

Drone testing range is buzzing

Despite activity, Pendleton still waiting economic boom

By KRISTIAN FODEN-VENCIL
Oregon Public Broadcasting

PENDLETON — Ten years ago, Pendleton's Eastern Oregon Regional Airport was an albatross: an expensive relic left over from World War II.

"It was a pretty sleepy little regional airport, to be honest," Pendleton Mayor John Turner said.

Back then, the airport had only 20 employees, and there wasn't enough economic activity to justify a regular flight to Portland.

But the Pendleton airport did have two massive runways that date back to World War II and carry a storied history. This is where the so-called Doolittle Raiders — the pilots who first bombed Tokyo, taking off from the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Hornet in the middle of the Pacific Ocean — trained for that mission.

In 2012, Pendleton hired a new economic development director, Steve Chrisman, and one of his top priorities was figuring out a better use for the airport. On his first tour, he met Oregon National Guard Lt. Col. Alan Gronewald, who was overseeing a drone test.

Chrisman said the officer had a simple message for him: "He said, 'Listen I don't want to tell you your job, Mr. Economic Development Guy, but this world is coming fast.'"

Gronewald was talking about drones. So in partnership with the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, the city applied to become a federally approved drone test range. It was a long shot; Oregon had neither a long history of working with drones nor as much money as others states. But in 2013 the Pendleton Unmanned Aircraft System Range was granted federal permission.

A popular site

The concept of a federal commercial drone testing range was relatively new, so initially, Pendleton officials weren't entirely sure how to proceed. Gradually, city leaders collected enough state and city money to build new hangars so visiting drone companies could test and tweak their vehicles in private.

Then, using an Oregon Innovation Council grant, the airport bought laser cutters, 3D printers and high-tech lathes, so companies could remake broken drone parts on-site and quickly resume testing.

The airport bought several mobile air-command centers too, so companies could drive out into the countryside to fly their drones over varied terrains, like canyons, forests, pastures and rivers. Most recently, with the help of a \$3 million federal grant, the airport built a 100-acre industrial park with lightning-fast internet.

The result of all this work and spending:

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Isabella Crowley/The Observer

Carrie Lowe, community science coordinator, helps students measure the water pH levels while attending the Qaqqápnim Wéele/Grande Ronde Community Science Project on Wednesday, June 1, 2022, at Bird Track Springs.

Going outdoors for SCIENCE

Grande Ronde Community Science Project makes an impact on local students

By ISABELLA CROWLEY
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Local high school students traded their science classroom and textbooks for the great outdoors and waders.

Thirty juniors from La Grande High School boarded buses Wednesday, June 1, for Bird Track Springs Campground, about 14 miles from La Grande, to participate in the Qaqqápnim Wéele/Grande Ronde Community Science Project. The students, who were taking Brandon Galvez's environmental science class, waded into the water for a hands-on learning experience.

"Kids deserve the opportunity to learn outside, and we're in the perfect place for that," said Carrie Lowe,



Isabella Crowley/The Observer

Students learn about riparian zone vegetation while attending the Qaqqápnim Wéele/Grande Ronde Community Science Project on Wednesday, June 1, 2022, at Bird Track Springs.

MORE INFORMATION

To learn more or get involved in the Qaqqápnim Wéele/Grande Ronde Community Science Project, email communityscience@grmw.org.

community science coordinator contracted through the Grande Ronde Model Watershed.

Lowe said the program encourages students to pursue their scientific interests.

"I want kids to know that

no matter what your gifts are, what your passions are, there is a place for you in science," she said.

Throughout the spring a total of 330 students from Union and surrounding counties took part in the community science project, Lowe said. The project aims to build awareness about the importance of the watershed by engaging young people in monitoring projects.

Each group visited a different part of the Grande Ronde watershed — an area of land that channels rain-

fall and snowmelt to creeks, streams and rivers before eventually connecting to outflow points, like reservoirs, bays or an ocean — where they learned at three workstations: water quality, aquatic macroinvertebrates and riparian vegetation.

While working at the water quality station, students measured water temperature, pH level, channel width and stream flow.

At the aquatic macroinvertebrates station, they

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New women's clothing boutique to open in July

Owners Reyna and Craig Moschkau say store will bring more retail options to downtown

By TRISH YERGES
For The Observer

LA GRANDE — New business owners Reyna and Craig Moschkau will be hosting a grand opening on Thursday, July 7, of their new retail women's clothing store, Bout Time Boutique, 109 Depot St., La Grande.

The Moschkau couple moved back to La Grande in 2020 from Gresham and founded Bout Time Boutique LLC last Feb-



Isabella Crowley/The Observer

Craig Moschkau, left, and Reyna Moschkau stand outside their new shop, Bout Time Boutique, in downtown La Grande on Monday, June 6, 2022. The store features women's clothing.

ruary in response to a need they noticed for more retail options in downtown La Grande.

"I serve on the Union

County Chamber board and La Grande's Economic Vitality Committee for Downtown Main Street, and everywhere



Isabella Crowley/The Observer

A selection of clothing at Bout Time Boutique on Monday, June 6, 2022, is ready for the new shop's July 7 grand opening on Depot Street in downtown La Grande.

we go and talk to people they say they want more retail, so we're trying to fill a need for women in Union County and sur-

rounding counties," Craig Moschkau said.

The store will be open Thursdays through Sundays and will carry

clothing inventory for everyday wear for women, including jeans, leggings, sweatshirts and hoodies.

"We're also going to have a lot of stylish, updated clothes, dresses, T-shirts, anything women can wear any day of the week," he added. "We will be inclusive of all sizes so that people coming into the store feel that they can find something they can wear. There will be a limited selection of footwear there too."

Moschkau said the store window display will be changed out frequently so that customers can see a variety of the store's inventory. Customers

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