



Shawn Lockwood, left, and Erin Chowning work on the quilt that they created for Chowning's grandson Cole Smith.

QUILT
Continued from Page A1

help with the quilting part. It was Lockwood who taught Chowning how to quilt. Neither of them had ever tried to do a T-shirt quilt before, but with the skills they already had and some hints from YouTube tutorials they figured it out. "It was so much easier than I thought it would be," Chowning said. The project, with 40 different squares, took about three weeks to complete. Lockwood said she has been quilting her whole life, but this was the most fun she ever had with a quilt. "I loved this project from start to finish," she said. The two women joked that they loved the quilt so

much they weren't sure if they were actually going to let Smith have it. Lockwood doesn't do the stitching for other people's quilts anymore, other than for the Quilts of Valor project for veterans. But she relented on helping her good friend, and was glad she did it. "I told Erin, even if he didn't appreciate it now, as an adult he will look back and cherish it, and he will know what love his grandma put into it," she said. In the center of the quilt is a square of jersey with Smith's high school number — 12 — in purple and gold. It's the inverse of his dad Shane Smith, who wore the number 21 when he played for the Hermiston Bulldogs. The squares tell the story

of Smith's basketball career, but they also tell the story of a close-knit team. The six graduating seniors on Hermiston High Schools' roster grew up playing together, most of them since third grade. The team finished their senior season with a 15-8 record. Now, Smith said, they will go their separate ways after graduation on June 6. Smith is still weighing his options — he got accepted to Eastern Oregon University, but is also considering an electrician apprenticeship with his dad. Wherever he goes next, he'll have his quilt to remember his basketball days, and the friends he made there. "I enjoyed spending time with my teammates, how close we got," he said.

LAYOFFS
Continued from Page A1

gress are pushing UP for more answers about the cuts. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Democrats, expressed their concerns about the job cuts in a page-and-a-half letter May 22 to Lance M. Fritz, chairman, president and CEO of Union Pacific Corporation. The decisions to reduce jobs at Hinkle Yard, close the supply warehouse and the mechanical locomotive shop, the senators stated, "will devastate this rural community by hamstringing the economic opportunities and stability of the entire region." While the railroad's employees can relocate to other yards, they worried "the potential outmigration of much needed family-wage jobs in rural Eastern Oregon will do serious long-term damage to the local economy and tax base." Paul Chalmers, director of assessment and taxation for Umatilla County, said the total assessed value of Union Pacific's property in the county is about \$169 million, and the Hinkle Yard accounts for about 32 percent of that, or roughly \$52 million. The yard's real market value, he said, is closer to \$140 million. What Union Pacific decides to do with the yard could affect the value and thus the taxes on that property. The railroad could cut jobs, for example, in a move to make Hinkle more automated. That could increase the property value. But even major improvements seem unlikely to replace the economic loss from the jobs. Union Pacific offered \$25,000 signing bonuses for electricians to work at Hinkle in 2018, according to reporting from The Wall Street Journal, and the jobs averaged \$40,000 in pay

the first year and \$60,000 the next. That pay, not including the bonus, works out to an average of \$24 an hour. Using that estimate, the total payroll for the 195 jobs exceeds \$9.7 million a year. Using the common economic development trope that every \$1 in the local economy goes through seven trades, the payroll from the 195 jobs multiplies to more than \$68 million. According to data in the city of Hermiston's annual financial report issued in June 2018, Union Pacific was the city's fifth-largest employer at roughly 500 employees. At the top of the list was Con-Agra Foods, at 1,600 employees, followed by the Wal-Mart Distribution Center, Good Shepherd Medical Center and Hermiston School District. Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said in an email that Hermiston is working on a "small industrial lot project" with the Port of Umatilla to bring about 50 acres of industrial parcels (one of 5 acres in size) up to "shovel-ready" status. The project will extend roads and utilities to the parcels and connect the area on the southern edge of town to Highway 395. A summary of the project lists the need for economic diversity as a driver behind the project, noting that in the past when large employers such as Hermiston Foods have closed it has been a "major blow" to the economy. The city hopes bringing in more options for employment at smaller operations will help. "[Last week's] announcement by UP only underscores why the Mayor and Council are committed to diversifying our employment base through this project," Morgan said. Union Pacific delivers freight to the Port of Morrow in Boardman. Ryan Neal, the port's executive director, said he did not

anticipate the port would sustain adverse effects from the cuts at Hinkle. But like others, he called the losses devastating for the area, particular because they are family-wage jobs. "We don't ever want to see those go away," he said. In response to Union Pacific's announcement, Neal said, the port issued one of its own showing a total of 62 job openings at businesses operating at the port, including a physical security manager for Amazon, maintenance mechanics for Pacific Ethanol Inc. and Lamb Weston and forklift operators at Lamb Weston and Boardman Foods Inc. Union Pacific started cutting jobs at Hinkle in October 2018. Wyden and Merkley stated in the letter those layoffs hurt agriculture producers and other shippers, who reported "difficulties reaching Union Pacific staff to resolve problems, or even reach a customer service representative." Union Pacific's "failure to work with Oregon shippers," the senators continued, could create more congestion on freeways and undermine the state's transportation infrastructure. And the closure of the Hinkle mechanical locomotive shop would reduce oversight inspection of trains carrying hazardous loads through rural Oregon communities. To better understand the effects of eliminating the jobs, Wyden and Merkley asked Union Pacific a series of questions about levels of workers and investments at Hinkle. The senators asked Union Pacific if the Federal Rail Administration reviewed workers' safety concerns at Hinkle and other Oregon facilities since the company started layoffs in October. The Hermiston Herald reported on those safety concerns in late March.

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