

Bus companies have difficulty competing for employees

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

It's not easy finding bus drivers.

Aimee Cook, manager of Mid-Columbia Bus Company in Hermiston, said about 15 to 20 percent of their drivers turn over every year, and finding new ones takes active recruitment.

"School bus drivers, the shortage of them, is a nationwide epidemic," she said.

The Umatilla County unemployment rate in May was 5.2 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. But local employers say it can be hard to find employees who can show up on time, drug free and with the right skills for the job. Cook said it is particularly hard to find people interested in a part-time, split-shift job that entails picking up kids early in the morning and dropping them off in the afternoons for three and a half to seven hours a day.

Many of the people willing to work that kind of schedule are retirees, she said, who then decide after a year or two that they're ready to retire completely. Other drivers are young people who then quit after starting a family, or people lured away by plentiful jobs at food pro-



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE MCDOWELL

Mid-Columbia Bus Company ran a recruitment booth at the Umatilla County Fair.

cessors or data centers.

For many years MidCo has recruited by posting signs on school buses parked around town, but Cook said this year the Hermiston office offered the school districts they serve — Umatilla, Stanfield and Hermiston — a fundraising opportunity. Umatilla School District took them up on the offer, and Umatilla students raised money for their clubs and sports for a week by standing on prominent street corners with signs.

"When the kids were out holding signs we had an amazing response," she said.

"We got 25 applications."

MidCo is still hiring, however, for route drivers, substitute drivers and drivers to take students on field trips and to away games for sports. Employment requires passing a background check, physical, drug test and commercial driver's license test.

When a driver is hired by MidCo they are given help studying to take a test at the DMV for their learner's permit for their class B commercial driver's license. Once they receive the permit they get hours of supervised driving until they are ready to take the test to receive

their CDL. After they have their CDL and have completed other trainings on topics such as handling rowdy students, they are sent out with an empty bus for a total of five hours' worth of practice drives on their expected route. Trainers can then work with them on any spots they still feel less than confident about before they take on students.

Cook said she has driven buses and the important thing to remember is that your job is to get students there safely and on time, even if that means being "mean" by telling them they have to follow the rules.

The job can be enjoyable, she said, and some people love being able to make money for part of the year while still getting summers, spring break and holidays off. MidCo does have some work opportunities during the summer too, such as driving the Umatilla County Fair shuttle this week. Getting to take overnight trips out of town from time to time can also be a perk.

Despite the turnover rate, some drivers have been taking Hermiston kids to school for 20 years now.

"Once they get past the third year, they tend to stay," Cook said.

Stanfield citizens ask to increase pressure on 3D Idapro

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

The city of Stanfield is still trying to figure out what to do about the smell.

At the council meeting on Tuesday, Aug. 7, a few residents showed up to find out how to deal with the odors still coming from the 3D Idapro plant, which processes potatoes to make dog food.

The plant has received near-daily citations, the cost of which range between \$0 and \$2,000 per occurrence. The city has to receive com-

plaints from at least four separate households in a 12-hour period to levy a citation.

In discussions about how to put pressure on the company, one option citizens considered was no longer accepting donations from the business.

City manager Blair Larsen said the company contributed \$5,000 to new playground equipment at Bard Park. There is a temporary sign thanking all the donors, including 3D Idapro.

"We had a motion that we don't accept any more donations and a motion to remove

the sign and any sign with their name on it," Larsen said. "But the staff perspective was that it would be improper to do that unless we also give the money back."

The council considered, and said at this time they did not want to return the money and remove the signs.

Carlos Chavez, a Stanfield resident, said he felt the fines were helping.

Larsen said he heard the citations were close to \$1,000 now.

"People want the fines increased quicker or maxed

out," he said.

"I spoke to the judge two weeks ago," Larsen said. "I made her aware of everything said at the public meeting (last month)."

Larsen said while 3D Idapro has been trying to get the city a meeting with the company's executives, it wouldn't change the citation process.

"The only other option is if the city wants to take action — a lawsuit," Larsen said. But he said the general consensus at the last meeting was that citizens did not want to do so.

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AUG. 6, 2018
PHILLIPS — Asia Hayne and Jacob Phillips of Boardman: a boy, Ezra Rashad-Ellis Phillips.

St. Anthony Hospital, Pendleton
AUG. 2, 2018
PREHN — Sarah A. English and Todd A. Prehn of Hermiston: a boy, Deklyn Leo Prehn.
AUG. 3, 2018
CANCINO — Janet Lomas and Ramiro J. Cancino of Hermiston: a girl, Melanie Emma Cancino.
AUG. 4, 2018
HARRISON — Ivette Harrison and Vincent Harrison of Irrigon: a boy, Adam Julian Harrison.

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