

# DELAY

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finding hourly craft construction professionals, particularly carpenters, bricklayers, electricians, concrete workers and plumbers. In Oregon, that number was 79 percent.

Joseph Hull, director of business development and operations for McCormack Construction Company of Pendleton, said general contractors like McCormack have to be cognizant of whether subcontractors are getting over-extended and might not be available for new projects.

“Our region is very, very busy,” he said.

He said delays in projects caused by not being able to find contractors have caused that to extend beyond Umatilla County. If contractors in Washington or Idaho have plenty of work coming their way in their own state, they might let their Oregon licensure lapse (Oregon does not have reciprocal licensing agreements with those states for trades like electricians). He said he has also noticed that subcontractors that used to reliably be willing to come to Umatilla County from cities like Hood River or Baker City are currently less likely to make the trip.

“If they can work 20 or 30 miles from home, why would they commute out here?” he said.

There are ways that impact can be lessened, he said. Hull is a fan of the Construction Manager/General Contractor, or CMGC, method that brings general contractors in from the beginning, instead of a “hard bid” where contractors don’t bid on the project until after design work is complete. One of its benefits is that it allows contractors like McCormack Construction to plan ahead and recruit subcontractors early, before they’re actually needed.

He said going the CMGC route has allowed McCormack Construction to keep construction of Pendleton’s new fire station on time.

It’s not just large projects that are affected by difficulty



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY  
**Josh Ross, of Ross-Brandt Electric in Hermiston, digs a trench near the intersection of 11th Street and Elm Avenue in Hermiston.**

finding contractors and subcontractors. Meribeth Phipps, Hermiston sales agent for MonteVista Homes, said developers could be adding housing to the area at a faster rate if more labor were available. Even while trying to match the number of new projects with labor availability, sometimes there is still a “bottleneck” at the end that delays completion of a house by a few days or weeks.

“It’s really created some challenges for us getting houses done by the estimated completion date,” she said. “We’ve had subcontractors not show up, or say it’s going to be a while before they can get to us.”

She said it’s an issue everywhere, but on staff calls with MonteVista employees from other cities like Bend, Hermiston seems to have particular trouble finding subcontractors. She said plumbers seem to be one of the biggest shortages, followed by carpenters.

On the public project side, Hermiston assistant city manager Mark Morgan said other than ODOT’s problem find-

ing contractors for the traffic signals on 11th Street, for the most part the city hasn’t had “too much of an issue” getting bids for recent projects such as the festival street.

He said on one of Hermiston’s upcoming projects — the new water tower on the corner of Northeast 10th Street and East Punkin Center — the city was more worried about materials than labor. Steel tariffs and rumors of a possible steel worker strike could drive up the costs on what is “a giant steel pipe, essentially.”

The Hermiston city council did vote to use the bid-design-build process Hull favors on new offices and RV park upgrades at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, which will give whatever general contractor is awarded the project more time to find subcontractors. And Morgan said he hears rumor of private projects having difficulties finding labor.

“Maybe we suck some of the work up and then the private side has a harder time finding someone,” he said.

# LAWSUIT

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living capacity, as well as \$13.2 million to cover Connor’s past and future medical expenses. The family also states that Dawna and Todd Martin’s relationship with their son has been impaired, and they ask \$350,000 as compensation for resulting emotional distress.

When reached, the Martin family declined to comment, referring all requests to their lawyers — Martin Dolan and Patricia Pascone of Portland’s Dolan Law Group — who did not respond.

The Hermiston School District released a brief statement emphasizing its commitment to the safety and well-being of students, but declined to comment further, citing legal and privacy reasons.

“If there are lessons to be learned from this or any other situation, we will apply them with that focus in mind,” the statement said.

A 23-page document reviews the timeline of Connor’s injuries, and the process the family went through after learning about them. According to the suit, Connor first sustained an injury when he was playing a football game against Mountain View High School on September 15, 2016, when, early in the game, he collided helmet-to-helmet with another player. Mountain View’s trainer, Lindsay Hagler, evaluated Connor and diagnosed him with a suspected concussion, sidelining him for the rest of the game. The lawsuit states that Bruck then put Connor back into the game in the fourth quarter, despite his injuries.

At another game on October 20, Connor hit his head twice and his symptoms became even worse, with his mother reporting that she found him curled up, sobbing with a headache after the game, and unable to walk without falling.

The lawsuit details Connor’s visits to Hermiston’s athletic trainer, Emery, between the first and second injuries, and after the second injury. The lawsuit states that despite several evaluations, Emery never administered an ImpACT (Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing) test, an evaluation that measures brain function. It also states that he cleared Connor to play without having the authority to do so, did not inform his parents of his initial injuries at the game against Mountain View, and did not direct him to see Dr. Derek Earl, a Hermiston doctor and concussion specialist that the

district retains as its school physician.

The suit states that after the second head injury, Connor was seen by a variety of specialists who excused him from school for several weeks and advised him to see a specialist at Oregon Health and Science University. He also saw Earl, who administered an ImpACT test, and told the Martin family that Connor’s concussion resulted in one of the worst declines in function that he had ever seen.

According to the suit, Connor continues to suffer pain and discomfort to his head, back and neck and can’t do basic activities, such as walking, balancing, reading and socializing, without difficulty. He has also not been able to attend school full-time, and now has an individualized education plan.

Several local mothers of children with brain injuries have formed a support group, of which Connor’s mother Dawna is a member.

Heidi Gray, whose daughter Natalie got a concussion about two years ago, formed the group, unofficially called “moms of concussed kids.” She said there are five mothers who meet semi-regularly.

“If something big is going on, if they need help, we share information,” Gray said. “Which neuro eye surgeons to go to, which is the best counselor to help our kids with anxiety.”

Part of the group’s goal is to help parents understand what the necessary steps are for helping their child, and how to navigate the aftermath of the injury.

“It’s hard to know exactly what to look for,” she said, noting that Earl told her about 80 percent of those who get concussions recover fully within less than a month. Problems tend to arise, she said, when the concussion is not recognized or addressed right away, leading to “post-concussion syndrome.” Those with concussions should see a doctor and get the appropriate scans and tests done, including the ImpACT test. They should also stay away from screens and, above all, get rest.

Gray said the group also helps moms understand how to help their kids ease back into school. Her child, and many others, she said, have specific needs after going back to school post-concussion, such as needing to take breaks periodically.

“Not every teacher understands what a child is going through,” she said. “I can help parents [talk to teachers] in a way that’s respectful, and gets the school to take you seriously.”

Gray said parents of kids with concussions can reach her at koussi@charter.net if they have further questions.

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