

Explosion, fire damage potato chip plant in Hermiston

BY ERICK PETERSON, ANDREW CUTLER, BEN LONERGAN, ANTONIO SIERRA AND PHIL WRIGHT

East Oregonian
HERMISTON — Umatilla County Fire District No. 1, Umatilla County Sheriff's Office and other first responders remain on the scene of Shearer's Foods off Highway 207 in Hermiston following an explosion and fire.

"We haven't had a fire like this in about the last decade," Fire Chief Scott Stanton said.

Employees of Shearer's Foods called 911 at 12:51 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 22, according to the sheriff's office reported, and reported a boiler explosion with possible injuries.

Medical and fire units responded, along with law enforcement agencies to assist. Nick Oatley, spokesperson for the fire district, reported the explosion and ensuing fire fully engulfed one building. Stanton said occupants at nearby hotels were evacuated.

Witnesses share their experiences

As the fire raged, a line of cars exited Feedville Road. Authorities ushered the cars away from Shearer's Foods

and the source of the smoke. Then, they blocked the road to anyone wanting to enter. Some Shearer's employees, though, left by foot to meet nearby friends and loved ones for rides.

Nick Perez, forklift operator, was one of the walkers. As he left to meet a friend, he spoke of the incident that engulfed his workplace in fire.

He said he was in a different part of the building from the explosion.

"It felt like a hurricane or a tornado came throughout the whole warehouse," he said. "It blew dust everywhere. I saw the roof collapse. There was a bunch of fire. That's when everyone evacuated."

When he left the building, he could not retrieve his car keys, which is why he said he was meeting a friend, Cory Harris, to give him a lift.

Harris, a warehouse worker at Shearer's, said he had the day off of work and was glad for that. He had seen fires there before, he said, but nothing like this. He expressed concern for the people who were there and worry about what this meant for his employment.

Art Moreno was on the side of the road and said he



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Fire departments from throughout the area combat a blaze Tuesday afternoon, Feb. 22, 2022, at Shearer's Foods off Highway 207 in Hermiston. The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office reported an explosion in a boiler room set off the blaze.

was waiting on his wife, Jonnie Moreno, who was on her way.

When she arrived, he met her with a hug and a tarp to warm her.

"I'm all right. I'm all right," she said to her husband. Then she shared a few words about her ordeal.

"Most of the girls were terrified," she said.

As for herself, she said she was not frightened but worried for other workers. Some of her co-workers, she said, were affected by smoke and minor injuries.

the Space Age truck stop near Interstate 84 Exit 182 due to the emergency.

Umatilla County Fire District No. 1 is the primary fire agency for the fire and has set up a command post, according to a press release from the sheriff's office. The fire district also requested mutual aid from surrounding fire agencies. The initial information is the cause of the explosion and fire is a natural gas portable boiler.

The sheriff's office urged the public to avoid the area.

Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith said the fire at the company could have a significant impact on the community.

"There are a lot of people who work there," he said. "It will be a big challenge for us."

Hermiston Mayor Dave Drotzmann called the explosion and resulting fire tragic for the Shearers family and the Hermiston community.

"We hope for the employees that have been injured a speedy recovery," he said. "For the families that are affected, Hermiston will work with our partners at the county, state and federal levels to bring resources as soon as possible to support them as they work through this tragedy."

Not the first emergency Shearer's

The Ohio-based Shearer's Foods bought snack food manufacturer Snack Alliance in 2010 and took over its Highway 207 facility.

After securing a tax break from the city of Hermiston's enterprise zone, Shearer's made several expansions to its facility from 2010 to 2014, developments valued at more than \$30 million. Shearer's did not immediately return questions about the size of its presence in Hermiston, but a Shearer's manager told the East Oregonian in 2013 that the plant employed 325 people. In 2014, the potato processor announced it was hiring an additional 114 employees.

This is not the first major emergency at Shearer's. In late September, Umatilla County Fire District No. 1 dispatched a hazardous materials team and other emergency responders to a chemical leak at the Shearer's plant. Three people were transported to Good Shepherd while another two refused transport. Once authorities were able to identify the source of the leak and stop it, Shearer's was allowed to re-open the following day.

Democrats dangle \$100 million for GOP rural districts

BY DIRK VANDERHART

Oregon Public Broadcasting
SALEM — As Oregon lawmakers begin the final two weeks of this year's legislative session, they are about to unveil their approach to a unique puzzle: How to spend more than \$2.5 billion in surging revenue unplanned for when they passed the state budget last year.

The answer involves hundreds of millions for housing, climate change, mental health, job training and other pressing needs. But majority Democrats are also rolling the dice on an eye-popping olive branch: They are going to give minority

Republicans \$100 million to spend essentially as they see fit in their rural Oregon districts.

In a move with little precedent, House Speaker Dan Rayfield, D-Corvallis, alerted Republican leaders last week that Democrats were prepared to reserve a notable slice of the state's budgetary bounty for GOP priorities. Part politics and part pragmatism, the offer would give the minority party far more influence over which projects make it through the crucible of the budgeting process.

"I've seen both parties be pretty contentious with one another," said state Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, one of four

lawmakers tasked with creating a plan for the money. "I believe the speaker of the House is saying, 'Let's see if there's a better approach to public policy, one where we can all communicate together.' It's refreshing."

There's also no guarantee the move will save the fierce partisanship that has ruled in Salem in recent sessions. Smith said his fellow Republicans were at first opposed to the spending proposal, fearing it was a Democratic ploy. The party is still furious that former House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, broke a deal to grant Republicans an equal say on new congressional maps last year.

"Initially, there was a perception that this was some sort of buy off," Smith said of a meeting last week in which House and Senate Republicans discussed the idea. "After initial conversations and once folks had a chance to better understand what this approach was about, I think more folks came along."

In the days since, GOP members and one rural Democrat have whittled down a list of projects most sorely needed in their districts. Smith led that effort with three other lawmakers — Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, Rep. David Gomberg, D-Otis, and Senate Minority Leader Tim Knopp, R-Bend.

The package they have arrived at encompasses dozens of projects stretching from Eastern Oregon to the coast. Smith, for instance, said he would request \$1 million to improve each of the seven fairgrounds located in his northeastern Oregon district. A full list of proposed projects had not been released as of the morning of Feb. 21.

"We're all committed to make sure that rural Oregon has the things it needs to progress," said state Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Portland, one of the state's top budget writers, when asked about the package Monday. "I'll be hon-

est with you. I think we're making investments that are more than \$100 million."

Though atypical, the approach by Rayfield isn't entirely novel. Flush with federal relief money during last year's session, legislative leaders made the decision — controversial in some circles — to grant each lawmaker millions of dollars to spend in their district as they saw fit.

Lawmakers contacted by OPB all made the case that the new package is a sensible investment to help small communities that often lack the resources to tackle big-ticket infrastructure projects.

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BAKER CITY CHRISTIAN CHURCH
Sunday Worship
First Service 8:30 AM
2nd Service & Sunday School 10:00 AM
Jr. High & High School Youth
Tues 6:30 PM
Youth Pastor Silas Moe
675 Hwy 7, Baker City • 541-523-5425

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
9-11 AM - Baker City 1st Ward
10:30 AM-Noon - Baker City 2nd Ward
Noon-2 PM Baker Valley Ward
EVERYONE WELCOME!
Family History Center
Everything Free
Tues & Fri 1-4 PM
Wed & Thurs 10AM-1PM
Wed Evenings 5-8 PM
2625 Hughes Lane, Baker City
541-523-2397

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Daily Masses:
M, T, Th, F 9 AM
Day Chapel in Cathedral
Wed Daily Mass 9 AM
at St. Alphonsus Chapel
Sat 8 AM at Day Chapel
Baker City Saturday Mass 6 pm
Baker City Sunday Mass 9:30 am
St. Therese in Halfway 2 pm Sat
St. Anthony's in North Powder
11:30 Sun
541-523-4521
Corner of First & Church, Baker City

Harvest Church
WORSHIP GATHERING
10:00 AM
Harvest Cafe Open
9:00 AM - 9:50 AM
3720 Birch St, Baker City
541-523-4233
www.BakerCityHarvest.org

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
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11:00 AM
www.bakercityda.com
17th & Pocahontas, Baker City
541-523-4913

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10:30 AM
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firstpresbaker.blogspot.com

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Third & Broadway
541-523-3891
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9 a.m. Sunday School
10 a.m. Worship Service
Thursdays
5-6 p.m.
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Celebrate Recovery
bakercalvarybaptist.com

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE CHURCH
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www.ChristianScience.com
3rd & Washington, Baker City
541-523-5911

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Sunday School 10 AM
Morning Worship 11 AM
Evening Worship 6 PM
Discovery Kids Worship
6:30 PM
3520 Birch St, Baker City
541-523-4332

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Service at 11 am
Live Streaming on Facebook
1734 Third Street, Baker City
541-523-3922
firstlutheranbakercity@gmail.com

Baker City Church of the Nazarene
Sunday Worship 9:45am
Sunday School 8:30am
Coffee is 9:15 AM - 9:45 AM
Pastor Troy Teeter
1250 Hughes Lane, Baker City
(Corner of Cedar & Hughes)
541-523-3533
www.bakernaz.com

St. Stephen's Episcopal
Services at 9 AM
1st & 3rd Sundays, Holy Eucharist
2nd & 4th Sundays, Morning Prayer
5th Sunday, Morning Prayer
2177 First Street • Baker City
Entrance on 1st Street
Corner Church & First Streets
541-523-4812

Baker & Haines United Methodist Churches
Baker UMC, 1919 2nd St, at 11am
Haines UMC, 814 Robert St, at 9am
or join us on Zoom at 11am
https://greaterwv.zoom.us/j/5415234201
Meeting ID: 541 523 4201
669 900 6833 US (San Jose) (Audio only)
or follow us on Facebook
Pastor Michele Holloway

ST. BRIGID'S IN THE PINES COMMUNITY CHURCH
11:30 a.m. Services
1st & 3rd Sunday
Holy Eucharist
East Auburn Street, Sumpter
541-523-4812
A Mission of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Baker City

AGAPE CHRISTIAN CENTER
Sunday Services
10:00 AM & 6:30 PM
South Highway 7,
Baker City
541-523-6586

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