



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

Dr. Jack Root feeds a tube into a horse's nose. Riley Erickson, right, veterinary assistant, helps.

Vet inspires next generation

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

NEWBERG — In his cramped office inside a horse barn, Dr. Jack Root, owner of Oakhurst Equine Veterinary Services in Newberg, was scratching out a drawing.

His client, Jean Marie Marsh, leaned in, watching the veterinarian sketch a horse's spine. As he drew, Root described to Marsh how he would perform incisions on her horse for a procedure called "kissing spine surgery," intended to correct "kissing," or overlapping, spinal vertebrae.

Root, 68, has performed more than 100 of these surgeries using a technique and surgical tools he invented. Compared to traditional kissing spine surgery, Root's method is gentler and less expensive.

"He is one of the few vets in the nation that has this down," said Marsh.

Root is widely considered to be an innovator in his field, and his work has created ripple effects in farming communities across the Northwest. Root is a farmer, expert horseman and accomplished equine veterinarian whose legacy includes inventing new surgical methods, treating lameness, developing famed genetic lines and training the next generation of large-animal veterinarians.

On the morning the Capital Press visited, Root's schedule was packed: collecting semen from a stallion to ship to Texas; treating a horse with a blocked intestine; checking the health of a day-old foal; and between veterinary tasks, feeding farm animals.

"Ehhh — Monday mornings," he said. He shook his head and chuckled.

Outside veterinary work, Root and his wife, Cookie, run a working farm with cattle and pigs on 147 acres in Newberg that they bought in 1996.

"This is both a veterinary practice and

a working farm. I love that about it," said Cookie Root.

Horses, however, are Jack Root's favorite animal — he has 35 of them. Root even kept two Kentucky Derby winners as studs at Oakhurst: Giacomo, the 2005 winner, and Grindstone, the 1996 winner, who died in March.

Root's love for horses started when he got his first horse at age 6. By age 9, he knew he wanted to be a vet.

He was captivated by race horses since early childhood and got his first Thoroughbred broodmare while an undergraduate at Oregon State University.

Root studied veterinary medicine at Iowa State University, interned with equine veterinarians around the U.S., then returned to Oregon, where he set up a practice in 1979.

Today, Root's passion includes training young large-animal veterinarians.

"There are fewer and fewer people doing large-animal practice," he said.

Root has seven veterinarians on staff at Oakhurst. They help one another and draw from Root's wealth of knowledge.

One of the biggest challenges rural veterinarians face, Root said, is lack of work-life balance. To combat burnout, Root has his veterinarians take turns with emergency shifts.

Root said he knows that's not possible for everyone, but he encourages even solo vets in rural regions to connect with other nearby vets and form partnerships, covering each other's emergency shifts.

Root told the Capital Press that he has a neurological autoimmune disease that almost took his life at one point, but he survived and was able to continue teaching young veterinarians.

"I think God sent me back from the edge of death to make these young people into vets, so that's what I'm trying to do," he said.

BMCC to get Amazon money

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

HEPPNER — Blue Mountain Community College's share of an \$11 million Amazon gift should go forward as originally planned, following a meeting of the Morrow County Board of Commissioners.

Commissioners reached the decision in a meeting Wednesday, May 25, voting 3-0 for the college to receive the \$627,517 share.

"We appreciate your efforts," Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay said to BMCC President Mark Browning after the vote, as she expressed her satisfaction with his work and the college's place in the region.

Browning was present at the meeting.

Suspending the funds

In a meeting April 20, Morrow County commissioners decided 2-1 to not give the money to Blue Mountain, holding off until they were comfortable that the money to the Pendleton-based community college would benefit Morrow County.

Lindsay, in particular, said she wanted to know the money would help fund the Workforce Training Center in Boardman.

Commissioner Jim Doherty agreed with Lindsay, voting with her to suspend the funds until further meetings with the college.

Meanwhile, Commissioner Don Russell called the suspension an overreach, as he said BMCC had its own board of directors, which was charged to oversee funds and spend money where it "benefits the most people." Being a board comprised of elected members, the college board should be allowed to make these decisions without interference, Russell said at the time. As such, he voted against the other two commissioners.

Crucial coffee meeting

In the time between the two board of commissioner meetings, Lindsay said "deeper conversations" took place between her, Blue Mountain and local industry.

One meeting in particular was especially productive. Lindsay said she and Browning met together over coffee, and she gained a great appreciation for the "big tasks" at the college.

And in that meeting, she said, Browning expressed his commitment to Morrow County.

Another meeting followed, taking place a week before the recent commissioner board meeting. At that time, she said, she business leaders and representatives from Blue Mountain discussed what was and wasn't working at the college since the start of the pandemic.

At the May 25 board meeting, Browning echoed

Lindsay's impression of recent meetings, calling them "very productive."

"There is an opportunity to move some things forward here, specifically for Morrow County and the industries that serve Morrow County," Browning said.

In addition, he expressed his appreciation, saying "thank you," specifically to Lindsay, whom he called "gracious."

Commissioners show support

In being part of the unanimous vote to give BMCC its due, Russell voiced his stance.

"I felt like we should have given the funds to Blue Mountain all the time," he said.

He added he was happy to see this happening now along with a "change in thought process."

Lindsay answered that this was not a "change in thought process," but a conversation that parties were glad to have.

With his vote, Doherty, who serves as the board's chair, spoke of someone at BMCC who affected him.

The commissioner said he talked with Paul Davis, who for 30 years taught animal science courses at BMCC and is a strong supporter of the college. Doherty said has spoken of his support for the college in the past and he expressed happiness at being able to support it now.

'It's an exciting time'

Leaving the meeting, Browning stated the school is "on the right track, and that positivity continued the following day.

"I'm super appreciative of the commissioners, especially Commissioner Lindsay, to continue talking and listening, and working with us to find some solutions that really can help move our efforts in Morrow County forward," he said.

Browning added there is a need to train staffs from Boardman-area employers. Such work can be done at BMCC's Workforce Development Center in Boardman, he said, and he committed to doing more of that going forward.

"It's an exciting time not only for Morrow County but for Blue Mountain Community College," he said, "and we're very grateful."

The college also remains in the midst of a serious dispute between Browning and the Blue Mountain Faculty Association over his proposal to slash teaching jobs and programs. Browning contends the cuts are necessary to close a \$2 million budget gap the college faces in the upcoming 2022-23 budget. The faculty association claims Browning is running a snow job and there is no need to slash instruction.

The full college board of education meets again to consider the budget proposal on June 1.



Browning



Doherty



Russell



Lindsay

Bend student veteran designs app to help prevent veteran suicides

By BRYCE DOLE
The Bulletin

BEND — Clay Webster, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, sat in his truck outside the Bend Municipal Airport on March 10, reading through the Facebook post that began: "FINAL CRY FOR HELP."

The 23-year-old student veteran at Central Oregon Community College scrolled with growing sadness as he took in the story of yet another veteran at the brink of suicide. The post, written by Steven Osborne, a 32-year-old Marine Corps veteran who

served four years in Afghanistan, described the "internal pain, sorrow and depression" that looms over many veterans post-combat.

The post read: "I hope now with this letter, it will send a message to the (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs). And not just another forgotten letter that the VA hides in its closet full of dead souls from those who served proudly but came home broken like me, asking for help but had the door slammed in their face ... They pushed me to this level."

Webster had never met Osborne before he died by suicide that day. But to him, this was

NEED HELP?

To get help, call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 or text 838255.

a story that was all too familiar. In 2016, his high school friend Grant Hodge had died by suicide while also serving as a radio operator in the Marines. "At the time, it seemed like a freak accident, but as you go through enlistment, you see that it happened more and more to different people in different areas," he said.

Webster wanted to find a solution. His hint came in the comments below Osborne's Facebook post, which veterans had filled with their names and phone numbers, in case another veteran needed someone to talk to. Webster, however, knew someone in the throes of crisis would need a quicker, easier way to seek help and likely wouldn't think to log on to social media.

That's how Webster got the idea of an app he is building for



Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin

Clay Webster, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, wears a bracelet in memory of a friend and fellow veteran who took his own life.

veterans needing help while contemplating suicide. The free app, called LifeLine Find, allows veterans to type in their ZIP code and search for other veterans in their area who can counsel them in a time of need, providing a path past the red tape that often impedes the process of getting help.

"The whole idea is to get the

story out there that this is something that could have been prevented," he said. "It's a story that is all too common."

The app, Webster said, will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, which Webster stresses is essential because too often mental health crises spurred by trauma occur outside the normal working hours that mental health facilities are open.

He said veterans will even be able to use a filter to find people of certain branches of the armed forces. He plans to launch the app next month, he said.

Webster is quick to describe the statistics behind what he sees as a stigmatized problem that can lead to tragedy among service members. Department of Defense data show suicide rates among active-duty service members increased by more than 40% from 2015 to 2020, as reported by the New York Times.

In all, 30,177 active-duty military personnel and veterans who have served since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorism attacks have died by suicide, according to a Brown University study. That's more than four times as high as service members killed in combat during that time period, the study found.

Webster said he believes mental health issues among service members often go uncaared

for "more than any place."

"The stigma around it is that it's a sign of weakness, which it's not," he said. "But that's the way that a lot of people view it. It's hard for them to seek help because they don't want to be viewed as someone who needs it."

Osborne's death inspired Webster to build this app to help other struggling veterans. He said he received approval from Osborne's fiancée to feature the Marine's story in its advertisements.

When he created a GoFundMe to raise money to build the app, Webster said Osborne's fiancée was the first person to donate. So far, he has raised about \$700, and the rest of the funds for the app Webster is paying out of pocket.

Webster served as a Marine in Japan, Thailand and in South Korea during then-President Donald Trump's summit with Kim Jong Un in 2018. Born and raised in a small town in Southern Illinois, he attends COCC's aviation program with the hopes of being a helicopter pilot.

Webster clarified that, at this point, although the app is intended for veterans, anyone who either needs help or wants to help others can use it.

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