

# Walmart offers college tuition help to workers

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
STAFF WRITER

One of Umatilla County's biggest employers is offering college tuition at only \$1 per day for its employees.

Walmart recently announced the incentive, available to all employees who have worked for the company at least 90 days, whether part-time or full-time. Associates who work toward a bachelor's or associate degree in business or supply chain management will pay the equivalent of \$1 per day at select universities, all of which offer the opportunity to complete the degree online while continuing to work.

"For all those parents with seniors just graduating, wondering how they're going to support them: They can support them-

selves," said Josh Burns, manager of the Wal-Mart Distribution Center in Hermiston.

He said they had announced the program at meetings for more than half the shifts at the DC already and it had been greeted with enthusiasm by associates who had been thinking about pursuing a college degree. Burns said a degree in business or supply chain management would offer new opportunities for promotion throughout the company.

"It's insane how many opportunities there are," he said.

For any interested employees, Walmart will pay all costs above financial aid and the \$1 per day contribution from students — including reimbursement for textbooks and other required course supplies.

Students must be enrolled in University of Florida, Brandman University (California) or Bellevue University (Nebraska) but all three universities offer the option to complete the degree online. Associates who leave the company mid-degree will no longer have their education subsidized but will not be required to pay back what they already completed.

The Hermiston Walmart Distribution Center employs about 1,100 people, and hundreds more work for the Hermiston and Pendleton stores. Burns said they will be able to continue to live in Umatilla County while furthering their education online.

"I'm extremely excited about it," he said. "In 12 years with the company I've never seen them doing something so awesome."

# Port of Morrow extends application deadline for manager position

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**  
STAFF WRITER



HH FILE PHOTO

Port of Morrow manager Gary Neal will retire at the end of the year.

The Port of Morrow commissioners decided on Friday to extend the deadline for those wanting to apply for the port's top position, and that there will be some updates to the application.

As longtime port manager Gary Neal sets to retire at the end of the year, the commission has been searching for someone to step into the role. Now, they have decided to extend their application period until the end of June, in the hopes that a more specific application will attract more candidates.

So far, commissioners said, seven people have applied for the job.

At a special meeting Friday morning, commissioners noted that they had not yet reviewed the seven applications they've received, and that those people would still all be considered. The purpose of extending the deadline, said commissioner Rick Stokoe, was to make sure they'd made it available to the best candidate.

"We feel it's important to do our due diligence, and try to find the best applicant for the port, and

the employees of the port," said Stokoe. "This position is extremely vital, not only to Morrow County but to the region."

Commissioners said thus far, the advertisement for the position had only been posted regionally, including in local newspapers, as well as some port organizations in Oregon and Washington. The recruitment process, which has been facilitated by the Special Districts Association of Oregon (SDAO), started May 1.

Stokoe said initially they hoped to have SDAO narrow the applicant pool down to 25, and then the commissioners would narrow it down to five.

Commissioner Joe Taylor said they plan to expand

the search nationwide.

Stokoe said the initial application did not list a salary range, but the updated one will state that the director's salary will be between \$175,000 and \$250,000 annually.

He said the application will also clarify a piece about a "residency requirement." The initial application stated that the person hired would have to live in the port district, which spans all of Morrow County. The updated application will still require the new port director to live in the district, but will specify that the commission will allow a period of time for the person to relocate.

The commission hopes to have a new manager in place by Oct. 1.

# New director turns SBDC around

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
STAFF WRITER



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Carol Frink is the Small Business Development Center director at BMCC and her department was just recognized with the 2018 Oregon SBDC Award for Excellence & Innovation from the United States Small Business Administration.

Upon her return to the Blue Mountain Community College Small Business Development Center in late 2015, Carol Frink knew she had an overhaul on her hands.

One of 19 such offices across Oregon, BMCC's center had fallen to dead last in the various metrics the organization uses to measure success, including its number of clients, the number of new businesses started under its guidance, and the number of jobs created.

In the two years since, Frink has overseen a dramatic turnaround that culminated in two awards — 2018 Oregon SBDC Award for Excellence & Innovation from the U.S. Small Business Administration and the Small Business Development Center Excellence Award for the Pacific Northwest region, which covers Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Alaska.

Whether it's developing a concept, branding, financing, or human resources, the SBDC uses a team of five business advisers to provide free help to small business owners and prospective entrepreneurs.

A 40-year Hermiston resident, Frink didn't start her career as a turnaround artist.

Frink was a banker for more than 12 years, working at the same local branch as it underwent a number of acquisitions, going from Western Heritage Savings and Loan to Benj. Franklin Savings and Loan to Bank of America.

Faced with approving small business loans, Frink said she became well-acquainted with aspiring merchants.

Applicants were seldom short on dreams or ideas, but definitive business plans weren't always part of the equation. Frink's first priority was to make

sure the bank was making a good investment and not offering sound business advice, so she often sent applicants to the SBDC to refine their proposal.

She got to experience the other side of the coin when she was hired as an SBDC business adviser in 2002.

Not only did she help prospective business owners secure financing, but she helped them develop business plans and make sense of the numbers.

Frink said the SBDC business advisers offer a degree of separation, offering objective advice and preparing them for the challenges that will come.

"If you run a marathon, you don't just show up on the day of the race," she said.

Frink had done private business consulting work in the past, and she left the SBDC to start a new consulting business in 2012.

When BMCC recruited her to return to the SBDC as the director, it was not in good condition.

**The turnaround**

Ironically, Frink felt that the SBDC was operating without a plan and direction, and it was reflected by BMCC's center being the lowest contributing mem-

ber organization in the state.

Frink replaced many of the SBDC employees with a fresh set of advisers and they set about drumming up business.

From 2016 to 2017, the center's clients increased from 213 to 265 and its capital infusion — the amount in loans and equity investments its clients made — grew from \$439,119 to \$1 million.

They number of new jobs created and new jobs were basically flat (15 to 16 and 33 to 31, respectively), but Frink said one of the most important statistics was the SBDC's return on investment.

For every state dollar spent, the Oregon SBDC Network created \$2.49 in state revenue while every federal dollar produced \$2.56 in federal revenue.

Also important: SBDC-assisted businesses last longer.

Frink said that only 18 percent of business in Oregon last longer than 18 months. With the help of the SBDC, the percentage jumps to 85 percent.

Cumulatively, Frink said it is now the third best performing center in the state after the SBDCs in Portland and Lane County.

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