the state average wages."

The plan to redevelop the depot has several parts. The first phase, converting a portion of the land to a National Guard training center is already well underway. Portions of the land will also be designated as a large nature preserve.

But Elfering says the biggest economic boon could come from developing two stretches of industrial land. The depot lies at the intersection of Interstates 84 and 82, giving it great potential as a transit hub.

"You go 185 miles or 180 miles to the west, and you're in Portland," Elfering says. "You go a couple hundred miles to the northwest, you're in Seattle. You go a couple hundred miles to the north-

east, you're in Spokane. If you go to the southwest, you're in Boise."

Mayor Drotzman says that type of development could provide a huge boost to his community.

"Most of those people will be either living here or doing business here, buying their groceries or doing their doctor visit with us," he said. "So it will have a significant impact, and we need to be prepared. We want to start that process, and so that's where the frustration comes from."

While the years of delays have been frustrating to many locals, another group has been waiting much longer to return to the site.

Chuck Sams is with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation. The depot runs through his nation's hunting and gathering lands, including the religiously-significant Coyote Coulee. He's eager to see the land return to the tribes so they can begin rehabilitating it.

"There's been wildfires that have went through there," he said. "It's burnt the shrub-

steppe habitat. So there's a lot of cheatgrass and foreign species. We want to reclaim the land and put more natural species in there."

Bill Elfering says the number of stakeholders has made what initially looked like a straightforward process much more cumbersome.

Each group has had its own specific interests at heart: protecting natural areas, preserving sacred lands, providing security for military assets and making sure the economic benefits are evenly distributed. Those competing interests have occasionally led to gridlock. But, Elfering says the coalition is closer than ever to an agreement.

"We need one more piece of paper, maybe two more pieces of paper that say it meets their objectives," he said.

Until then, the 1,000 bunkers at the Umatilla Chemical Depot remain empty — aside from the occasional stash of vintage army supplies.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Rotary Club scholarships available

The Scholarship Committee of the Baker City Rotary Club is accepting applications from qualified students of Baker County and North Powder school districts. The deadline is April 15. For program information and applications, contact Brenda Holly at 541-523-7927 or jetlag4h@hughes.net. Applications are also available at local high schools.

County seeking volunteers

Baker County is seeking volunteers to serve on its Planning Commission and on the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District.

Volunteer forms are at www.bakercounty.org/ commissioners. More information is available by calling the Commission Office at 541-523-8200 or emailing hmartin@bakercounty.org

City planners to meet March 20

The Baker City Planning Commission will meet March 20 at 7 p.m. at City Hall, 1655 First St.

Planners will have a public hearing on a proposal to add 17,168 square feet to the Harvest Church at 3720 Birch St.

Copies of the Harvest Church application are available at the Courthouse, 1995 Third St., and digital versions can be emailed by contacting the planning department at planning@bakercounty.org or 541-523-8219.

Conservation district meetings planned

Baker County soil and water conservation districts have scheduled meetings over the next month. All meetings are open to the public.

- Eagle Valley, March 18 at noon, location to be determined. Call 541-523-7121, extension 100, for details.
- Keating, March 19 at noon at the USDA Service Center, 3990 Midway Drive in Baker City.
- Burnt River, April 2 at 5:30 p.m. at the USDA Service Center, 3990 Midway Drive in Baker City.

Scholarship for agriculture students

The Pendleton Cattle Barons are offering scholarships to students studying agriculture. The program is open to residents of Baker, Union, Wallowa, Grant, Umatilla and Morrow counties. Applications are at www.cattlebarons.net/. Application deadline is April 20.

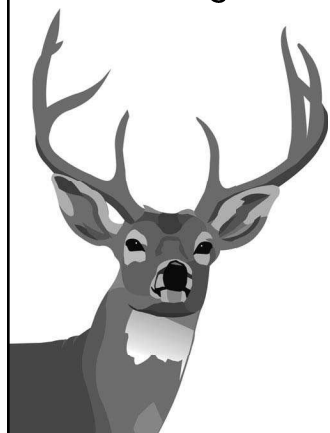
Wildland fire refresher course set

Eastern Oregon Training Group will have the RT-130 Wildland Fire Refresher course on April 13 in Baker City. The course will start at 8 a.m. at the 5J School District Building, 2090 Fourth St. Cost is \$100. All participants should bring gloves for the practice fire shelter deployment.

Registration can be done at oregonfiretraining.com. Pre-registration is requested; the cost will be \$120 at the door. This is a required class for all federal and state contractors. More information is available by calling Laurel Goodrich at 541-403-0907 or Jeff Sherman at 541-519-6213.

We would like to thank the following businesses for their generous donations to our very first Mule Deer Foundation Dinner:

Elkhorn Wood & Leather, Thatcher's Ace Hardware, El Erradero, Sycamore Tree, Haines Steakhouse, O'Reilly Auto Parts, Bearded Dog, Baker NAPA, BiMart, Baker Valley Mobile Tire, Peterson's Chocolate, No. 1911, Sweet Wife Baking, Corner Brick Grill, Ryder Brothers, Eltrym Theater, Paizanos Pizza, Eagle Cap Grill, Baker Liquor Store



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