

ADAMS County MAGAZINE®

2022

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The Herd 5C boxed beef

Entrepreneurs in computers, food, art

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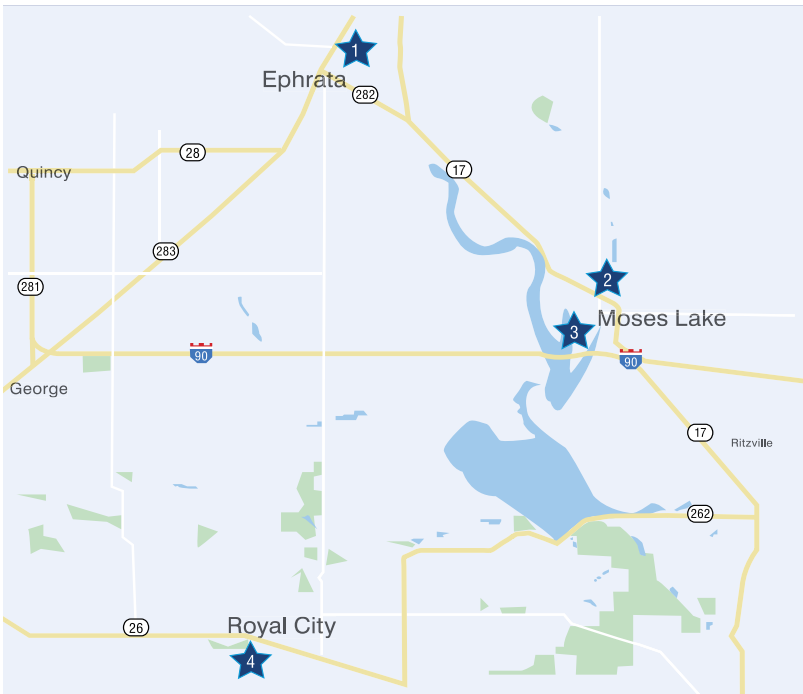
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ADAMS

Country MAGAZINE®

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ADAMS COUNTY
Development
Council



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A message from the publisher

Affordable energy, affordable land and a willingness to make it happen for potential businesses, big or small, are what Adams County is known for.

With Interstate 90 connecting our region to 10 local ports and both coasts, in addition to a world-class fiber optic network, there are few limitations to where our economy is heading.

Adams County offers great opportunity, and we can't wait to see what's on the horizon in 2022. Multiple businesses have invested long term in our communities, and we expect that to continue to be the trend as we move forward.

The Adams County Development Council's mission is to enhance, retain and attract commercial, industrial and agricultural growth, development and diversity in Adams County and its cities, towns and ports. I know that this magazine represents what they envision as a visual representation of Adams County. This group is driven, and I can't wait to see what 2022 brings to Adams County.

Please enjoy this year's edition of the Adams County Magazine!

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Bob Richardson'.

Bob Richardson

Publisher, Adams County Magazine



Bob Richardson
*Publisher, Adams
County Magazine*

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ALL THE PIECES IN PLAY

The new director of Adams County Development Council aims to help bring the county more wins in 2022

By R. Hans Miller

The Adams County Development Council will have a new navigator as it works to steer the county's economy into fairer territory at the start of the new year.

Kyle Niehenke will take the role of executive director for the economic development council after being appointed by the group's executive board. In 2021, he was a ACDC board member.

He grew up in Ephrata and attended Washington State University, where he obtained a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. Afterward, he worked in a variety of positions in construction sales and project management. He served on the ACDC executive committee for two years prior to applying for the executive director role and being selected.

Niehenke says he is excited to begin the new position and help Adams County reach for prosperity.

"We are poised for growth," Niehenke said. "We have



Kyle Niehenke will take over as executive director of the Adams County Development Council on Jan. 1, 2022. Niehenke is a graduate of Washington State University. *Photo courtesy of Kyle Niehenke*

ADAMS COUNTY DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

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infrastructure in place. We have existing businesses that are growing, spending their hard-earned business dollars to expand and move to the area, so we're already seeing growth."

Access to what Niehenke called cheap rail transportation for goods, as well as inexpensive utilities in comparison with other parts of the country, are a draw for companies to bring industry to Adams County. With more people moving to the area, Niehenke said the workforce is growing, as well.

The abundance of available land in the county is an

ACDC continued on page 11

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Janice Baginski, owner of The Cow Path Artisan Bakery & Creamery, prepares dough for turnovers while in temporary quarters in 2021. She reached the goal of her own building in 2022. *File photo*



Triple berry pound cake is one of the specialties at The Cow Path Artisan Bakery & Creamery in Othello. *Janice Baginski/Courtesy photo*

Sweet startup

For The Cow Path Artisan Bakery & Creamery, Othello proves to be a great place to expand into its own location

By Cheryl Schweizer

That little bakery — yeah, that one, the one with the interesting industrial vibe and the amazing scent of cookies and cinnamon rolls coming from the kitchen. It serves amazing baked goods and is a testament to the entrepreneurial spirit.

Owner Janice Baginski opened The Cow Path Artisan Bakery & Creamery in her front yard, progressed to a pop-up shop, then to a location where she could have regular hours, then to her own shop.

It's a familiar path for an entrepreneur, starting small and growing as demand grows. Well yes, except for the whole COVID-19 pandemic thing.

The Cow Path is located at 910 East Main St. in Othello, but it started at the Baginski dairy operation, Dan Maur Farms. It took Baginski about two years to build her business from online custom orders to her own shop, and she did it as the coronavirus pandemic discombobulated business in Adams County, as well as all over the country.

Baginski said the path has been both fun and a little scary.

"Terrifying," she said, when talking about opening her own

brick-and-mortar shop. "Exciting. All the feels. It depends on the day."

The Main Street shop is built on the foundation laid by selling online, in pop-ups (an urban concept retooled for Othello) and selling from temporary quarters.

"We'll have our morning cinnamon rolls, morning pastries, cookies. I hope to expand our offering of desserts that need to be chilled, (such as) cheesecakes and cream pies."

Her discussion of menus was interrupted by a customer seeking to place a special order. And her customers have supported her all the way, she said.

"We have our repeat customers that come every week (and) we see new faces. It's been fun to bless people through delicious food. It's a privilege, right?" she said.

"We have a lot of community support," she said, "and it's been a lot of fun, especially in the last year, getting to know our regular customers. We just look forward to seeing them every week."

Customers come back for those cinnamon rolls and the jalapeno cheddar ciabatta bread.

Startup to continued on page 12

other resource that Niehenke expects to draw businesses to the area, Niehenke said. The availability of land to build on combined, with shipping options, has the potential to help the county's economy flourish.

"We have all the pieces in play, but we need someone to come here and, I mean, really see that and land that so we can get some of these small wins to show that we can sustain new business and support business growth within the county and just keep that moving forward," Niehenke said.

With additional infrastructure on the way, Adams County should be able to draw more telecommuters as well, Niehenke said.

The Washington State Public Works Board announced in December 2021 that it had awarded more than \$44.6 million in grants to fund 15 broadband internet projects to communities across the state. One of those projects is slated for Wash-tucna, a town in southeastern Adams County, which will see an investment of about \$789,000.

With the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on workforces worldwide, Niehenke said the added high-speed internet access for more of the county will make it even more attractive to potential employers and remote workers.

"A lot of these rural towns have struggled to get access to that — to get even internet in general. So something like that coming to Wash-tucna just opens the door to virtually anything. I mean, high-speed internet is absolutely one of the requirements, and all of these businesses that we talk to, they

need it. I mean, even simple manufacturing plants need high-speed internet. We live in the 'internet of things' day and age," Niehenke said.

While the ACDC has no plans to say no to new businesses of any kind, Niehenke said the goal is to draw organizations that will contribute to the community. Being proactive in communicating with new employers that will bring quality jobs and contribute to the county in multiple ways is important, he said.

"The focus is that we want to vet and bring in folks that are going to benefit from the community and benefit the community back as well," Niehenke said. "... I mean, it's a requirement just because we want to make sure it's a good fit for the community. Jobs are obviously important, but bringing in the wrong industry or the wrong business or a fly-by-night corporation that doesn't do what they're saying they're doing does not benefit anybody."

Communicating that priority and networking Adams County together to facilitate healthy growth will be a key factor as Niehenke takes charge at the ACDC, he said. He acknowledged that the council needs to improve on how it communicates with community members, businesses, local governments and others that may be able to work together more effectively to benefit the residents of Adams County.

"I don't think communication has been just the greatest in the world we live in, in general. So my emphasis moving into this position is just going to be communication, communication, communication," Niehenke said. ■

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Janice Baginski says cinnamon rolls are among her bakery's top sellers. *Janice Baginski/Courtesy photo*

After two years of building her business through a global pandemic, Janice Baginski reached her goal of her own bakery. *Corrine Madison/Courtesy photo*

Dinner rolls are among the savory options at The Cow Path Artisan Bakery & Creamery, Othello. *Janice Baginski/Courtesy photo*

Startup continued from page 10

"The best grilled cheese bread ever," Baginski said of the jalapeno cheddar bread.

Customers come back for the salted caramel chocolate chip cookies, which usually are among the first items to sell out, she said. There is the apple cake, the snickerdoodle cookies, the triple berry cheesecake, the triple chocolate cheesecake, the rosemary parmesan scones and bacon cheddar scones. The menu is far more extensive, with some things offered every week, such as salted caramel chocolate chip cookies, and others offered periodically. Baginski also takes special orders.

One week the menu might include cranberry-orange muffins and raspberry cream galettes (similar to a pie but not baked in a pan), the next it might be peanut butter stuffed brownies and sausage cheddar scones. The Cow Path also sells a selection of cheeses from Idaho-based Brush Creek Creamery, made with milk from the family dairy.

"We'll still always accept pre-orders and we're getting more into doing weddings, desserts for weddings. We've had a couple opportunities to cater the (wedding) desserts, which has been really awesome," she said. "I'd like to see that grow."

Eventually she plans to expand the bakery menu a little, bring in some sandwiches and other things. But that will wait until she has paid off some of the debt incurred to date, she said. The point is to grow, but grow at a sustainable pace.

She said she always expected to get to the place where she had her own shop.

"In some ways I thought it would be sooner, and in other ways I can't believe we've come this far," she said.

She started taking custom orders in January 2020, and started selling baked goods on weekends, out on the farm near Othello, in July 2020.

"It was crazy. We sold out every weekend," she said.

But summer doesn't last forever, and she didn't want to lose the momentum she had built up. So, with the help of a sister-in-law, Jennifer Baginski, she started the pop-up shop.

The pop-up was open a couple days a week, first at the Pizza Factory in Othello, where she rented the kitchen for things that couldn't be made for sale in the kitchen at the dairy. But The Cow Path kept growing.

"Alfie (Pizza Factory manager Alfred Voorhies) was super-generous, but we just got busier and busier, and it was more challenging, because he's got a business in there," Baginski said.

The operation switched to the Othello Fraternal Order of Eagles Lodge kitchen, which was closed due to the pandemic. She sold out almost every week, and expanded from two days to three.

She never stopped planning for the ultimate goal, starting with sketching out a design for her own kitchen.

"Based on my little bit of experience, working in a couple of other kitchens, thinking of things I didn't like about those spaces, what I would want to do differently. That was kind of my starting point. I drew it out on paper, and we sent it to an actual commercial kitchen designer. They didn't really change a whole lot from what I had written out, so I guess I was on the right track."

And she had a building in mind.

"I had my eye on this building for a long time, three or four years, I think," she said.

What is now The Cow Path was once a brake and muffler shop.

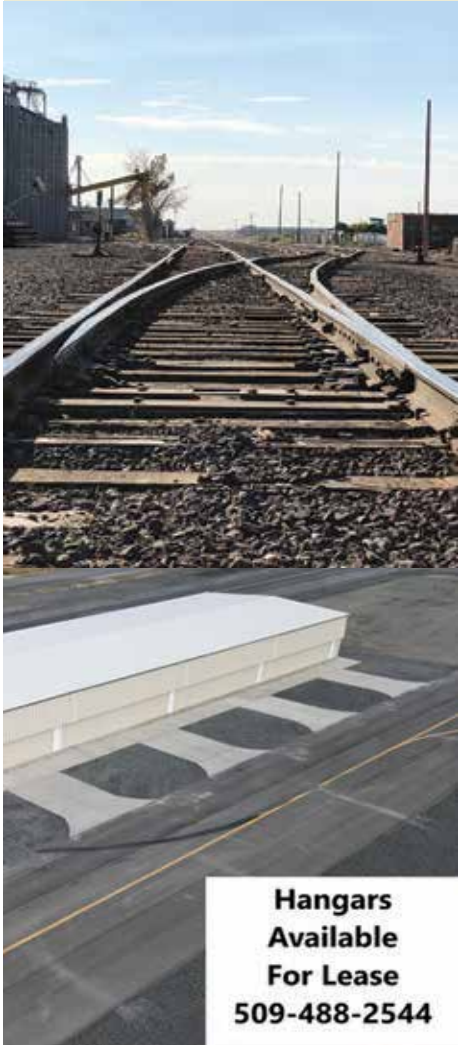
"There was a (car) lift in here when we bought it," Baginski said.

She's looking forward to possible expansion, and the future.

"The sky's the limit, right?" she said. ■



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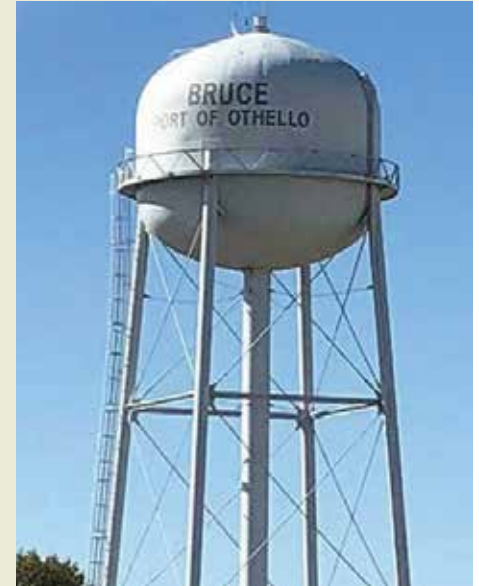
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The Port of Othello was voted into existence in November 1966. The Port encompasses 182 square miles in the panhandle of Adams County, Washington. The geographic area includes irrigated and dry land farms, grazing land, and state and federal wildlife conservation areas. The City of Othello is the only incorporated area within the Port District.

The Port of Othello lies within the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project located in the central plateau of Eastern Washington. The irrigated lands surround the City of Othello provided a major contribution of agricultural products to the nation and the world.

The long range growth potential of the Othello area and the surrounding region has yet to be achieved. Industrial development and resulting population expansion is expected to continue for decades to come. Our hub location allows us to draw from and support a large area, leading as far as Spokane, Moses Lake, Royal City, Connell and the Tri-Cities area.



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Mindful *about* growth

A local couple aims to develop Ritzville property in ways that benefit the community

By Cheryl Schweizer

Right now it's a farm field in production, but it's full of possibilities.

The property is on the south side of Interstate 90, right off state Route 261. Owners Derek and Susan Schafer have long-term plans to develop it, and the property was annexed into the city of Ritzville in 2021.

"I think a good summary might be that my wife and I just wanted to make this property available for Ritzville to be able to grow," Derek Schafer said.

They don't plan to do the developing themselves.

"We're not property developers, we're farmers," he said.

But they are doing some of the work that comes before development, working with the Washington Department of Transportation on traffic impacts, and getting the property annexed into the city. They want to make it easier for businesses to locate in Ritzville, he said.

"We're going to do some of the hoop-jumping that takes years," he said.

Ritzville city officials have worked with the Schafers on the project and have been supportive and helpful.

"I feel like we're learning and growing through this together," Schafer said.

They purchased the property about two years ago with the intention of farming it now and possibly opening it for development later. The land was within the city's urban growth boundary, and he said it would be easier to market if it were inside the city.

"It made sense for us to move ahead," he said.

The Schafers have a preliminary concept map, envisioning 200 acres as a mix of general commercial and residential development.

They donated land for a facility that would highlight agriculture, in Adams County in particular and Washington in general, and its contribution to the county and state.

But development will be a deliberate process, in an effort to produce



Derek Schafer said he and his wife, Susan, plan to develop some Ritzville property they own in a way that provides maximum benefit to the town. *Derek Schafer/Courtesy photo*

maximum value for the town, he said.

"We're not in any hurry to develop," Schafer said. "It's a big project that will probably take many years to come to fruition."

Currently, the Schafers farm the *Growth continued on page 16*



Views like this are common in Adams County. This farmland view is in south Ritzville and north of the Schafers' development. *Dave Burgess photo*



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Growth continued from page 14

land, and they're happy to keep doing so. But if there's a way to use it to benefit Ritzville, they'll do that.

"It's really exciting for Ritzville," he said.

The Schafers are Ritzville natives, he said, and their families have been a part of the town for about 130 years. And they like their hometown.

"It really is a wonderful place to live and raise a family," Schafer said.

They want the town not only to survive but thrive, and development is part of that.

"You have to grow and change and evolve to survive," he said.

New businesses that come to Ritzville, along the freeway corridor and elsewhere around town, will need workers, and those workers will need a place to live. The residential portion of their land they envision will help with that.

Those workers also will need places to shop, which eventually will benefit downtown.

"Our hope is that growth is good for the entire community," Schafer said. "We just want it to be good for Ritzville."

The COVID-19 pandemic changed a lot of things, he said, and one of those changes might be the way people look at small towns like Ritzville. The pandemic demonstrated that people can live in one location and work somewhere else, as long as they have sufficient internet access. Officials from Adams County and its cities are working on a broadband project designed to improve connectivity throughout the county.

The Schafers' annexed property is zoned about one-third commercial and two-thirds residential.

That may be more residential property than can be developed in a few years, he said, but due to the size and makeup of the parcels it made sense to annex the entire property into the city.

Almost all of the town of Ritzville is on the north side of the freeway. Currently, the area south of the freeway is mostly farms, with three properties built close to the freeway interchange.



A preliminary development plan has been drawn up for property south of Interstate 90 that recently was annexed into Ritzville includes commercial and residential areas.

Derek Schafer/Courtesy photo

Schafer envisions some businesses targeted toward freeway traffic for a portion of the Schafers' property, like a gas station or restaurant.

"Any business you might ordinarily see along a busy freeway," he said.

But, essentially, for the commercial portion of the acreage, they are not looking for any specific business development.

"We're waiting for the market to tell us what it wants," Schafer said. "We're not in a hurry. We really do want it to be the right thing for Ritzville." ■

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THE DOCTOR *is in*

All-in-one stop for all things computer, Gigamedics thrives in Ritzville

By Rebecca Pettingill

Ritzville businessman Cory Bartlett has turned his small computer-fixing business into an all-in-one stop for computer and tablet sales, repair and diagnostics, internet installation and cellphone support and sales.

Bartlett's business, Gigamedics, is located at 213 W. Main Ave., in downtown Ritzville, and is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.



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Cory Bartlett, left, and David Dahill, right, make up Gigamedics in Ritzville, a computer sales and repair company. *Rebecca Pettingill photo*

Bartlett was first introduced to computers as an adolescent while visiting his dad in Kansas during the summer. His dad and uncle owned a computer store, and little by little, Bartlett expanded his understanding of computers through the '80s, when computer technology was first expanding.

However, Bartlett did not go into owning his own computer business until much later. For 15 years, Bartlett was a teacher at several schools around eastern Washington. Today he still moonlights as an adjunct teacher for several institutions and provides tutoring to adults in the Ritzville community.

Throughout his life, he was always working on computers, but Bartlett officially opened an office in 2016 in order to be closer to home and take care of his father who was battling brain cancer. Despite his father's decline and subsequent passing in late 2019, Bartlett's business was growing. In the past five years, Bartlett has moved his business and now has one full-time employee, David Dahill, who has worked with Gigamedics

Computer continued on page 20

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Computer continued from page 19

for a little over a year.

Bartlett's family is also very involved in the business, and he is really appreciative of being able to pass down some of the skills and knowledge he learned from his father to his own children.

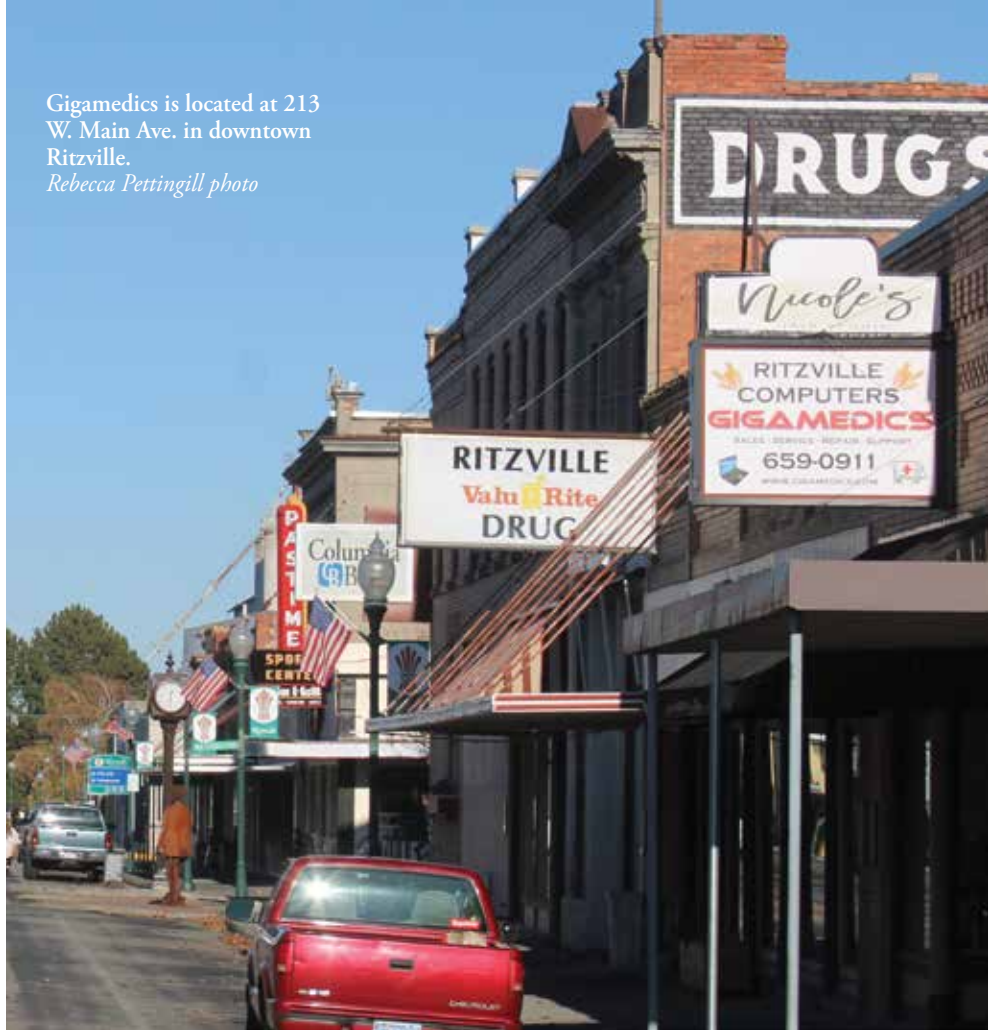
Bartlett said his business is very similar to old-time doctors who would make house calls and diagnose the whole person, not just the main issue. He explained that he does do house calls, remote access and full diagnostics on a range of problems. He also noted that he takes the time to talk to people and to help them understand what is going on with their computers, not just hand them the bill — it's paramount to his business mission, service and commitment to the customer's satisfaction.

James Wahl, a customer of Gigamedics, said, "My account is a perfect example of this." He mentioned that Gigamedics has done a number of services for him, such as setting up a new laptop and securing his Facebook account.

"I'll be very upfront — they have helped me more than anybody with

Gigamedics is located at 213 W. Main Ave. in downtown Ritzville.

Rebecca Pettingill photo



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I'll be very upfront — they have helped me more than anybody with computer issues that I've ever had.

”

— James Wahl
customer of Gigamedics



Cory Bartlett, right, and David Dahill, left, make up Gigamedics in Ritzville. *Rebecca Pettingill photo*

computer issues that I've ever had," Wahl said.

One of Gigamedics' more interesting repairs involved opening a computer tower and finding a petrified snake inside.

More recently, Gigamedics partnered with Desert Winds Wireless to be an official installer and reseller of the internet service. Desert Winds Wireless is a point-to-point network that runs off of a fiber backbone of Northwest Open Access Network (NoaNet). It's a natural fit to provide internet service along with computer repair, Bartlett said. He adds that people come to his business because they trust he has the knowledge of what service to use.

"Partnering with Desert Winds was a no-brainer for us," Bartlett said.

Bartlett had initially pursued a partnership with another internet service provider but he was looking for more investment in the community, like Desert Winds, because that was important to him.

It's natural in a community like Ritzville, which has a population of about 1,700.

Bartlett said he is personally involved with the Ritzville Lions Club as the secretary, provides free computer workshops for the elderly and gives free or reduced-priced computers to those in financial need.

Despite being distant from big cities, Bartlett's business is healthy and thriving. He said he has a database of more than 2,000 customers. Gigamedics services customers all over eastern Washington and even across the nation.

"Not because we were aiming for that, but because word-of-mouth has spread," Bartlett said. ■

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Making a mark in metal

Old parts become works of art in hands of former Lind farmer

By Charles H. Featherstone

Tom Strohmaier looks over a pile of rusting metal just outside the door of his workshop.

“My father-in-law used to restore buggies, sleighs and horse-drawn wagons, and when he died in 2014, he left me this huge pile of ... this sort of thing,” he said.

Springs. Axles. Spindles. Cogs. Bolts. Chains.

“All this specialty stuff, and I didn’t want to build wagons,” Strohmaier explained.

So the 64-year-old retired dryland wheat farmer decided to use all of this century-old metal to make art instead, large sculptures of fish, birds, insects, flowers and even a farmer scything wheat and a laborer pounding the golden spike.

“It basically spoke to me to build something else,” Strohmaier said, as he picked up a long piece of curved metal that once was a buggy spring. “Pieces like this, you see how pitted it is, no one wants to use that.”

“That’s what I start with, and it tells me what to make,” he said. “It just kind of gets in my hands, and eventually, I make stuff.”

There’s nothing in the Lind native’s past that suggests a potential career as an artist. Raised on a farm south of Lind, Strohmaier said he inherited that 3,000-acre farm and worked

Metal art continued on page 24

FACING PAGE: Tom Strohmaier shows off the farmer scything wheat he created from old buggy and combine parts. The work, which is painted in Washington State University’s official crimson, has over 10,000 individual welds, Strohmaier said, and the individual heads of wheat are made from segments of chain taken from old combines.

Charles H. Featherstone photo



Tom Strohmaier will use these pieces of metal for feathers in a sculpture of a sandhill crane family he started.

Charles H. Featherstone photo



The 12th Seahawk feeds her young in a nest. Tom Strohmaier created the sculpture to honor the Seattle Seahawks and their fans. *Charles H. Featherstone photo*



Lind artist Tom Strohmaier shows a photo of his very first work of art, a giant 22-by-18-foot U.S. flag with the twin towers of the World Trade Center done in 25 stars each he painted on the side of his workshop on the farm he once owned south of Lind.

Charles H. Featherstone photo

Metal art continued from page 23

it for 30 years, raising a family on the land, as well.

But when none of his kids expressed any desire to farm the place, Strohmaier said he was faced with a choice.

“I sold out my part, moved to town, and joined the fire department. I’ve been in the fire department for 10 years — it’s quite something for a 53-year-old to join a volunteer fire department — but I’ve been on over 600 calls,” he said.

He’s also gotten himself elected to the Lind City Council, the local school board, and built a workshop next to his house, where he started tinkering with all those metal parts.

While he said there was no inkling in the years he farmed he had any artistic inclination, after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Strohmaier said he painted a giant American flag on the side of his shop door with the 50 stars in the blue field arranged in the shape of two towers of the World Trade Center.

“Twenty-five stars in each tower. Look at the symmetry on it all,” he said. “It’s still out there on the farm.”

The first sculpture Strohmaier created was a giant, 8-foot tall praying mantis getting ready to devour a tiny centipede. There’s a second centipede crawling on a long, metal leaf lower down, and beneath them all, a worm crawls along the mantis’ feet.

It’s an ornate work Strohmaier said took several years to finish as he worked “on and off,” adding things as he saw fit until it struck him the piece was done.

“I can’t think of anything else I want to do to it,” he said.

He’s just started working on a sculpture of a sandhill crane family, building the bird bodies with curved pieces of buggy springs and the feathers from small scraps of metal, which once bolted axles to wood.

After coming up with an idea, Strohmaier said he sketches and plans meticulously — he has notebooks full of drawings — because he doesn’t want to waste time or resources sanding, shaping and welding iron and steel only to make something



A metal sculpture of an eagle catching a salmon as salmon are migrating over the falls. *Charles H. Featherstone photo*



A closeup of the 12th Seahawk feeding her young “a pigskin trout.” *Charles H. Featherstone photo*

working, cutting and welding. The farmer sculpture, for example, has over 10,000 separate welds in it, he said.

“It’s a lot of sitting and thinking,” Strohmaier said of the artistic process. “I draw an idea out, and then put it together. I try to double and triple check everything before, because it costs me money.”

He’s sold a few pieces for “thousands of dollars,” and exhibited a few works at the Basalt Collective Fine Art Gallery in Moses Lake, Strohmaier said. He’s also got pieces on public display in half-a-dozen towns and cities from Othello to Coeur d’Alene, including some public benches he made for downtown Ritzville. But Strohmaier calls himself “a pretty well-kept

that doesn’t work.

Like the wheat heads made from bits of combine chain, part of the sculpture of farmer scything — the farmer is painted official Washington State University crimson. He wanted to paint those purple, to reflect the long-standing rivalry between WSU and the University of Washington.

“So it looked like he was cutting the Huskies,” Strohmaier said. “I painted one head, but it didn’t look right.”

Strohmaier said he spends his afternoons in his workshop, four or five hours nearly every day, planning and



Tom Strohmaier stands with a pile of rusted old buggy and horse cart parts behind his Lind house, where he creates artworks from that scrap metal.

Charles H. Featherstone photo



An Atlantic bluefin tuna sculpture created from the springs of old horse-drawn buggies by Lind artist Tom Strohmaier. Charles H. Featherstone photo

secret,” and has made almost no effort to advertise or promote his work.

“I’m almost to the point where I need a big art gallery to show it off,” he said. “Other than that, I really haven’t tried to sell anything. I don’t know what this stuff is worth.”

Strohmaier said he could calculate the price for an artwork by multiplying how long it took to create by the average hourly wage for a welder, which is roughly \$21, according to the website Indeed.com. That means a piece like the farmer, which Strohmaier said took “over 220 shop hours” to create, would have a price tag of roughly \$4,620.

Of course, Strohmaier isn’t all that concerned whether he sells a piece like the farmer, or the 12th Seahawk, or the work he’s just started. He’s more interested in creating art than making money from it right now.

“I think it’s worth some money, but I don’t care if I sell it,” he said. “I don’t need to sell it, and I like looking at it.” ■

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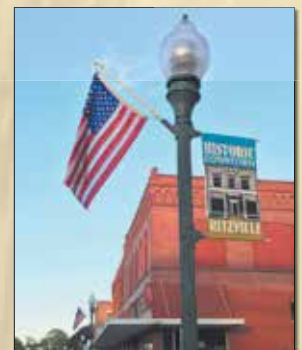
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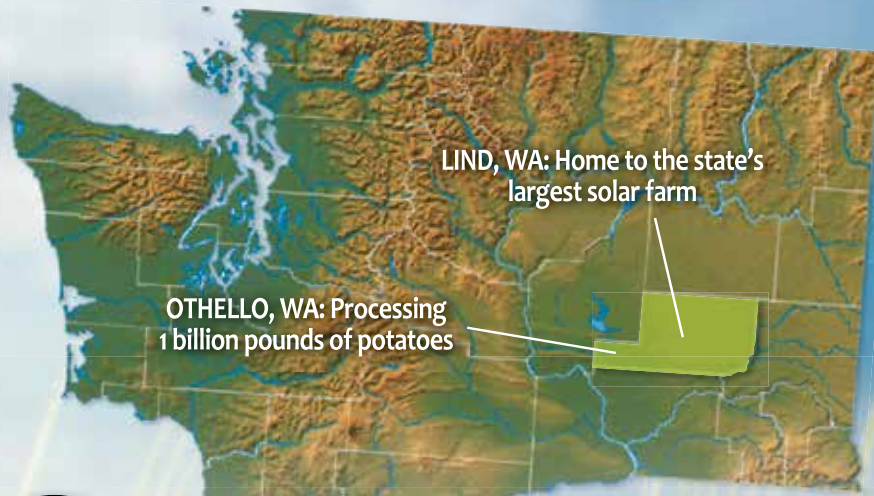


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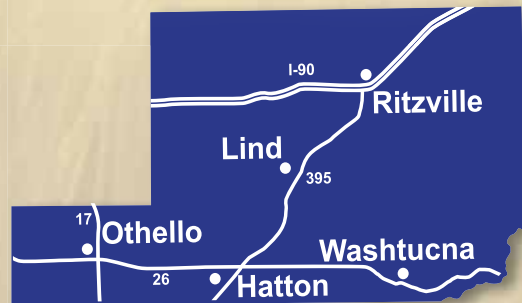
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'A WIN'

Mi Jalisco Mexican Restaurant brings flavor to Ritzville

By Charles H. Featherstone

Fermin Castellon said running a restaurant is making money the hard way.

"I have no school degree or anything like that," said Castellon, the owner of Mi Jalisco Mexican Restaurant in downtown Ritzville. "That's just what I've done all my life, just work in restaurants."

And he's not done too badly at it, given Castellon has managed to keep Mi Jalisco — named for the state in Mexico where he grew up — open in downtown Ritz-



Chips and salsa from Mi Jalisco Mexican Restaurant in Ritzville. Charles H. Featherstone photo



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ville and serving food to hungry customers for the last three years, including nearly two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Ritzville is a very small town, but the people here are very supportive,” Castellon said. “I was completely impressed with how much they come here and keep supporting the business.”

“To me, that’s a plus; that’s a win,” he added. “Since we got here, we’ve been treated real well.”

Mi Jalisco occupies the space on West Main Street formerly occupied by “The Legendary Circle T Inn,” at least according to the sign on the swinging door into the kitchen.

Castellon said he worked as a waiter at various restaurants for a number of years and ran an uncle’s tavern in Pendleton, Oregon, before deciding what he really wanted to do was own his own restaurant.

“I cannot be a waiter all my life,” he said.

Castellon said he was able to open Mi Jalisco because he knew the owner of the building, who invited him to come to Ritzville.

“He said, ‘I have this empty building; you may want to give it a try and see what happens. Run it for a year, and if you like it, I’ll sell it to you,’” Castellon said. “I did that, and here I am.”

“We are buying the building, and at least we accomplished that goal,” he added.

Castellon said he’s no cook; he’s learned to work a kitchen over the years and follows fairly simple recipes, and he’s fairly modest and self-effacing about the food served. It’s fairly standard Mexican-

Flavor continued on page 31

AT LEFT: Fermin Castellon, the owner of Mi Jalisco Mexican Restaurant in downtown Ritzville, stands in his kitchen just before opening. *Charles H. Featherstone photo*

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More options

Local leaders see growth in their communities and more opportunities ahead for residents and newcomers

By Rachal Pinkerton

Adams County is growing. New businesses are opening. New faces are being welcomed to the small towns across the county. Neighbors are working together to bring a sense of community to their towns.

“We have sold a ton of houses recently in the past year or two,” said Jamie Schmunk, president of the Lind Chamber of Commerce. “We had a lot of empty houses. There are really a lot

of cool new people in town.”

And some of the new residents have opened up new businesses in town, including a coffee shop, a diner and a tavern.

One tradition that’s changed in the last couple of years due to COVID-19 has been the lighted nighttime Christmas parade. The parade traditionally only went downtown.

“Last year with COVID, we decided to take the parade up and down the streets,” Schmunk said. “It was nice to see people coming to their windows or coming outside, giving us Christmas greetings. People were so excited. We decided to do it again.”

Schmunk said when she first moved to Lind 16 years ago, the parade moved her.

“I had never seen one before,” Schmunk said. “It was so touching. I want to keep that going.”

As new people continue to move into Lind, Schmunk will have the opportunity to share that emotion to others.

Othello, too, has seen a lot of growth in housing in the past few years.

“Someone is building homes all the time,” said Chris Faix, executive director for the Port of Othello. “As soon as they build one, it’s sold.”

The need for housing in Othello is such the port was asked if it would consider selling some of its commercial land for housing, if the area could be rezoned.

“If it’s needed, I wouldn’t say no,” Faix said. “There is a need for affordable housing.”

The Port of Othello has 70 acres of commercial land for sale in Othello, where hotels, restaurants and other businesses can locate. Faix said the port would help get the zoning changed if someone wanted to build houses on the land.

The port also has 105 acres of industrial land for sale at Bruce, a small town a few miles away from Othello, for industries that will employ a large number of people.

“We’re continually trying to search for food and beverage industries that will employ more people here,” Faix said. “We’re trying to bring development to Othello and Adams County.”

One project the port recently finished is building a new hangar at the Othello Airport, giving the airport a total of 32 hangars. In recent years, the runway has been resurfaced. The airport also offers 24-hour refueling.

“We have a competitive price on fuel,” Faix said. “We have been told by pilots that they go a little out of their way to fuel up here.”

To encourage the start of new businesses, the port owns a building where new businesses can get started without having to pay full price for rent.

“It has been full since I took this job,” Faix said. “We’re doing our best to help businesses in there make a go of it.”

Faix said the port would work with anyone interested in locating on port land, whether a truck stop, hotel, restaurant, food and beverage or housing.

“We want to bring people and jobs to Othello,” Faix said. “If someone can get some housing going, as well, we’ll move forward with that as well.”

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Opportunities continued on page 32



Luis Villasenor, Fermin Castellon's nephew, is a waiter at Mi Jalisco Mexican Restaurant.
Charles H. Featherstone photo



Two soft tacos from Mi Jalisco Mexican Restaurant.
Charles H. Featherstone photo

Flavor continued from page 29

American fare of burritos, enchiladas, fajita platters and nachos, but it's been enough in Ritzville to keep the doors open and the customers coming.

But Castellon's nephew, 23-year-old Luis Villasenor, said the food is what drew him to Ritzville from Seattle and keeps him working as a waiter at Mi Jalisco.

"That's why I started working here, because of the good food and the opportunity for me, as well," he said. "A lot of people come in here and ask, 'What's good?' And I say 'Everything!' And they think I'm lying."

"And that's why I like working here, because everything's good," Villasenor said. "I put myself in a place where I can be needed, where my uncle needed help."

Villasenor said working for his uncle at Mi Jalisco for the last few years has helped him figure out what he wanted to do in life — eventually go back to college, study hotel and hospitality management, and maybe run a restaurant or a hotel at some point.

He also said his uncle was wise in starting a business in Ritzville, because it's a little town with a lot of possibilities, noting the town sits at the juncture of Interstate 90 and U.S. Route 395. State Route 261 also meets I-90 at Ritzville.

"I see a lot of potential here, which I think is what my tio saw when first got here," Villasenor said. "They need food here other than burgers. They need more diversity in food options."

Castellon said he's been helped by the nearby interstate.

Despite the challenges, he gets up every morning, turns the burners on and makes lunch and dinner for hungry travelers and local residents, even through a pandemic.

"I have no complaints, really, and I know that a lot of places have struggled just as much as we have, if not more," Castellon said. "The work is hard, all day every day. But I do like what I do." ■

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Opportunities *continued from page 30*

Washtucna has also seen new community members.

“Real estate has been changing hands,” said Kriss Bottino, a member of the Lions Club in Washtucna and the pastor of the only church in the community. “We’ve had young families move in. School attendance is up significantly this year. There are more kids in the school, which speaks mostly about the leadership in the school right now. I can’t say enough good things about (the) principal.”

Another area of growth Bottino has seen is community health.

“The food bank has grown significantly,” Bottino said.

The Washtucna Food Bank started around 2018 and was initially serving 35-45 households. Now it serves approximately 60 households from Washtucna and surrounding communities. According to Bottino, it is the only food bank for at least 30 miles.

The building where the food bank is housed is in an old hardware and insurance building. The space is shared with the local museum, which was started only a few years before the food bank.

“The volunteer base is small, but mighty,” Bottino said, of the people who operate both the food bank and museum. “There are some people with a real vision for the community and a heart for the community.”

One project the town is wanting to do is make an art park and informational ice age walking trail around That NW Bus, an iconic roadside attraction on state Route 261 near Washtucna. The bus, which can be found on Instagram under #thatnwbus, is constantly changing and attracts visitors. The community is working on obtaining grants to fund the park and walking trail.

“We have a community that is trying to be innovative and use stewardship with what we do have,” Bottino said.

Ritzville has also seen growth in the housing market in the past year.

“It is thriving,” said Katelin Davidson, with the Ritzville Area Chamber of Commerce.

Empty homes in town have been filled, and new homes are being constructed. As more businesses allow employees to work remotely, small towns are seeing an increase in residents who want a country lifestyle with low-cost living. Ritzville is a prime location because of its easy interstate freeway access.

Businesses in the town have also grown in the past year, expanding into the world of digital and virtual services.

“Businesses have been able to promote themselves in the digital world, not just brick and mortar,” Davidson said. “We really admire all of our businesses for being able to make it through the pandemic and be contributing members. We see the future continue to be stronger and brighter.”

Ritzville is continuing to attract more businesses to town, with a new development near the interstate and the Love’s Travel Stop & Country Store.

“It’s a good sign to see that our town is growing,” Davidson said. “Growing in a visible location.”

As towns and businesses in Adams County grow, so do the opportunities for their residents and potential residents.

“It is great that people have options,” Davidson said. “The industries are very diverse in what we can offer. People can do just about anything in our county. It is a great opportunity.” ■

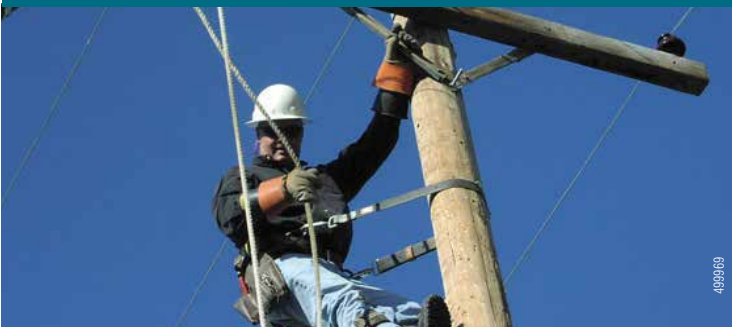


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Dr. Sara Thompson Tweedy.
Big Bend/Courtesy photo

By Rebecca Pettingill

Big Bend Community College President Dr. Sara Thompson Tweedy said, in reflection of her first year as president, she is happy about the direction the college is moving in and looks forward to the future and the continued expansion of services the college hopes to offer in its service area.

When she became president of the college, she did not want to change the direction of the college.

“I stepped into a college that was in forward motion. There were a lot of good things happening related to work around accreditation, launching bachelor’s of applied science, starting an ag mechanics program, working with our workforce partners, so I feel like I stepped into that and one of the things that I felt was really important was to not come in and be a president who commandeered the agenda, but to be a president who would come in and support the innovations that were already happening.”

She also said this was a big part of the reason why she wanted this particular job.

“I felt like this community was healthy, that it was innovating, it was being proactive in its

BBCC continued on page 34

ONE YEAR IN

Big Bend Community College president strives to continue to expand educational access, and looks back at her first year

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efforts to support students and their success, and that's why I wanted to be a part of Big Bend. So, I recognized right away, even in the interview process, that my role was going to be stepping into a healthy organization and helping it sustain its momentum," Thompson Tweedy said.

She feels like her values align with the community's values of educating students, both in the high school running start program and as adults, and doing the best to ensure the students' success and supporting them holistically.

Part of her vision for the college is how to expand educational access in the college's service area. Big Bend serves all of Grant and Adams counties, as well as a sliver of Lincoln County. Thompson Tweedy explained that it is not always feasible for people who live on the edges of the service area to commute to Moses Lake to Big Bend's campus for classes. Her vision is that Big Bend is accessible to everyone, regardless of where they live in the service area.

In order to address that issue, she has worked with the mayor in Mattawa, the superintendent, the high school principal and the Wahluke School District to name a few, to see what the needs are in the Mattawa area (western Grant County) to better serve them.

She also brought up the digital divide that is affecting people in the college's service area.

"Based on these conversations we had, we brought ESL (English as a Second Language) classes and adult basic education to Mattawa. Working with the school district there, they gave us

Dr. Sara Thompson Tweedy works at her computer in her office at Big Bend Community College. As president of the college, she said this past year a big focus was responding to COVID-19 and being flexible. This included a drive-thru graduation for graduates this past spring.

Big Bend/Courtesy photo




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“

I felt like this community was healthy, that it was innovating, it was being proactive in its efforts to support students and their success ...

”

— Dr. Sara Thompson Tweedy
Big Bend Community College president

space. Now we have a waiting list,” Thompson Tweedy said. She wants to bring this service to Quincy and Othello, as well.

“As we build on this vision, it will go beyond just ESL and adult basic education, it will become college courses and programs,” she said.

She says those courses and programs could be specific to the workforce or need in those communities.

Thompson Tweedy said that along with the progress on serving the more distant cities, most of 2021’s efforts have been in responding to COVID-19 and being flexible. That flexibility included turning graduation of spring 2021 into a drive-thru ceremony.

She also said that during the year, her respect and admiration for the Big Bend community has grown.

“Big Bend is a wonderful community of educators who care deeply for students,” Thompson Tweedy said. ■



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The 5C brand of the Curtis family ranch.
Charles H. Featherstone photo



Angus heifers in a pasture run by Miles Curtis, of The Herd 5C, a boxed beef business based on a ranch north of Ritzville. *Charles H. Featherstone photo*

CONNECTING with customers

The COVID-19 shutdown became the right time for a ranching family to start a new venture

By Charles H. Featherstone

When you order a box of beef from The Herd 5C, you will most certainly get a little handwritten note — in silver ink on thick tan paper — from Peyton Curtis.

“I want clients to feel like they are becoming part of our family,” said Curtis, 21, who is home on a weeklong break from her studies at California Polytechnic State University, in San Luis Obispo.

She sits at a kitchen table in the family’s sprawling farmhouse in what both she and her father Miles — a third-generation eastern Washington cattle rancher — refer to as “no man’s land” along the line between Adams County and Lincoln County to the north.

It’s quiet here, at the end of a long, county road that alternates between dusty and muddy, and when you stand still you can hear the wind blow and nothing else. It’s where they run their 1,300-head Angus ranch, and where Peyton — home from her university studies because of the COVID-19 pandemic — started the family’s mail-order beef business.

“As this grows, we always want to have that connection with our clients,” Miles said. “We don’t want to get so big that we start losing sight of our core business.”

“Our core is what builds us,” Peyton added. “It’s why we’re here.”

The “we” is The Herd 5C, a mail-order boxed beef business

the Curtis family started in early 2020. They offer a varied selection of steaks, roasts, ribs, brisket, ground beef and fajita beef, all produced from the Curtis family’s Angus herd and processed in an Odessa slaughterhouse Miles purchased last year, as well.

They aren’t anywhere near as big as Butcher Box or Omaha Steaks, but the Curtis family has managed to make a go of things from what city folks might call the middle of howling nowhere. They do it by selling online and at pop-up shops from a refrigerated truck Peyton drives to farmers markets (when she’s not at school in California) across the Columbia Basin.

“She flew in on a Saturday afternoon, ran a pop-up on Sunday morning in Moses Lake, and she will do another one in Spokane (on Saturday),” before she heads back to school in California, Miles said.

“My breaks from school are not breaks anymore,” she said. “They’re work vacations.”

This is no small feat for a company Peyton started because she was home from school and looking for a distraction from her studies during the COVID-19 lockdowns of early 2020.

“It helped that I was bored out of my mind doing organic chemistry,” she explained. “Any excuse to get away from the organic chemistry.”

To be fair, vertical integration — not only raising the cattle, but slaughtering and selling the beef — was something the Curtis family was considering for a long time, both Curtises said. But in the early part of the pandemic, Peyton explained she looked at the beef shortages in American supermarkets and thought the

Beef continued on page 38

AT LEFT: Miles Curtis and his daughter Peyton, with the family dog Danc. *Charles H. Featherstone photo*

Beef continued from page 37

time had come to make that move.

“So, Dad acquired the beef processing plant and said, ‘You’re going to sell our beef,’ and I said, ‘OK,’” she said. “This had been a dream of ours. We had talked about it since I was in high school, but it was kind of ... we just had to finally do it.”

Miles said he’d been eyeing the abattoir in Odessa, which had been started by a co-op of ranchers in 2012 who tried but simply could not make it work, for years.

“It was a fortuitous chain of events that occurred,” he said. “It was finally just time, and everybody had kind of walked away and plum given up on that place.”

Having the slaughterhouse allows the Curtis family to control every part of the operation. Miles said the bar codes on every Herd package of meat says where the animal it came from was raised, letting the Curtises track the lineage of each animal, figure out which genetics yield better meat, and then breed and raise their cattle accordingly.

“Very few people in this boxed beef industry actually see the calf born on their ranch,” Peyton said. “We’re the real deal.”

Both Miles and Peyton said The Herd 5C offers USDA prime and USDA choice beef at competitive prices. The Herd 5C’s Cowboy Box — 4 pounds of ground beef, 1 pound of fajita or stew meat, 3 pounds of steaks and 3 pounds of roast — is \$125.

It doesn’t help right now, everything from boxes to shipping to the dry ice used in keeping frozen beef frozen

as it wends its way across the land, is getting more expensive. Which means The Herd 5C is charging more, as well.


“It’s frustrating for me because I don’t want to raise prices and I want it to remain accessible to everyone. But costs of everything are substantially increasing,” Peyton said.

So far, they’ve managed to grow and get established largely by word of mouth, though Miles noted The Herd 5C is beginning a big push to advertise and find new customers.


Which means a lot of work for everybody.



Peyton Curtis, founder of The Herd 5C. Charles H. Featherstone photo



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Peyton Curtis writes thank-you notes to nearly everyone who buys beef from The Herd 5C. *Charles H. Featherstone photo*

“I’ve got a ranch to run and a packing plant to run and other things and Peyton is a full-time student two states removed,” Miles said. “Peyton is taking care of all of the marketing and the logistics between customer relations and things she can do remotely, which is fantastic, because that is the hardest part of this business.”

It takes a lot of planning, Miles said, to manage inventory properly. It takes 16-18 months to raise a cow to the point where it can be slaughtered, so Miles wants to make sure they can fill everyone’s order and not run out. That means keeping growth of both the cattle herd and The Herd 5C business slow and measured, largely by focusing on repeat customers, he said.

“My fall calves that were born in September, they won’t come through until December of next year, and so we’re minimally advertising,” Miles said. “Because the last thing I want to do is run out of beef, and have somebody place an order and say, ‘Oh, I can’t.’”

“What we’re seeing is if we can get people to buy a box, they’re probably going to come back and buy another box,” he added. “The repeatability of customers has been fantastic.”

“We have a herd!” Payton said, referring to their repeat customers.

Because, as Miles noted, Americans eat around 60 pounds of beef a year each. As long as that persists, there will be a market for everything he can raise.

“I can sell everything off this ranch, and get bigger, and sell everything off those ranches, and we’re still just a microscopic dot in the general market,” he said. “So, we’d like to get that big, but we’d like to do it in a way that we maintain a connection.”

Which is where Peyton, with her handwritten notes, comes in. While she is getting ready to graduate from university in 2023, and has already applied to veterinary schools, Peyton said the business she’s helped start has connected her to the family ranch in a ways she never expected, and selling the family’s beef and working closely with customers helped her fall in love with ranching in a way she never had before.

“I sound crazy saying this because I’m 21 years old, but I feel extremely fulfilled doing this,” she said. “And I know that whatever I do during the next 40-50 years of my life needs to revolve around this ranch.” ■

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FRESH

off the grill

New eatery opens in Lind

By Charles H. Featherstone

The Highway 21 Grill is so new the storefront didn't yet have a sign, even after opening in late November 2021.

It's coming, said Bobbi Dreier as she slices cabbage, as are proper printed menus, business cards, a Facebook page and a website. Dreier co-owns the little hole-in-the wall eatery at 109 N. I St. with her hus-



ABOVE: Bobbi and Rusty Dreier discuss the finer points of lunch preparation as Rusty gets ready to cook up a batch of french fries for lunch customers. BELOW: Three cheeseburgers ready to be wrapped and sent to go. Charles H. Featherstone photos



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band Rusty, and she's getting ready to add the cabbage to a big tray of red potatoes, sausage, onions and spices that has been sitting in the oven all morning.

It's bar food for the customers at Haase's Bar right next door.

"We invested a lot of money in food, so we had to open," Bobbi said. "So we're open. We're doing pretty well considering we haven't done any advertising."

But word gets around in Lind, a town of around 560 people.

Rusty is busy mixing spices into fresh ground beef and cutting several Hutterite potatoes to make french fries for three to-go plates.

Most things at the Highway 21 Grill are fresh, with potatoes and beef bought locally, Bobbi said.

"There was a real need for family dining in Lind," Bobbi said. "And we want a place like we used to go to.

Real french fries and real hamburgers."

The Dreiers moved to Lind about three years ago. She is a former small town newspaper reporter and editor, and he retired after 36 years at Boeing designing parts for military airplanes and helping the company figure out how best to make different parts fit together.

They ended up in Lind because they both like small-town life.

"We have a house on the edge of town. It's quiet, it's peaceful. I like Lind," Bobbi said. "The people here are good, hard working people."

The menu — which right now is printed on thick, DayGlo paper — is fairly simple, mostly burgers of various kinds, salads, fries, chili, soup, and Rusty's specialty, German potato salad.

"Making people happy with food makes me happy," Bobbi said. ■

ABOVE: Highway 21 Grill opened at 109 N. I St., Lind.
BELOW: Highway 21 Grill's German potato salad. *Charles H. Featherstone photos*



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Washtucna, Washington

By Rebecca Pettingill

The Washtucna Heritage Museum is home to an array of artifacts dating throughout the century since Washtucna was founded. Washtucna is the oldest town in Adams County and is full of hidden gems.

The Washtucna Heritage Museum is located at 287 South Main Street in Washtucna. The museum is a non-profit working to preserve the story of the small eastern Washington town.

Supporters of the museum are constantly pursuing grants, hosting fundraisers and seeking out alternative

Museum supporters work to preserve small-town history

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ABOVE LEFT: Wash-tucna is the oldest town in Adam County, and the Washtucna Heritage Museum is home to an array of artifacts.

ABOVE RIGHT: The That NW Bus sits along state Route 261. The Washtucna Heritage Museum board hopes to turn the gravel lot into a park. *Rebecca Pettingill photos*

funding options to create a stable environment for their locally sourced artifacts.

Their latest project is restoring a building referred to as “the Lodge.” It was originally built in 1901 and is probably one of the oldest frame commercial buildings in the county still standing, according to the Washtucna Heritage Museum website. It sits only a couple of doors down from the museum on the next block corner.

The Lodge was initially home to Basset Hardware, but over the last century it has been a gathering place for many different entities, including Free and Accepted Masons.

The Lodge was donated to the museum in 2018

by Jack Guske. Immediately, the museum board and volunteers went to work mothballing the building and closing up the portion of the roof that had fallen apart.

Earlier in 2021, a group of volunteers worked to clear out debris and pigeon droppings from the Lodge. Their next step is to rebuild the roof, which they hope to do in the original gable style. In order to fund all the work needed on the Lodge, especially the dilapidated roof, short-term emergency funding is being sought.

An interesting feature to the building is the old metal fire escape slide, which is still intact. Such

Washtucna continued on page 49

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By popular demand

Housing action plan and regulation changes are seen as ways to address housing needs in Othello

By Cheryl Schweizer

It's mostly a good thing when a city is popular. But there are some challenges, even though they're good challenges.

The city of Othello is popular, which means there's a high demand for housing. The population jumped from about 5,800 in 2000 to about 8,400 in 2019.

Single-family homes, of course, are in demand and not just the standard three or four bedrooms. Community development director Anne Henning said there's demand for houses with one or two bedrooms, and five or six bedrooms.

Othello Mayor Shawn Logan said Othello is an attractive place for families. According to data from the Adams County Development Council, the median age in Othello is 27.1 years.

"We're a young community. We have a lot of kids," he said.

Other residents are looking for multi-family alternatives, like apartments or duplexes, triplexes or fourplexes. Henning said housing demand is expected to stay strong in Othello as businesses expand.

Othello is also the largest city in the county, and well located between Moses Lake to the north and the Tri-



Sergio Infante works on the garage of a house under construction in Othello in 2021. City officials are working on revisions to the city's building regulations to make it easier to build in town. *File photo*



Othello Mayor Shawn Logan. *File photo*

Cities to the south. It is served by state Routes 17, 24 and 26.

City officials are actively looking for more businesses that might want to locate in Othello, Logan said.

There's been a lot of housing construction in Othello over the last few years, such as at both ends of 14th Avenue, near Lee Road to the north and state Route 26 to the south. There's housing in what used to be vacant fields off 16th Avenue. But

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A player drives toward the basket during a basketball tournament in Othello's Lions Park in 2021. The park is the centerpiece of the city's extensive parks and recreation network, and is getting some upgrades in 2022. *File photo*

EYE ON OTHELLO

Recreation taken seriously

A project in Othello's Lions Park will be a game-changer, Mayor Shawn Logan says

By Cheryl Schweizer

It's just a fact of life. "Kids love to play," said Othello Mayor Shawn Logan.

Kids like to go swinging on the swings and slide on the slide, climb the climbing bars and crawl through the tunnels at playgrounds. A town needs places for kids to do those things.

Not only that, kids also like to play basketball. And soccer. And baseball. And a town needs places for kids to do those things, too.

It's also a fact of life that teens and adults like to play. Maybe it's basketball, or maybe it's soccer or baseball or softball, maybe it's riding a skateboard. Kids like skateboarding, too.

And all kids like to play, even when they face physical challenges.

Luckily for kids, and adults, in Othello, there are places to swing and play basketball, ride a skateboard and play softball. City officials have

Recreationn continued on page 48

there's demand for more.

Othello city officials have been working to make it easier to build new housing of all kinds.

"Open the doors of opportunity," Logan said.

City officials started with a study to determine what was really needed. Once city officials know what the needs really are, Logan said, they can work to address them.

The report from BERK Consulting had some surprising results, Logan said. According to the study, about 42% of current households in Othello are one or two people, Henning said, but there are many households with seven people or more. Logan said he expected the greatest need would be for three or four bedrooms, but according to the study the city needs both bigger and smaller houses.

According to the report, the city also needs additional low-income housing, Logan said.

City officials have responded by starting with a plan to encourage more housing development in the Othello area. The study resulted in a "housing action plan," which was approved by the Othello City Council in 2021.

The study advised changing zoning codes to make it easier to develop housing within the city limits. Council members followed up by approving changes to housing density regulations. That means more housing can be built on a piece of property. Instead of eight lots per acre, Logan said, the changes mean a developer could make 10 to 12 lots per acre.

"You basically begin to address the problem," he said.

The changes apply to both existing and new development, Henning said.

The council also approved changes that allow auxiliary dwelling units in some parts of town. Sometimes called "mother-in-law apartments," they are now allowed where other kinds of multi-family housing are allowed. Homeowners will be allowed to rent them out.

"That's kind of a big deal," Henning said.

The changes haven't come without a lot of discussion and some controversy. The auxiliary dwelling unit discussion lasted nearly two years. While the ordinance passed, some council members opposed it.

The changes made have drawn attention, generating interest from out-of-area developers. Henning said.

"But there's still some work to do," Logan said.

City officials are working on development codes and regulations to provide more flexibility in building housing, Logan said, whether it's single-family or multi-family.

Henning said city officials also are looking at other options, including some that haven't really been considered before. She cited the example of a project that ultimately didn't happen, but sparked some new thinking nonetheless.

There was interest in redeveloping a downtown building to include residential and commercial use. Mixed residential-commercial development is something to consider, Henning said, since there is vacant commercial property.

City officials also continue to look for opportunities, such



Carlos Gonzalez works on a window sill on an Othello house under construction in 2021. Othello is a popular place to live, and housing is in high demand as a result. *File photo*

as tax credit programs that benefit development of low-income housing, or higher-density housing.

Othello, Logan said, is on the verge of commercial, residential and population growth, and city officials are doing what they can to accommodate and encourage that growth. ■



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A player sets up a spike during a 2021 volleyball tournament in Othello's Lions Park. *File photo*

Recreation continued from page 46

worked to upgrade recreation facilities for children and adults.

The latest project is the new 7,000-square-foot Pride Rock Playground at Lions Park, which replaces the old swings and climbing bars with new ones, adds a climbing wall and a surface that's more kid-friendly when they fall, because that, too, is part of playing.

The old swings, slides and climbing bars were still serviceable, but they were, well, old. Logan said he played on the original swings when he was a kid and Logan is, um, over 30 years of age.

The funding was obtained in 2021, the design approved and the playground is to be built in 2022.

"This playground is going to be awesome. Really awesome," Logan said in November 2021, before the project was completed.

It's built in two sections, one for kids 5 years of age and younger, including some toys for babies and toddlers. There's a separate area for children 5 to 12 years of age. There are special toys designed for kids with limited mobility. There are more benches and picnic tables, and over time all those new trees will get a lot bigger.

"It's a game-changing project for Othello," Logan said.

There's a new bike rack, a new path from the parking lot, and the old paths have been redesigned.

The playground project also included expansion of the basketball courts. There were two and there will be four before 2022 ends, with bleachers and team benches.

The new playground area also has information boards highlighting Othello's history and the local geography. It was designed to have something for almost everybody, Logan said.

Recreation continued on page 50



A skater rides the bowl at the Othello skate park in Lions Park. Lions Park is part of an extensive network of recreation opportunities in Othello, enhanced in 2022 with the construction of a new playground and two basketball courts. *File photo*

Washtucna continued from page 43

slides were a common addition to schools and other public buildings during the early 1900s, according to the museum website.

Washtucna Heritage Museum Board Secretary/Treasurer Michelle Plumb said they have applied to have the Lodge put on the historic register — they are just waiting for confirmation.

Plumb said their goal of restoring it is to turn it into a community gathering place like it has been in the past.

Washtucna Heritage Museum Board Vice President Kriss Bottino said another project they are working toward is turning the That NW Bus location into more of a park and visitor center than just the empty lot it currently is.

The That NW Bus is a former Toppenish School District 1955 Kenworth Pacific School Bus, broken down and spray-painted, along state Route 261 and visible from Route 26. It has attracted a lot of attention over the years, especially on social media. It is now a part living guest book/part art gallery. It is a pitstop for many on their way to Pullman traveling from the West.

It used to be located southwest of Washtucna, by the turnoff to Palouse Falls on Department of Natural Resources (DNR) land. In 2017, DNR decided it was more of a



Since acquiring the Lodge property in 2018, the Washtucna Heritage Museum board has mothballed the building. There is still a lot of work to be done on it. *Rebecca Pettingill photo*

liability than a charming roadside attraction, so the museum board acted quickly and relocated the bus. The land it currently sits on was a donation from Blankenship Farms in 2018.

The museum board hopes to turn the lot into an art park or Ice Age Floods learning trail. In 2019, WSU's Rural Communities Design Initiative put together a conceptual site plan but no official plan has been decided on yet, Plumb said. ■

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Recreation continued from page 48

“It’s not only a playground. It’s going to be a learning experience. And a fun experience,” Logan said.

The project was funded through grants and some local donations. The new playground was built with a \$500,000 grant from the Washington Wildlife Recreation fund, and the basketball court received a \$350,000 grant from the state’s Youth Activities Fund. Local organizations like the Othello Lions Club and the Columbia Basin Health Association also pitched in.

Logan said the latest U.S. Census data show that about 13% of Othello’s population is 13 years of age and younger. That being the case, city officials and the Othello City Council wanted to invest in the town’s young people, because they believe it’s going to be a good long-term investment.

“We’re working to make this a fun place for kids to grow up,” Logan said.

Lions Park is also the home of the city’s skate park — check out that bowl — the Othello Community Pool and the tennis courts. The ballfields adjacent to Lions Park were upgraded before the park project started.

Upgraded “up to a first-class level,” Logan said.

The four fields provide opportunities for groups to put on tournaments, with a central concession stand and a storage facility that works for a tournament central office.

They take their fun seriously in Othello. Opening day of the youth baseball season features a parade down Main Street to the

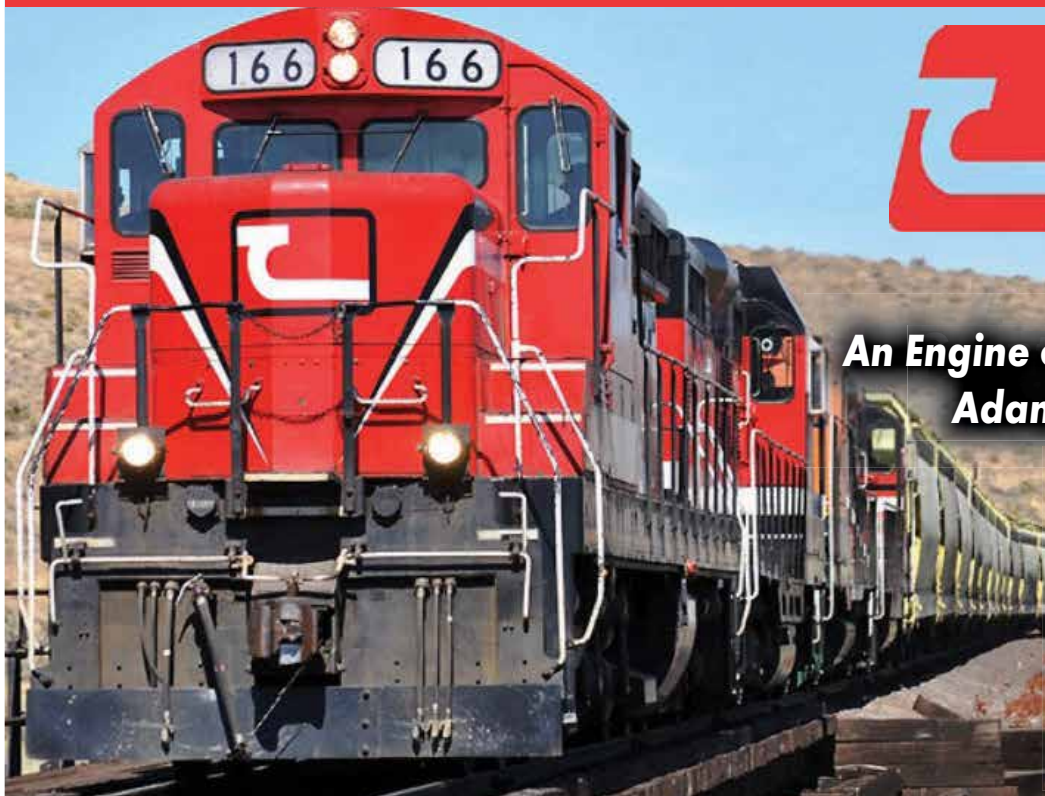


A volleyball player serves up the ball during a 2021 tournament in Lions Park in Othello, part of the city’s extensive parks and recreation department. *File photo*

ballpark. There’s a youth soccer league every spring, as well. The annual July 4 celebration featured volleyball and basketball tournaments, the first in a decade or more, and the organizers said they wanted to keep the tournaments going.

The city maintains a walking and bike path that circles town, from Lions Park down to Fourth Avenue, through Kiwanis Park, past McFarland Middle School, down Cemetery Street to 14th Street. ■

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