

HERALD OPINION and reader's forum

Wednesday, August 10, 2022

A4

OUR VIEW

Eastern board getting out into the region

Eastern Oregon University got it right when it made the decision to hold its recently completed annual retreat of the board of trustees in Boardman.

The retreat, held earlier this week at the SAGE Center Gallery, showcased meetings with local and regional business leaders and area stakeholders. Those meetings were aimed outlining the university's role in business, industry and education.

The retreat was part of a more in-depth agenda to stage fact-finding tours across the region.

There is a lot of good to say about this effort by the university. The university really should be — and is — a jewel in the crown for Eastern Oregon.

It is the only four-year university on this side of the state. That, alone, makes the university unique and places it in an optimum position to help make a huge difference in the lives of many of us.

The decision to hold the retreat outside of its home in La Grande shows the leaders at the university believe in collecting input from everywhere. That sends the message of inclusiveness and reasoned, methodical planning.

Yet while there is plenty to praise about the university's decision, those of us who live in this great area also have a responsibility to interact with the board members and make their retreat a success. The trustees can't read minds and they are offering area stakeholders and officials a great opportunity to give feedback.

The university clearly understands that it serves a wide area and to know the challenges and triumphs our area faces, they must get out into the hinterlands and listen.

That may seem like a common-sense approach — and it is — but it isn't as common as some might believe.

There is no doubt that a kind of mission-creep can develop with institutions like the university regarding the region it serves. It can seemingly be easy to stay focused on the campus and ignore the region or forget the diverse elements of our rural townships and counties.

Thankfully, that hasn't happened with the leadership at the university. The retreat shows that its leaders desire to gather as much information as they can and to listen to as many diverse opinions as possible on the way to creating a first-class learning opportunity for all.

That should be excellent news to every voter in the region.



COLUMN

The Spruce Goose and the watermelon

The Spruce Goose is a spectacle of an airplane — part sideshow oddity, part historical relic — on display in a custom hangar at the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum in McMinnville.

It was constructed primarily of birch wood in Long Beach, California, during World War II in a plan to produce air-worthy transports that didn't require scarce metal commodities. It made one flight in 1947 to prove the concept and was then mothballed as the only prototype.

Half a century later, the McMinnville museum bid on the right to purchase the one-of-a-kind plane, building a sizable collection of real and replica planes and helicopters around it to tell the history of flight.

As we climbed the steps up to see the Goose a few weeks ago, the friendly veterans stationed at the entrance went through an all-but scripted dialogue with us. They asked if we were enjoying the museum, asked the kids if they were ready to fly a plane, and asked us where we were from.

When we told them we were from Hermiston, the inevitable question followed: "Are the watermelons ready yet?"

Only for locals, I let them know, but we'll ship them out once we're ready to share with the world.

My agricultural background is minimal, and I've certainly never harvested watermelons in the heat of summer. But that doesn't mean I can't take pride in living in a town that produces the best version of the best



DANIEL WATTENBURGER

fruit known to mankind.

I've never been asked how the potatoes are looking, how the onion crop is coming in, or if the grass seed is as good as last year. Frankly, I wouldn't have an answer, although I know a few folks at the Hermiston Agricultural Research & Extension Center who could share some thoughts. But I do know enough to know that the iconic watermelon, proudly displayed on the water tower, doesn't nearly tell the story of Hermiston's agricultural bounty. It's just a digestible slice of what makes Hermiston special.

In the same way, Pendleton has the Round-Up, a once-a-year event that doesn't completely define the town but captures its ethos. Maybe McMinnville didn't birth the birch behemoth that now plays an outsized role in its tourism culture, but it does tie into a rich aviation history that could otherwise be missed.

I was thinking about these touch points during a presentation about the Hermiston HEROS project that would add youth sports fields at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center. The question of identity came up. What is Hermiston all about?

What would bring people here from across the Northwest?

As EOTEC manager Al Davis likes to say, it's the middle of nowhere but the center of everything. That's a good start.

But this community has also developed a reputation as a youth sports mecca, and not just because of our location at the crossroads of two interstates.

In the fall we host playoff football and soccer at Kennison Field, in the winter we have Amateur Athletic Union basketball and wrestling in school gyms, in the spring and summer our sports fields fill with lacrosse players. A youth softball team just did us all proud by carrying the Hermiston name to the western regional Little League tournament, as many other local teams have done in all areas of competition over the years.

Watermelons may be our notable export, but youth sports give us a chance to showcase our talented youth, dedicated adult coaches, commitment to inclusiveness, and community hospitality. They make up our character.

Everyone wants to live in a town that stands for something. Knowing what Hermiston stands for will guide us through the continued growth and change ahead.

■ Daniel Wattenburger is the former managing editor of the East Oregonian. He lives in Hermiston with his wife and children and is an account manager for Pac/West Lobby Group. Contact him at danielwattenburger@gmail.com.

COLUMN



ERICK PETERSON
PETERSON'S POINTS

Goodbye to a good man

BY ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

Since the start of my sick leave, the Hermiston Herald produced two newspapers, and many things have occurred during my absence. The biggest gut punch, however, was the death of Umatilla's John Perkins.

Perkins played Santa Claus at local events, which is how I became acquainted with him. One day before last year's Hermiston tree-lighting celebration, Perkins called me to say that it would be his last year as Santa; he had stage-four cancer and was not expecting to survive to play the part another year.

In fact, he said, he probably shouldn't have agreed to be Santa in 2021.

His health was in severe decline, and he knew that the role would be taxing on him. Still, he took the part because

he loved doing it, and he expressed concern he would disappoint people if he didn't. One day, he dropped into the Herald office and sat down to discuss growing up in Pendleton, serving in the Navy, graduating high school when he was around 60 years old and more. He spoke of his wife, Jeanne, and his religious faith.

Last year, Perkins waved at a large crowd of people, flipped a ceremonial switch and then walked to a nearby church to recuperate.

When he was feeling better, he sat beneath the large tree, then lighted, and he met with children and families.

Perkins was happy. He was tired, but glad to be doing his work as Santa.

John did terrific things in his life that brought pleasure to both himself and others. May we all be like this Santa, working to benefit one another.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Stretch run on comments before OPUC sides with utilities and gives them what they want

Electric utilities are about to get a free pass to take your land or your neighbors' land in condemnation proceedings.

The Oregon Public Utilities Commission is going to allow utilities to take your land before the utility has all the permits required to do so. The main reason — it takes too long. I am the only "public" at the table and have been up against PacifiCorp, Portland General Electric, Idaho Power and the Consumer Owned Utilities (co-ops, public utility districts and municipal utilities).

Will you help? The case docket, AR 626 — Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity, aka "condemnation," is in its final phases. It started in September 2019 with informal rulemaking and staff recommending, among other things, that condemnation be the capstone or final process after all other permits and regulatory reviews are completed. The utilities wanted a waiver

in special circumstances that mostly involve the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals and the counties. Staff stuck to their position.

Once we went into formal rulemaking, the commissioners became involved, everything changed and the pro-utility/pro-transmission mentality of the commissioners came to full light as they rewrote most of the rule(s). In order accommodate the utilities' desire for a waiver and sidestep LUBA's slowness, the OPUC would have to use its super powers and cited in Oregon Revises Statute 197.180 — state agency planning responsibilities. If that didn't work the commissioners cited Oregon Administrative Rule 660-030-0065(3) to condemn your land. This looks and smells like an end-run around other state agencies and counties to serve the utilities.

I have also been pushing them, in writing and verbal testimony, to develop environmental justice filters. These filters will look at critical factors the other agencies and the counties do not look at in their rules. These include but are not limited

to cumulative economic, health and environmental impacts and to make sure they look at the demographics and are not putting a line in economically challenged or communities of color.

Over and over the commissioners have been reminded that the public does not have the time, money or knowledge to be at these meetings and it is the commissioners' job to see that the public's values, health and security are taken into consideration. Only one commissioner, Thompson, asked about environmental justice and seemed concerned.

This Thursday, Aug. 11, at 4 p.m. is the last time to submit comments before the OPUC sides with the utilities and gives them what they want. I apologize for not ringing the alarm bell sooner but I believed in the process. I do not now.

Send comments to the OPUC at puc.filingcenter@puc.oregon.gov and use AR 626 — Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity in the subject header.

Jim Kreider
La Grande

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