

EDITORIAL

Sad milestone for city fire department

A service that several generations of Baker City residents have relied on reaches an ignominious end this week.

The Baker City Fire Department will cease operating ambulances.

This sad conclusion was set in motion six months ago, on March 22 when the City Council decided to notify Baker County commissioners that the city intended to discontinue ambulance service on Sept. 30.

Under Oregon law, the county, not the city, is responsible for ensuring there are ambulances on call. In June, commissioners contracted with Metro West, a private ambulance company, to cover Baker City as well as much of the rest of Baker County.

Metro West has been operating ambulances here since early June. The Baker City Fire Department has responded occasionally, when Metro West was already handling other calls. But soon the fire department at 1616 Second St. will be limited to responding to fires, which are much more rare than calls for an ambulance.

Unfortunately, the department's firefighting capacity has been reduced due to the city council's decision.

Without ambulance runs — and the approximately \$1 million in yearly revenue they bring in — the fire department's staffing was trimmed from 16.25 full-time equivalents to 10.5 for the fiscal year that started July 1.

City Manager Jonathan Cannon told councilors at their March 22 meeting, and reiterated at subsequent meetings, that the city can't afford to continue running ambulances because the cost was rising faster than revenue.

The city faces financial challenges in operating ambulances to be sure.

Most of the patients transported in ambulances locally are covered by Medicare or Medicaid, and those federal program reimburse the city for a relatively small fraction of what it bills, often around 20%.

But the city's budget situation isn't so dire that ending ambulance service this fiscal year was necessary. The city could have continued the service for at least this year without cutting back on other important public services.

Keeping the fire department intact for another year would have given city and county officials a chance to pursue other revenue sources, the most plausible being to ask voters, both inside the city and in parts of the county where Baker City (and now Metro West) ambulances operate, to form a taxing district.

County commissioners were interested in that idea, but it's a moot point now, at least in terms of preserving the fire department as the dual-role agency it has been for so many decades.

We can remain assured that if we have an emergency, an ambulance with trained personnel will rush to our aid.

But the city's ability to handle the full range of dangerous situations, including fires, is not as robust as we've come to expect.

That we've lost some of that capacity unnecessarily only makes this week's milestone all the more bitter.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Joe Biden: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1111; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Baker City office, 1705 Main St., Suite 504, 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz (2nd District): D.C. office: 1239 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515; 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. Medford office: 14 N. Central Avenue Suite 112, Medford, OR 97505; Phone: 541-776-4646; fax: 541-779-0204; Ontario office: 2430 S.W. Fourth Ave., No. 2, Ontario, OR 97914; Phone: 541-709-2040. bentz.house.gov.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read: oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us; 350 Winter St. NE, Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4000.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum: Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

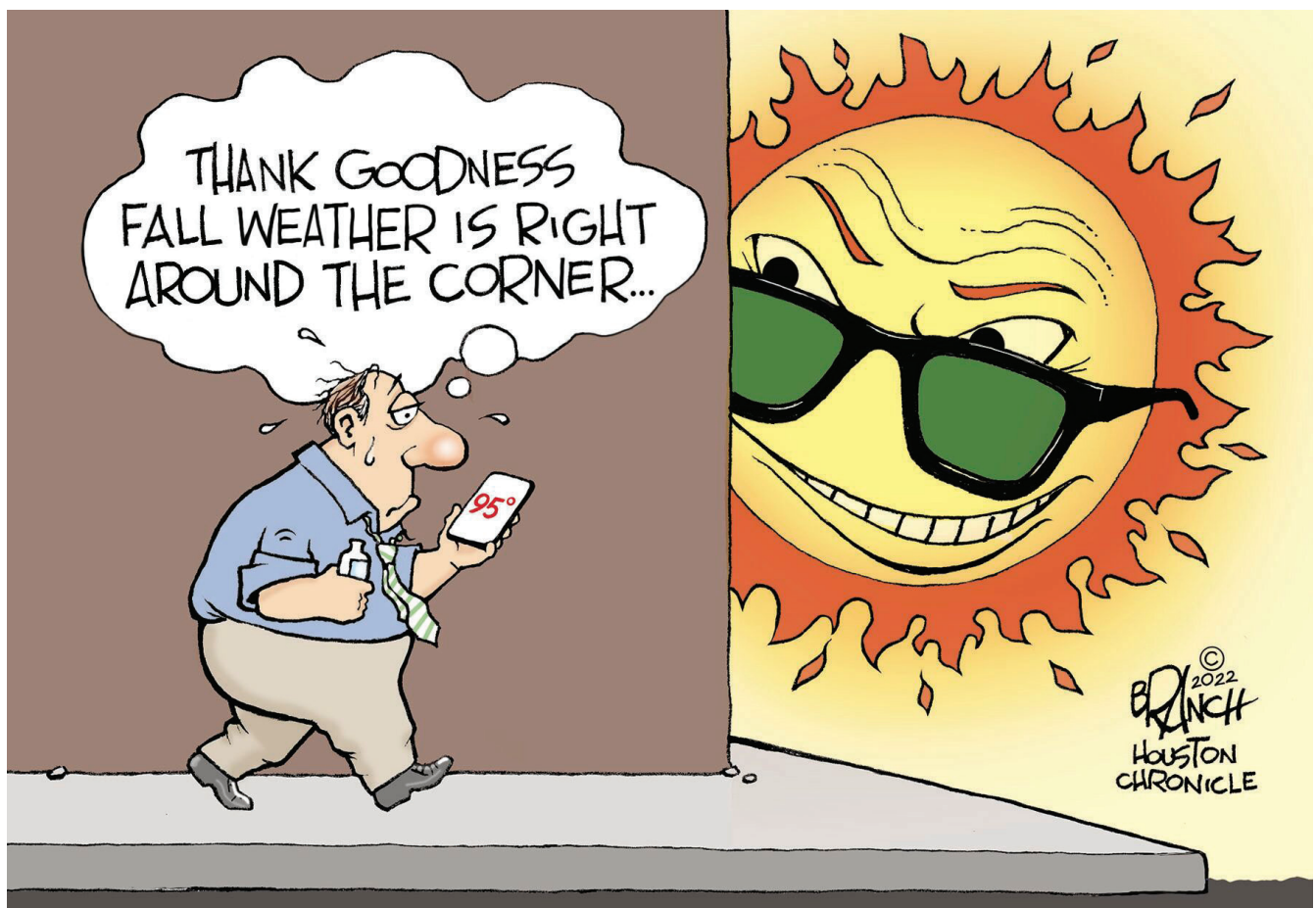
Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

State Sen. Lynn Findley (R-Ontario): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-403, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. Email: Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov

State Rep. Mark Owens (R-Crane): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: Rep.MarkOwens@oregonlegislature.gov

Baker City Hall: 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Councilors Jason Spriet, Kerry McQuisten, Shane Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Kenyon Damschen, Johnny Waggoner Sr. and Dean Guyer.

Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Jonathan Cannon, city manager; Ty Duby, police chief; Sean Lee, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.



YOUR VIEWS

Garrick the best choice for county commission chair

I have personally spent many hours watching Bill Harvey pray every day and research every decision and vote he makes while serving as your Baker County Commission Chair.

Dan Garrick used this last year spending time with Commissioners Bill Harvey, Mark Bennett and Bruce Nichols, learning the job and what you as Baker County citizens require for the position.

Dan asks many questions and is seen at several County meetings as he gathers information in preparation to serve you as your Commission Chair for Baker County.

I see many of the same qualities in Dan as I have seen in Bill. This is a great indication that Baker County will continue to be diligent is serving all of us in a positive direction.

My vote will be for Dan Garrick this November.

Loirie Harvey
Haines

Editor's note: The author is Bill Harvey's wife.

City needs councilors dedicated to serving all citizens

Our founders understood that city government needed to be focused on us, on the needs of all of the citizens of Baker City. Our City Charter specifically states that all city offices must be nonpartisan. There is no room for party politics, the protection and safety of the whole community must always be the focus of the city council.

That makes perfect sense to me. If you are willing to serve your neighbor, you should serve all your neighbors. There is no room, nor need, in a small city for

anything other than what is best for us all.

That doesn't mean that everyone gets what they want, but it does create a clear and honorable goal for the council. Working to serve the citizens of Baker City is an admirable quest. We are all in the same small boat and the council and the city administration are the oars and the rudder.

The past two years have been difficult for us all.

In addition to the challenges and chaos that the pandemic put upon us, our council has not served us well. I want to be pragmatic and positive, but at the same time, I feel no need to gloss over the problems. In fact, I think it's important to talk about all of this and to remind ourselves that we can do better and that we deserve, and should therefore demand, better from our elected leaders.

There is no room for disrespect from any member of our city council, not for other members of council, for citizens, or for other public servants — past or present in their participation. Our city council must be leaders in the community, accessible to the public, not beholden to any party agenda nor hiding behind some perceived privilege.

They must be respectable.

This council has allowed a mayor, who has no greater power than any single member of the council, to bully other council members, demean past public servants, and to severely limit public participation in our city governance. The mayor is chosen by council to chair the meetings and is tasked with preserving order. The mayor has no veto power and should encourage discussion, not dictate opinions, and should demand respectful conduct from other members.

The next council has an obligation to change that course.

We must elect representatives that

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

• We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.

• The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters.

• Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.

• The writer must include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.

• Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

Mail: To the Editor, Baker City Herald, P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814

Email: news@bakercityherald.com

love this city and want to work to make it better for us all. We do not need anyone looking to launch a political career months after taking a vow to serve. We do not need anyone with an agenda beyond serving this community for the length of the term they are elected to.

We need city councilors who are willing to support all of the work that has been accomplished before, and to build upon that good work. We need city councilors who are willing to study issues, understand process, support volunteer advisory boards and have the time and energy to conduct the business of the city with some level of bootstrap grace and humility.

We need councilors dedicated to resetting the standard, and the tone, of what is expected from a public servant. I believe there are some current members of the council that want this as well and as a candidate for the Baker City Council, I am committed to doing just that.

Beverly Calder
Baker City

COLUMN

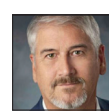
It's an exciting time at Blue Mountain Community College

The collective exhale we all heard Sunday morning, Sept. 18 as horse trailers, RVs and vendors headed out of town officially signaled the completion of the 112th Pendleton Round-Up. A tip of the hat to countless volunteers and the entire Round-Up board for another wonderful event. Round-Up is truly an Eastern Oregon classic!

While another successful Round-Up is now in the rearview mirror, activity is increasing here at Blue Mountain Community College. Last week we welcomed faculty back to campus on Monday, Sept. 19 with the first in-person preservice event in several years. Tuesday, Sept. 20, BMCC staff and faculty greeted students with our signature event: Welcome to the Pack!

Welcome to the Pack helps students navigate their way through all those first jitters; finding the building where their classes are to be held, clearing registrations, learning all the ways they are supported through advising, tutoring, financial aid, scholarships, club and athletic activities and more. My thanks to all who worked so diligently to make this event a grand success.

On the topic of success, BMCC is moving forward with several successes in our quest to continuously improve the way we serve students and our communities. We recently held a splicing academy in conjunction with Amazon Web Services (AWS). This was the second such training this year, the first being held in Hermiston in May 2022. This most recent saw 28 students dig in over two days to complete their certifications. These type of industry recognized certifications are exceptionally sought after in today's tech workplace. This is where we see a very bright future for students who choose these types of courses and for BMCC as we work to fulfill our role as a major provider of work-



J. Mark Browning

force training in the region.

Another area where BMCC is excelling is with our nursing program. Each and every one of this spring's registered nursing graduates not only had a job offer before they walked across the stage, but all 13 of them stayed right here in Northeastern Oregon to live and work in one of our many high-quality health care facilities. This happens because of exceptional instruction from our nursing faculty, rigorous and relevant hands-on clinical training in partnership with local hospitals and clinics and the support of many, including those students' family and friends who do so much to keep households running, families tended to and more so that these nurses excel. BMCC nurses this last year passed the licensure exam (NCLEX) with an astonishing 85% rate on the first attempt, and the two who did not, passed it on the second. When you and I need health care, we are in good hands thanks to these nurses!

Bright futures are in store for our students in the UAS Professional Pilot program. Pendleton is such a unique area for drone work and training. Companies from all over the world are taking advantage and BMCC students are positioned for successful careers. Two different certificates are available right here locally. The first certificate is called UAS Professional Pilot and the second is called Flight Lab. The first certificate trains students on mission planning via computer simulation using an advanced Flight Management System called Piccolo. Our partners, Volatus Group, had to receive special per-

mission to offer training on Piccolo from the developer, Collins Aerospace. So, outside of the military, we are part of a select group that can offer training on that system. Students also learn everything they need to know to pass the exam to earn their Part 107 Certification.

Flight Lab is a continuation of the UAS Professional Pilot Certificate where students get hands-on experience using Piccolo and other systems and fly various drone platforms, including multi-rotor and fixed-wing VTOL.

Additionally, state grant monies have been secured and committed to help address the critical shortage of commercial truck drivers through a CDL training program that will be mobile. Yes, the training can and will come to you! The Future Ready Oregon program passed by the Legislature and signed into law by Governor Brown will help us with the equipment and start-up costs. Addressing critical needs for our local agricultural producers, processors and industries in need of moving products to and from market through licensed trained drivers is at the core of our mission: "As a comprehensive community college, we are committed to providing responsive and high-quality innovated educational programs and services that promote personal and professional growth to strengthen our communities."

As president of this incredible college, I thank you for your support of our students, our staff and faculty and our mission. Blue Mountain Community College looks forward to our continued partnership throughout this academic year and for years to come.

■ J. Mark Browning is president of Blue Mountain Community College.