



FILE PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS
Construction crews contracted by the Wenaha Group work on the Hawthorne School building in December 2014 in Pendleton. Construction workers and carpenters are among the difficult-to-fill jobs that make up the majority of job vacancies in Eastern Oregon.

Eastern Oregon lacks workers to fill jobs

Low unemployment rates and rapid job growth leave many job vacancies, especially in Eastern Oregon

By BRITTANY NORTON
STAFF WRITER

The good news is Oregon's unemployment numbers are the lowest they've been in recent history. The bad news is now the state lacks enough workers to fill job openings.

According to a report released by the Oregon Employment Department, there were a large number of difficult-to-fill job vacancies in Oregon in 2017. The report says there were 60,700 job vacancies at any given time in 2017, and over half of these were classified as "difficult to fill" — mainly due to lack of applicants. Other reasons employers listed vacancies as difficult to fill included unfavorable working conditions, a lack of experience and a lack of soft skills such as showing up on time.

"Right now there are a lot of job opportunities, and I'm not sure everyone feels that way because they're not looking at the data," said state employment economist Nick Beleiciks.

The Eastern Oregon region, including Umatilla, Morrow, Union, Wallowa, Grant, Baker, Malheur and Harney counties, had 1,424 difficult-to-fill vacancies, which accounts for about 62 percent of all job vacancies in the region. Truck drivers, carpenters, personal care aides, construction laborers, farmworkers and restaur-

ant cooks topped the list of occupations.

The report noted that Oregon "has enjoyed solid job growth and record low unemployment over the past few years," so it is to be expected that some jobs go unoccupied.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Oregon's unemployment rate is 4.1 percent, which is at its lowest point on records dating back to 1976. The report estimates that Oregon's total employment will grow by 12 percent by 2027. The private health care industry will lead the way in job growth with the health care sector creating about one out of every five new jobs in Oregon by 2027. Construction is projected to be the second-fastest growing industry at 17 percent, due to population and economic growth and low vacancy rates across most of the state.

According to Beleiciks, lack of job seekers could hinder the growth of some businesses.

"We hear from construction workers that they'd like to take on more jobs, but they just can't find enough workers in order to commit to those new jobs," he said. "I think construction is a pretty easy example where you can see them not building that next house because the staff that they have is already busy."

Beleiciks says the trend of young adults choosing to pursue bachelor's degrees, and thus forgo trade professions, is a common sentiment he hears, but there is more to the story.

"Another aspect of it is, are there enough training programs to meet the needs of the industry or the young people who do want to get into the trades? Are there enough opportunities for them to learn this skill?" He said there are programs being introduced to provide Oregon residents with skills training that are necessary

qualifications for these jobs.

In early 2018, Gov. Kate Brown launched the Future Ready Oregon initiative that aims to prepare the workforce in two ways. The first is preparing the future workforce, such as kids in school or adults changing careers or just entering the workforce. The second is preparing the current workforce, which encompasses those who are looking for a path to a better job.

According to Shalee Hodges, initiative manager for Future Ready Oregon, the program hopes to expand opportunities for apprenticeships beyond construction trades and into information technology, health care and manufacturing. It also plans on holding industry roundtables with employers from food processing, construction and manufacturing industries to hear what their hiring challenges are.

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Nick Beleiciks,
Employment economist

Hodges said there are many reasons employers have a hard time hiring people, including lack of work-force skills.

"Part of what I think we need to do is focus on people who haven't really worked or haven't been successful in

work," she said. "And supporting them in removing the barriers that they have in their lives and really becoming successful and becoming self-sufficient."

Closer to home, Blue Mountain Community College collaborates with community partners to evaluate workforce gaps. The college has advisory committees that are composed of about 50 percent community partners — such as business leaders — that represent what employers are looking for in workers. There also are apprenticeship and cooperative internship programs that allow students to gain real world experience and learn what skills are important for entering the workforce.

Mary Jeanne Kuhar, vice president of instruction at BMCC, says the college is always looking for new opportunities to provide to students. An example is the data center technician program, which was implemented because there were job openings in Boardman. Related opportunities continued to grow, and local employers said they needed more students, so the college expanded the program.

"I think we're always looking for areas where there's workforce need and then working with the employers, and with our public partners as well, to figure out how we can meet that need," she said.

As for Oregonians who are currently searching for jobs, Beleiciks has some advice:

"One thing that really stood out [in the report] is employers are looking for previous work experience," he said. "I like to point this out when people are searching for a job: to highlight the related work experience — whatever they have that is related to the job — because we know from this data that's one thing employers are really looking for."

New fair coordinator prepares for August event

By BRITTANY NORTON
STAFF WRITER

With opening day just over a month away, the Umatilla County Fair's new coordinator is working to make the second year at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center a success.

Angie McNalley assumed the title of fair coordinator in April, after former fair coordinator Cyndie Driscoll resigned in March.

McNalley was formerly the administrative assistant of the fair, which acts as a support position for the manager, and said she is familiar with many of the responsibilities of being fair coordinator.

"It wasn't the right time in years past when our managers have left for me to accept the promotion," she said. McNalley has a 16-year-old son, and said now that he's older she has more time to devote to the fair.

In addition to promoting McNalley to fair coordinator, the Umatilla County Fair board has implemented a variety of other changes in attempts to improve this year's event. One such change is the flow of the parking lot and the appointment of Luke Dynes as the fair's new parking director.

Although the new grounds at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Cen-

ter had more paved parking spots than years past, many fair-goers left upset over how long it took to exit the lot at the end of the night.

McNalley said the fair board has found insight from the layout of the new fairgrounds to enhance parking, improve security and better serve vendors based on the general flow of foot traffic.

"I'm just excited this year because we've gone through our first year and we've learned so much and gone through a lot of the aches and pains," she said.

She also hopes to improve the carnival compared to years past. The company that supplies the carnival rides, Davis Amusement Cascadia, is under new management and McNalley is optimistic that carnival rides will go more smoothly this year.

"There were issues with the contractors that the carnival was using and it kind of left a bad taste in everybody's mouth and I know that over the years everybody has been asking for more rides, bigger rides and better rides, so that's where we're at this year," she said.

Nonetheless, McNalley said despite the stress of planning the fair, she enjoys seeing it come to fruition: "Watching it all come together. That's the best part."

The Umatilla County Fair is August 7-11.

Umatilla County increases DUI patrols for summer events

HERMISTON HERALD

The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office will increase its efforts to catch impaired drivers in July starting Tuesday.

The sheriff's office announced a grant from the Oregon State Sheriff's Association is covering the cost of extra patrols looking for impaired and distracted drivers during the Fourth of July, the Pendleton Whisky Music Fest on July 13 and 14 and Pendleton Bike Week, July 17-22.

The sheriff's office stated 188 people died in crashes in 2016 involving at least one driver

with a blood alcohol concentration of .08 percent or higher, an increase of 28 percent from 2015. Nearly half of those who died were in a vehicle with at least one driver with a blood alcohol concentration of .15 percent — almost twice the legal limit — or higher.

These statistics do not include persons driving under the influence of drugs, or a combination of drugs and alcohol.

The sheriff's office also asked the public to call 541-966-3651 to report possible drunk drivers or call 911 if there appears to be an emergency.

Mendenhall initiated into honor society

BATON ROUGE, La. — Hailey Mendenhall of Hermiston was recently initiated into the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, the nation's oldest and most selective collegiate honor society, at Eastern Oregon University.

Mendenhall was among approximately

30,000 students, faculty, professional staff and alumni to be initiated into Phi Kappa Phi each year. Membership is by invitation only and requires nomination and approval by a chapter. Only the top 10 percent of seniors and 7.5 percent of juniors are eligible for membership.

POLICE LOG

TUESDAY, JUNE 26

10:35 p.m. — An assault was reported at North First Street, Hermiston.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 27

3:44 p.m. — A suicidal subject was reported on Northeast Misty Drive, Hermiston.
6:46 p.m. — An assault was reported at West Madrona Avenue, Hermiston.
10:54 p.m. — Several people were fist-fighting at North First Street, Hermiston.
11:24 p.m. — Two adult women were fighting in the street on West Sunland Avenue, Hermiston.

THURSDAY, JUNE 28

3:28 p.m. — A caller on East Reeder Drive was in the Hermiston Police Department lobby to speak with an officer regarding another female sending messages about her husband.
6:56 p.m. — A woman was at Goodwill on West

Theater Lane and found a bag with white powder inside it and brought it to Fiesta Foods. She thinks it is a drug and asked an officer to come pick it up.

FRIDAY, JUNE 29

12:03 a.m. — A caller reported shots fired on West Hartley Avenue, Hermiston. Police were unable to locate.
11:11 a.m. — A suicidal subject was reported on East Newport Avenue, Hermiston.
9:21 p.m. — A caller reported shots fired on Southwest 11th Street, Hermiston. Police were unable to locate.

SATURDAY, JUNE 30

4:54 p.m. — A 3-year-old boy was reported missing from West Ridgeway Avenue, Hermiston.
5:28 p.m. — A domestic disturbance was reported at Butte Park in Hermiston.
9:15 p.m. — A suicidal subject was reported on East Newport Avenue, Hermiston.
11:07 p.m. — A woman was reportedly trying to

stab herself on East Newport Avenue, Hermiston.

SUNDAY, JULY 1

12:02 a.m. — A burglary was reported on West Hermiston Avenue, Hermiston.
9:56 a.m. — A domestic disturbance was reported on Southwest 13th Place, Hermiston.
5:08 p.m. — A burglary was reported on East Main Street, Hermiston.
5:36 p.m. — Drug activity was reported on Southwest 13th Place, Hermiston.
5:38 p.m. — Child abuse/neglect was reported on Highway 395, Hermiston.
7:33 p.m. — A prowler was reported on West Hartley Avenue, Hermiston.
8:55 p.m. — A burglary was reported on East Gladys Avenue, Hermiston.
11:39 p.m. — Someone reported a man kicked in a door and violated a restraining order on Southeast Fourth Street, Hermiston.

BIRTH

Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston
JUNE 20, 2018

ARMSTRONG — Laurel Armstrong and R.E. Armstrong of Lexington: twins, Iris Lynn Armstrong (girl) and Rune Ender Armstrong (boy).

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