

Cost overruns hit reload center

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

NYSSA — Building the Treasure Valley Reload Center to original design specifications would cost almost one-third more than originally estimated, prompting proponents to scale back the project.

The truck-to-train loading facility to be built north of Nyssa would ship onions and other commodities east to major markets. Southeast Oregon and southwest Idaho produce about a quarter of the country's fall storage onions.

The 2017 Legislature

approved a \$26 million ConnectOregon grant from lottery-backed bonds. Legislators this year approved a \$3 million grant, from federal coronavirus recovery funds, to the city of Nyssa, for a water line extension for the reload center and future industrial development.

Greg Smith, Malheur County Economic Development director and officer of the separate Malheur County Development Corp., said the project is about \$9.8 million over the original \$35 million budget. The original plan called for opening nearly 290 acres of industrially zoned

ground for development.

He said an overarching solution is to reduce the budget and features "from a Cadillac to a Chevrolet" including eliminating "unnecessary wants."

Cost overruns include about \$5 million in unexpected necessary excavation to deal with excess groundwater, a price from lone building-construction bidder TCG Construction, Meridian, Idaho, that was about \$2.9 million above expectations, and steel and asphalt costs driven by high inflation.

Smith said construction bidding interest has dropped

due to development in southwest Idaho and high transportation costs. The corporation will solicit new bids.

About \$3 million could be saved by delaying construction of one of the three rail spurs for three years, he said. And \$1 million could be saved by using a septic waste system instead of a lagoon system serving several companies.

Smith said \$2 million could be saved by eliminating all access roads except the one to the reload center. Industrial park roads could be added later as funding becomes available.

Homeless mom clings to hope

By SUZANNE ROIG
The Bulletin



Moon

REDMOND — When sheriff's deputies evicted Tessa Moon from her Redmond home, she told her children they were going camping.

At first it seemed like fun, but two and a half years later, it's anything but.

Being houseless has taken more imagination and hard work than she could ever have imagined.

Getting drinking water and propane for electricity and heat to the campsite requires a half-mile or more walk and a plan on how to carry the heavy tanks across unstable terrain.

She used area rocks and found wire fence material to carve a playground out of sagebrush and hard-packed dirt for her kids to play and ride their bikes.

Throughout it all, Moon has remained hopeful that one day soon her family won't be crammed into a fifth-wheel RV in the sagebrush of a remote area of Redmond.

"We try every day," said Moon, a 36-year-old mother of four. "It's hard to stay clean when you're homeless."

Their family van, which doesn't have a current registration, runs, but only when there's extra money for gas, Moon said. So most days she and her family walk or use the one bicycle they own. Just a week ago she was on her bicycle in Redmond and a motorist hit Moon. Thankfully the bicycle and Moon were OK, just a few scrapes and bruises.

They walk a half-mile — three times a day — to get the children to three different school bus stops.

Their RV home is outfitted with a scrap wood entry attached to keep the cold out. A black mailbox is wedged into the rungs of a ladder at the entrance. Does she get mail there? A bouquet of fake flowers greets visitors.

"It's pretty small in there," Moon said, pointing to the dark interior of the RV. "It's a tight squeeze for us. But luckily

someone gave it to us. Some people here (in Central Oregon) have had it hard."

It's not the life she imagined for her children. It's not the life she imagined for herself growing up in Tumalo.

The past two years have been harder than she ever anticipated. There have been times when she's had to humble herself for diapers or food. She's stood on street corners or in parking lots with a cardboard sign asking for help. One time, a woman yelled at her to get a job. Another time, a woman handed her \$200 to buy Christmas presents.

Moon does what she can to make the site homey. On Easter, she hid plastic eggs filled with candy for the children. And sometimes the children spend the weekend with her mother, who lives in Central Oregon.

"Anyone can become homeless," Moon said. "Don't judge me."

The path to homelessness for Moon was paved with nearly three years of domestic violence that finally ended in divorce. Finalized in May, the court awarded Moon possession of a mobile home in Redmond. That was after more than 30 court hearings all occurring in the middle of the pandemic.

Her divorce took a long time because there were criminal charges against her husband for the domestic violence. Her ex-husband is now serving a jail sentence.

The mobile home that the couple bought several years ago has been sitting vacant since November 2019, when the court prohibited the family from living in the home on Northwest 35th Street in Redmond until the health violation caused by the leaking septic system is fixed, according to court records.

Raw sewage was seeping on the ground and into a neighbor's property, according to court records. The court also posted a lien against the home because of back taxes owed.

BMH gets \$400K equipment grant

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — The Blue Mountain Hospital District has been awarded roughly \$400,000 in federal grant funding to purchase new medical equipment.

"Critical access hospitals like the Blue Mountain Hospital District serve as a lifeline for Oregon's rural communities," USDA Rural Development Oregon State Director Margi Hoffmann said in an April 14 press release.

"Too often rural Oregonians are forced to drive hours for specialized medical care, while rural health care workers

and providers struggle to find funding for basic operations. If an expecting mother no longer needs to travel hundreds of miles for an ultrasound or a grandfather no longer loses crucial days waiting for a cancer screening, that's a win in our books."

The grant funding came through the Emergency Rural Health Care Grant Program, part of the American Rescue Plan Act. The funds were paid out to 93 rural health care organizations and groups across the country.

Joan Sonnenburg, the John Day hospital's director of outpatient and provider services, said the USDA grant has helped

the hospital acquire pieces of equipment it otherwise would not have been able to afford.

According to the press release, the grant helped the hospital purchase equipment that included an ultrasound machine, a portable chest X-ray machine, and a stand-alone auxiliary generator.

Blue Mountain Hospital District CEO Derek Daley said he wished the hospital had had much of this equipment during the omicron and delta variant surges. In any case, he said, the hospital is in a much better position moving forward for both COVID and non-COVID patients.

Showdown looms over BMCC cuts

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian



Browning

PENDELTON — The Blue Mountain Community College Budget Committee has its first public meeting to discuss the plan to cut faculty and programs to meet the college's bottom line.

BMCC Faculty Association President Pete Hernberg said some instructors plan to be at the public meeting Monday, April 25, at the Pendleton campus, but he stayed mum about any addresses or statements they might make to the committee.

BMCC President Mark Browning contends the col-

lege started the 2022-23 budget process with a \$2 million hole. After cutting 39 classified and administrative positions from 2020 through 2022, the college no longer can make cuts to those areas. Now, he told the East Oregonian in a meeting April 19, it's time to "right-size" Blue Mountain, and that means eliminating faculty.

His proposal calls for cutting 10 full-time faculty and several part-time positions in multiple disciplines and elimi-

nating criminal justice, college prep and industrial systems technology programs. Browning said BMCC is top heavy with faculty compared to other Oregon community colleges. BMCC has 47 full-time faculty teaching just more than the equivalent of 1,000 full-time students, he said, while Clatsop Community College has 29 full-time faculty and 800 full-time students and Treasure Valley CC in Ontario has 566 full-time students and 26 faculty.

Hernberg contends Browning is conflating the 35 full-time faculty who teach on campus with those who teach in the two state prisons in Umatilla County. The teach-

ers at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, Pendleton and Two Rivers Correctional Institution, Umatilla, receive separate funding, he said, and those students don't count as part of the college's 1,000 full-time students.

Hernberg teaches math and said he keeps a close watch on funding for the college, so Browning's claim the college is \$2 million short is shocking.

"The revenue is projected to be up \$300,000 from where we were a year ago," Hernberg said.

And some of the cuts in the proposal, he said, are for classes that are full.

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