

RETFERFORD:

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laughing. He started out at Treasure Valley Community College, then moved on to Washington State University, where he walked onto the team as a safety in the spring of 1980.

"I went back to John Day thinking I would be the hero of the town," he said. "Nobody there had played Division I since the 1950s."

Instead, he said, the school wouldn't give him permission to use their weight room — the only weight room in town — to train over the summer. So Retherford said he trained for his Pac-10 football debut by sneaking into the high school after dark each night and lifting weights by flashlight.

When fall came around he returned to WSU, ready to play.

After growing up in a town where every pick-up in the school parking lot had a few unsecured guns inside, Retherford thought nothing of leaving his 22 pistol under a seat during fall training.

Some of his teammates weren't so experienced with firearms.

Fellow Cougar Junior Tupuola felt the gun under his seat one day and, not thinking that it might be loaded, pulled the trigger. A bullet tore through Retherford's shoulder and lodged in his neck, paralyzing him.

Retherford returned to John Day as feeling returned to his body, determined to train his numb shoulder to work again even though his parents couldn't afford a physical therapist for him.

"I showed up (at WSU)



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE McDOWELL

Rod Retherford uses his leatherworking skills to make "cowboy art" when he is not making and repairing saddles.

six months later and said, 'Where's my stuff? Let's play ball,' and the coach said, 'Dang you cowboys are tough,'" Retherford said.

He had to try out again, but he walked back onto the team and ended up playing two seasons with the Cougars, mostly as starting cornerback. His junior year he played in

the Holiday Bowl. And he said he and Junior Tupuola remain friends to this day.

After college, wanting to return to his rodeo roots, he said he told Hermiston saddlemaker Richard Bayer that he would order a saddle from him if he could watch him make it and learn how it was done. Bayer agreed,

launching the saddlemaking career Retherford carries on to this day.

He is also in the midst of rekindling a rodeo career. Retherford said he swore at his brother's funeral that he would win a national rodeo championship for him, and he hasn't forgotten that promise. In 2012, at age

55, he got back on a bucking bronco for the first time in 20 years and came in second in the NPRA rodeo in Grant County. He's shooting for a win in the National Senior Pro Rodeo Association championships for cowboys age 50 and over someday.

His workshop, Rod Retherford Saddlery, is

located at Horse Plaza, 34287 Diagonal Road outside Hermiston. His phone number is 541-279-9060. He advertises "quick and professional" repairs, custom saddles and uses his leatherworking skills to cover animal skulls in intricate leather designs and turn them into art.

HIRE:

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icated staff and leadership overseeing our programs and students," Smith said.

Smith said the opt-out primarily impacted special education programs. Jon Mishra, Hermiston's executive director of special programs, said a special education director position was created this year to handle many of the day-to-day challenges. Former Rocky Heights Elementary School principal B.J. Wilson was hired for that position. The district has also hired its own specialists, such as speech language pathologists and psychologists or evaluation specialists.

"The staffing hasn't changed," he said. "It's just who they work for. We were not unhappy with the ESD service. It's just we were able to get to a point where we were able to hire our own folks."

Mishra said filling those positions has proven challenging, however. The district planned to hire six speech specialists, including pathologists and assistants. Thus far, only one speech language pathologist has been hired with another starting later this month. Two speech assistants have also been hired, he said, and one assistant position is currently open after a resignation. To fill the gap, Mishra said the district also uses teletherapy: specialists who work with students online using cameras and microphones.

"Some of the kids were very receptive to that online therapy," Mishra said. "In special programs, everything is about individualizing the education for them, and whatever we need to do to help them out is good with me."

Mishra said the district still collaborates with the ESD on many programs, such as vision, hearing and autism specialists that were funded through state and federal grants.

Mark Mulvihill, superintendent of the InterMountain ESD, said these grants accounted for about 36 percent of the ESD's \$26.2

million in revenue in 2014. About 33 percent of its revenue comes from local education entities and the ESD's entrepreneurial efforts, he said.

Because Hermiston was such a large district, Mulvihill said it accounted for about 22 percent of the ESD's general fund revenue, which was about \$8.2 million in 2014.

However, after subtracting the cost of the services provided directly to Hermiston — about \$930,000 in specialist payroll and \$110,000 in technology costs — Mulvihill said the ESD would see a net loss of about \$763,000 each year. Fortunately, he said, the ESD was able to balance its budget this year without laying off any personnel.

Mulvihill said a variety of factors and actions between 2010 and 2015 contributed to a strong financial position for the ESD, including cost containment, increased state funding, expansion in state contracts, entrepre-

neurial efforts, ESD property sales and 24 full-time clerical and administrative positions that were not filled after previous employees left.

"We have proactively planned to maintain programs with the hope that Hermiston stayed in so we could grow programs," he said. "Now that they didn't, we're back to maintenance mode. It's still too early to tell what the long-term impact will be on the region and the other schools."

The ESD is now comprised of 18 school districts in Umatilla, Morrow, Union and Baker counties. Without Hermiston, he said the ESD lacks the revenue to expand to add new services, such as school resource officers and more technology support, college credit advisors and wellness services.

Mulvihill said balancing equity between so many districts in a consortium can be difficult, and he can understand why a district might want more

control over services provided to students.

"The door is always open if they want to re-

turn," he said. "Despite having a difference of opinion on some of these issues, we both share the

common mission of serving our kids. And at the end of the day, that's what we're both doing."

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