



Greg Smith makes offer on Vale newspaper

By ANTONIO SIERRA

Local lawmaker offered \$35,000 for the publication, not including employees

Hermiston Herald

Greg Smith's offer to buy the Malheur Enterprise came in a postscript.

An email exchange between Smith and Les Zaitz, the publisher and editor of the small weekly newspaper in Vale, over an editorial led to an offer to take the Enterprise off the market.

According to the email chain obtained by the Hermiston Herald, Zaitz wrote to inform Smith, the state representative for District 57 and the Malheur County economic development director, that he intended to publish an editorial critical of Smith and asked him for comment.

"I'm preparing an editorial for next week about the Malheur County Court's management of your company's contract," he wrote. "You will, in part, get a pass because you can't be blamed by taxpayers for getting what you can as easily as you can. But the issue of your truth-telling is another matter. You lie. By that, I mean you declare as fact something you know to be false."

Smith responded by saying he wouldn't respond to "negative suppositions," but also added Malheur County residents were "begging" Zaitz to sell his newspaper and that it had no support.

"P.S. ... if you need a buyer for the paper, I'll pay \$35,000 cash," he wrote at the end of the email. "No employees included."

Later in the chain, Zaitz told Smith he would share Smith's offer with the public.

"Let's see what the community — and the state — thinks of your idea of buying a paper to shut it down," he said. "Thanks for the offer. We'll be in touch."

Smith followed-up by clarifying he would not shut the Enterprise down if he bought it.

"I already have staff in place that would run the paper quite well," he wrote. "I never said it would be shut down."

In a response to a request for comment, Smith provided a written statement.

"The Malheur Enterprise, a privately owned company, publicly announced it was for sale," he said. "Gregory Smith and Company, also a privately owned company,

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Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

A no trespassing sign on March 9, 2022, warns people away from the site of the Shearer's Foods plant.

LAI D OFF

Shearer's says goodbye to 231 workers who had been employed at the plant

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

The devastating fire last month at the Shearer's Foods facility in Hermiston has led the company to end employment of the men and women who worked there. And the city is without a sure sign the company will rebuild.

Shearer's Foods CEO Bill Nictakis made the announcement in a press release Tuesday, March 8.

"After assessing the damage, it's clear that the destruction is too great to quickly rebuild and begin production in the near term," according to Nictakis. "Unfortunately, it would take at least 15-18 months before we could resume production. We have not yet decided the future of the Shearer's Hermiston site. This has led to the very difficult decision to end employment for our team members."



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

A backhoe sits ready for use at the Shearer's plant in Hermiston, March 9, 2022.

The company has reported it employed 231 people at the plant.

Nictakis stated the company is "exploring opportunities to relocate team members interested in working in our other plants" and has "provided a severance and benefits continuation package to recognize the

effort and tenure that has gone into making the site successful over the past years."

He continued, "We will do everything we can to support our Shearer's family during this transition."

According to the press release, Shearer's Foods has been teaming up with commu-

nity organizations on projects, including food drives, family activities and job fairs, to benefit its former employees.

"We will continue to provide counseling services to those affected and will do what we can to help them find other employment," the letter stated.

Nictakis ended the letter with thanks to local businesses and government representatives for their support.

"Please continue to put our Shearer's Hermiston family in your thoughts through this difficult time," Nictakis stated.

Dealing with the fallout

This is a situation that has driven people to tears, according to Mark Gomolski, Agape House director.

Gomolski said Shearer's supplied Agape House with a list of all of the Hermiston plant employees, and the nonprofit held a food drive March 4 for them. Gomolski said CAPECO — Community Action Program of East Central Oregon — and

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Morrow County narrows focus on superintendent candidates

The final choice will be between one local resident and two people from out of state

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

The search for a new Morrow County School District superintendent is down to three.

One district employee, Mathew Combe, is among the finalists. The other two, Chester Bradshaw and Jose Silva, are working in Idaho and Nevada, respectively.

"Any of the three could potentially do a good job for us," Becky Kindle, Morrow County School District board chair, said.

The district released the names of the prospective superintendents, as well as information about each candidate in a recent press release.

Bradshaw is superintendent at Sugar Salem District in Sugar City, Idaho, near the state's

border with Wyoming. The district has about 540 students, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, while Morrow County School District has closer to 2,200. Bradshaw holds an education specialist degree from Idaho State University.

Silva is principal of the Kermit R. Booker Sr. Innovative Elementary School with the Clark County School District in Las Vegas. He holds a master's in education from Sierra Nevada College and a doctorate of education from Argosy University.

Combe is the director of maintenance and facilities and a principal in the district. Other credentials include being a regional alternative education coordinator with the Union Baker Education Service District, as well as a master's degree in education from Sierra Nevada College.

He works for Heppner Junior/Senior High School.

The Teacher Standards and

Practices Commission of Oregon filed a report on Combe regarding a matter in 2004 that resulted in a 30-day suspension in 2009. The report provides a stipulation of facts, including an admission of submitting one or more travel reimbursement claims when he was a teacher at Union Baker Education Service District. It states he claimed "mileage that he did not incur while employed by the UBESD."

"He claimed reimbursement for personal mileage when he actually drove a UBESD vehicle on business, or when he did not make the trip claimed," the report states. "Mr. Combe asserts that these reimbursements were actually related to other, non-travel, work-related expenses and that he had followed his supervisor's direction in categorizing them as travel-expense reimbursement requests."

The stipulation of facts within the report also mentions that Combe "cooperated

with, and assisted, law enforcement officials in their investigation into wide-ranging allegations of impropriety involving a number of UBESD staff and administrators."

The conclusion of the report is Combe did submit improper claims for travel reimbursement and his conduct "constituted gross neglect of duty."

School district looks for positivity in new superintendent

Board Chair Kindle said she was not concerned about the past impropriety. She said the board is happy with all of its remaining candidates.

"We went through a long process and spent a long time in our screening committee and board and reviewed all candidates, and those were the ones that we wanted to revisit some more," she said.

She acknowledged the final choice, whoever it is, will be fol-

lowing a superintendent who has "done a good job."

As the outgoing superintendent, Dirk Dirksen said he is not part of the selection process for his replacement. He did, however, offer a few words on the sort of person he would like to see hired.

He said the person who ends up filling his shoes should be "one who looks into the future" and makes decisions based on student needs.

"We've just gone through a two-year cycle where everything's been kind of, I'm just going to say, in a bad place with mandates and politics and things like that," Dirksen said. "We just need to work on a positive attitude and a positive outlook of what we're going to see in the future in education."

The school district stated the finalists would be gathered Tuesday and Wednesday, March 15 and 16, for discussion. They were scheduled to meet with staff, students and community members.

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