

Herald Business



BRIEF CASE

Boardman chamber sets annual meeting

The annual meeting of the Boardman Chamber of Commerce will include a review of the past year, as well as looking forward to the rest of 2016.

The no-host luncheon event is Wednesday, June 15, at noon at the Port of Morrow, 2 Marine Drive, Boardman. The meal costs \$12 per person.

Those planning to attend are asked to RSVP by Friday, June 10 by calling 541-481-3014.

Boardman bank hosts barbecue

A customer appreciation barbecue is planned at the Boardman branch of the Bank of Eastern Oregon.

Customers are invited to enjoy some food and visit with bank employees during the Friday, June 10, event. The barbecue will be fired up from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at 100 City Center Drive, Boardman.

For more information, call 541-481-3445.

Youth art festival seeks participants

Students in fifth through 12th grade are invited to apply for an art festival on the Oregon coast.

The Oregon Coast Invitational Youth Art Festival is Aug. 27 through Sept. 5 in Toledo. Those who would like to participate must send two photos of original work they created in the past year that shows their creative abilities and imagination. The work of art can be a painting, drawing, sculpture or ceramic work. The application is due Friday, June 10.

Those selected to participate will be notified by June 20. Participants will then have two months to create a "Sculpture in Paper" for the event. The top five places will receive cash gift cards towards art supplies and a \$100 cash prize will be awarded in each grade category.

For more information, contact 503-790-0952 or occt.youthartprograms@gmail.com.

Simmons Insurance takes over RoeMark's building

Simmons Insurance renovating building for new offices, hopes to attract dining establishment

By JADE McDOWELL
Staff Writer

The former RoeMark's Men's and Western Wear building in downtown Hermiston has a new owner.

Simmons Insurance Group purchased the building last week and has already started renovations. The company plans to maintain offices on the eastern half of the building while leasing out three different retail spaces on the side facing Second Street.

Since RoeMark's closed in 2012, the historic brick building down the street from City Hall has become a symbol of Main Street's struggles. Revitalizing downtown was one of the top priorities that Hermiston residents named in a recent survey about livability, and it is rare to hear a conversation about revitalization that doesn't invoke the RoeMark's building.

It's something that Simmons Insurance managing partners and brothers-in-law Justin Simmons and Jacob Neighbors are aware of.

"We care about this community," Simmons said. "We were both raised here and RoeMark's was part of where we went and shopped."

The large space was a good fit for the growing company's needs, but Neighbors said that the partners also recognized the opportunity to help revitalize downtown. Once renovations are finished they hope to welcome a winery, restaurant, bistro or other promising business to the high-visibility space at the corner of Main and Second. They have already heard from some interested parties and said they welcome contact from more.

"We really want something cool for the downtown community to go there," Neighbors said.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Joshua Simmons, left, and Alden Jemmett, with Jerry Simmons Construction, remove wooden paneling from the walls of the RoeMark's building on Wednesday in Hermiston.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

The RoeMark's building has been purchased by the Simmons Insurance Group and renovations have begun to transform the former store into office space.

The Scrubs store, which sells medical professional clothing, already leases space along the Second Street side and will continue to do so from the new owners, and Neighbors said they have a prospective tenant for the space north of Scrubs. He said the second-story renovations on that side of the property will take place in a second phase in two years.

The eastern side of the building (where RoeMark's used to sell western wear) and its mezzanine will be converted into a reception area, office space and conference rooms for Simmons Insurance.

The 6,000-square-foot space will hold administrative offices and commercial

insurance, while Simmons Insurance's home, auto and health offices will remain in their current location down the street at 702 East Main. Once renovations are finished in November or December, the company will vacate the space it currently leases for administrative offices in the 400 block of East Main.

Simmons Insurance is a family-owned company founded in Hermiston in 1974. Today it has offices in 20 locations, but 48 of its approximately 100 employees work in Hermiston. Neighbors said some of those employees have been working from home due to lack of office space, but will now have a desk at the RoeMark's location.

Simmons said the renovations that just got underway will include about \$500,000 worth of new HVAC, lighting, windows, flooring, walls and other updates.

"It will look a lot different," he said.

Despite a complete transformation of the interior, Simmons said the plan was to keep much of the outside brick façade the same, with the exception of replacing the boarded-up window wells with glass panes.

The purchase wasn't officially announced until Wednesday, but Simmons said as word leaked out in the weeks before, people said they were happy that someone local was going to put the building to good use.

"Everyone I talked to is excited because that is a staple of the community," he said.

The two-story section of the building was first built in 1907, and in 1914 it served as Hermiston's public library. Later uses included a ladies' boutique and the offices of the *East Oregonian* from 1968 to 1973, when Roe Gardner purchased the building and renovated it, turning it into RoeMark's Men's and Western Wear.

To inquire about the retail space that will be up for lease, contact Josh Woods at Simmons Insurance at 866-268-3796.



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE McDOWELL

Firefighters put on gear before heading into the Best Western on Highway 395 north of Hermiston, where they put out a small fire in a room Thursday afternoon.

Small fire evacuates Hermiston Best Western

Local fire departments responded Thursday afternoon to a small fire at the Best Western on Highway 395 south of Hermiston.

The damage was limited to smoke damage in one room and possible water damage in adjoining rooms. A customer had been

staying in the room but was not present at the time of the fire.

Guests were evacuated from the building and no one was injured.

Hermiston Fire & Emergency Services, Umatilla Fire Department, Stanfield Fire Department and Hermiston Police Department responded.

Port of Morrow donates land for community projects

Latest project will be a training center for BMCC

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Staff Writer

The Port of Morrow is already Eastern Oregon's industrial engine. It is home to power plants, food processors and an increasing number of data centers along the Columbia River.

But Gary Neal, the port's general manager, says they are focused on more than just big business. Their mission is to improve the quality of life in Boardman and Morrow County, which is why they recently donated land for both the new Boardman Recreation Center and Blue Mountain Community College Workforce Training Center.

BMCC broke ground on its facility — one of three projects approved by last year's \$23 million bond measure — on Wednesday, while construction on the recreation center began on May 12. The buildings will be located next to each other as part of their own campus on Olson Road, just north of the SAGE Center. The port even moved Les Schwab's tire storage and

maintenance shop to the neighboring East Beach Industrial Park to make room for the school and gym.

"We do a lot of things like this for the benefit of our regional partners," Neal said. "If we can help raise support for all their services, it benefits everyone else as well."

Not only did the port gift several acres of land for each project, but Neal said they will also extend sewer and water services onto each lot. The area will have a far different look than the rest of the port, which is a 24/7 hive of manufacturing. Port businesses make everything from french fries and cheese to wood chips and ethanol.

Neal estimates the port accounts for roughly 5,000 jobs, though a whopping 70 percent of workers commute from elsewhere. That, combined with the unique and changing skills required to fill those jobs, has created the demand for local workforce training.

Enter BMCC, which will house its data center and industrial technology programs at the Boardman facility. The building will cost \$4.78 million and open by winter 2017.

"This is a momentous occasion," said college



STAFF PHOTO BY GEORGE PLAVERN

Officials broke ground on BMCC's new Workforce Training Center Wednesday in Boardman. From left: Tony Turner, BMCC Board; Rob Dreier, bond project manager; Ed Taber, BMCC Board; Tyson Furstenberg, McCormack Construction; Chris Brown, BMCC Board; Louis Carlson, bond campaign volunteer; Susan Plass, BMCC Board; Kim Puzey, BMCC Board; Cam Preus, BMCC president; Jerry Healy, Port of Morrow commissioner; and Gary Neal, Port of Morrow executive director.

President Cam Preus at Wednesday's groundbreaking. "We think this is just the right stuff for the city of Boardman and Morrow County."

Sixteen students have already signed up for the school's data center program, which is entering its second year. Neal said the port has two sites where

data centers are up and running and more could be coming "in the not-too-distant future."

By having BMCC at the port, Neal said they can also help local students make connections that lead to good-paying jobs in their own back yard.

"My job is to create jobs for the people I represent,"

he said. "Now, I just have to get them skilled up to be ready to enter those positions."

The BMCC Workforce Training Center will also host the school's early childhood learning classes, allowing those students the opportunity to work directly with the port's Early Learning Center that will be

next door. Neal said that facility should break ground sometime later this year.

Because employees at the port work long hours or odd shifts, Neal said they need a place for their young children to receive care and start their education.

The Early Learning Center will be operated in partnership with Umatilla-Morrow Head Start and IMESD, and paid for through \$1.6 million in state lottery bonds.

Finally, the Boardman Recreation Center is expected to provide another shot in the arm for the community. Nearly 60 percent of voters approved a \$12 million bond to build the facility in 2014, which will include an indoor swimming pool, gym and training center.

Once again, the port stepped up with free land, and even spent \$250,000 to move Les Schwab from that location to a new building on Lewis and Clark Drive. Along with the SAGE Center, Neal said the campus was a good fit and fills a different role than the rest of the port's heavy industry.

"It's about supporting the area we serve," Neal said. "We think we're striving to do that."