

THE ECHO

Created by incarcerated people

NEWS
FROM
THE
INSIDE

WINNER OF AMERICAN PENAL PRESS AWARD FOR BEST NEWSLETTER 2025

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EASTERN OREGON CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION

2500 WESTGATE

PENDLETON, OR 97801

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STARS SHINE BRIGHT UNDER CHAPEL LIGHTS

Annual Sing Along Showcases AIC and Staff Talents

Written by Alex Dewhurst and Kurtis Thompson

Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

Incarcerated people sing along to holiday music in the chapel on Dec. 23, 2025. Dental assistant Carrie Cary leads the vocals, accompanied by Tim Taylor on guitar.

The 17th annual Christmas sing-along was held on Dec. 23 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. in Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution’s Chapel.

About 60 adults in custody sang along to traditional Christian Christmas songs, including EOCI nurse Nathaniel John and dental assistant Carrie Cary. Several AICs and staff volunteered to lead the event.

The event included hot chocolate,

coffee and cookies after the sing-along.

Chaplin DiSalvo opened with a reading from Luke Chapter 2 of the Bible – the story of Jesus’ birth. After setting the tone, AIC Timothy Taylor, his company of singers and one pianist took to the stage.

“This performance is all about you.” he said, strapped with an acoustic guitar and ready to perform.

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OREGON DOC UNLIKELY TO CLOSE EOCI FOR BUDGET REDUCTIONS

Written by Berit Thorson

Published in the *East Oregonian*, reprinted with permission

Despite a social media post circulating from podcast “Oregon D.O.G.E.,” it’s unlikely the state will shut down Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution because of budget cuts.

Residents in Pendleton are reacting with concern to a Dec. 31 social media post from the podcast warning people about effects of possible statewide budget cuts.

While it’s true EOCI is on a list of possible reduction options for balancing the state’s 2026 and 2027 budgets, the Oregon Department of Corrections listed closing the prison as one of its worst-case scenarios.

The reduction options were part of an ongoing response to an anticipated statewide budget shortfall from the state’s approved budget for the biennium.

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The Echo Mission Statement

To serve the incarcerated community by providing monthly news and other important information, while highlighting the human experience in the carceral setting.

Direct questions and comments to EOCI Institution Work Programs (IWP). All views and opinions expressed are those of the contributing writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Corrections.

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EOCI

BUDGET continued from page 1

Addressing a budget deficit

The fiscal year 2027 projected general fund balance for the state is negative \$63.1 million as of December, up more than \$300 million from the state's September revenue forecast.

The general fund adopted budget for fiscal years 2026-27 is \$37.3 billion dollars, meaning the newest anticipated deficit is less than 1% — 0.169%, to be precise — of the total budgeted general fund.

To have a surplus, then, the state needs to adjust its revenues, reductions or costs to make up the difference and more than balance the budget, according to Amanda Beitel, the legislative fiscal officer who serves in a nonpartisan role helping with the state budget.

The total budget beyond the general fund is even larger, reaching nearly \$139 billion for the biennium. According to the National Association of State Budget Officers, in the fiscal years for 2026 and 2027, "the combined general and lottery funds enacted budget (are) up 11.7% compared to the previous two-year budget."

Still, a deficit means plans will have to change to balance the budget.

"When you're thinking about a \$63.1 million deficit, to resolve that, you're not really resolving to zero," Beitel said.

Instead, she said, the Legislature likely will aim to have a balance with a surplus of \$300 million to \$400 million, or about 1% of the state's expenditures.

For the 2026 and 2027 fiscal years, the state likely will have to make cuts to anticipated spending to offset the expected deficit. These cuts in planned spending may mean that programs ex-

pected to expand cannot or roles planned to be filled are left empty.

Closing EOCI would make waves, not ripples

The Legislature asked state agency department heads to create a two-tier list of reduction options — from preferred to least preferred — that add to a 5% budget reduction for their areas.

Beitel said the drastic drop in the September revenue forecast prompted the 5% reduction option request in October. Legislators wanted to start figuring out possible solutions in case the December revenue forecast created a downward trend. Though the December outlook increased significantly, it still leaves the state in a deficit if no changes to revenue or costs are made.

For the Department of Corrections, even a 5% reduction in its budget for this biennium is still a 9% increase over the 2023-25 statewide budget. Even accounting for inflation, the budget for the DOC would be bigger with a reduction than it was in the previous biennial state budget by about \$80 million, according to Legislative Fiscal Office analyst Steve Robbins.

Robbins, who analyzes the Department of Corrections budget for the office, said Oregon's budget for the DOC mostly accounts for human costs, such as employee wages and the necessary food and medical provisions for the adults in custody. He said it's challenging for public safety agencies to reach a 5% reduction option without drastic cuts to their operations.

"You have to close prisons in order to hit a number like that," he said. "By putting an institution like that on the list, they know it's going to create heartache. They don't like doing it because it causes communities stress and everything else, but they cannot hit a number without doing it."

Luckily, he said, it's highly unlikely the state will close Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, partly because there just isn't space to rehouse the adults in custody there and partly because the December revenue forecast improved so much over the September one, putting the state on a lower trajectory reduction path. Furthermore, Robbins said, politicians are aware suddenly closing a prison as large as EOCI wouldn't sit well with constituents.

"Closing Pendleton — it's not even on the radar (politically)," he said.

Department of Corrections Director Mike Reese spoke Nov. 17 to the legislators on a subcommittee focused on public safety within the Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means.

Closing the prison would not only affect broader public safety — as people would be released early from sentences elsewhere to make space for the approximately 1,300 people housed in EOCI — it also would mean more than 400 employees would either need to

transfer to another DOC facility or be out of a job.

Reese noted in his written reduction outline that “a significant number (of people) would be laid off in this area with a historically inhospitable employment market,” and closing EOCI would harm the local economy. The outline states about 207 people would lose their jobs.

He also mentioned to the subcommittee the possibility of cuts creates instability and fear.

“When we put these budget cuts out there, employees see a very personal impact on them, and communities feel that same sense of pressure,” he said.

Shutting down EOCI was listed as option 20 out of 21 within general fund reduction options for the Department of Corrections.

Greg Smith, who represents House District 57 — covering part of Umatilla County — and sits on the Joint Ways and Means Committee as co-vice chair,

said he has no intention of letting Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution shutdown.

“It's such a critical asset for the community, and not just Pendleton, for the surrounding areas, that there's no way we're gonna allow that to occur,” he said.

Beitel with the Legislative Fiscal Office said closing a prison “is a significant action that likely would not be taken at a 2% reduction level, which is the ballpark of where they're at now.”

Smith added that next session “we're probably going to have to make even deeper reductions” than the 2% reduction outlook for the upcoming short legislative session.

An updated revenue forecast is anticipated in early February, which aligns with the start of the short session. Beitel said the upcoming revenue forecast will “inform the final budget plan” for the Legislature in its efforts to rebalance the budget. | **ECHO**

IN OREGON

FEDERAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION DOWNSIZING

No Changes Imminent for Prison College Programs

Written by Alex Dewhurst

The federal government has been downsizing the Department of Education, which may concern some incarcerated people about the longevity of prison college programs.

Greg Jones, education director at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, said despite federal downsizing, he does not foresee changes in access to college programs or Second Chance Pell Grants for incarcerated people.

Second Chance Pell Grants are need-based student aid grants provided to people in state and federal prisons.

While prison programs have not been affected, the federal government has said the Department of Education is ineffective, and now responsibility for educating incarcerated people may transition to individual states. The Department of Education's workforce was cut in half under guidance from the Department of Government Efficiency.

How the Ed. Department Worked

Some prison education providers have been sunsetting their programs because of the administrative burden after staff cuts were made.

Despite the cuts, student aid has been largely unaffected.

The department worked with the DOC, colleges and accreditors to help students navigate a system not specifically designed for them. The department also developed the Prison Education Provider programs, and offered Second Chance Pell Grants.

Trump Administration's Goal

The downsizing agreements are designed to “reduce administrative bur-

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IN OREGON

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dens, and refocus programs and activities to better serve students and grantees,” according to a Nov. 18 press release from the administration.

The announcement expressed the Trump administration’s plan to transition the federal governments educational approach to workforce development.

There was no mention of the potential impact on adults in custody.

“My administration will take all lawful steps to shut down the department. We’re going to shut it down and shut it down as quickly as possible,” said Trump.

His administration said the agreements are “to break up the federal education bureaucracy, ensure efficient delivery of funded programs, activities, and move closer to fulfilling the President’s promise to return education to

the states.”

The order called for the department to simultaneously dismantle and maintain delivery of services, programs, and benefits. Although, federal funding is set by Congress and would require congressional approval to reallocate.

White House Press secretary Karoline Leavitt said that the Department of Education would not be abolished under Trump’s order, but would eventually become “much smaller than it is today.”

In contrast, Education Secretary Linda McMahon started a campaign to end her own department. She said on social media that the functions of the department could be better handled by the states and other agencies.

“Cutting through layers of red tape in Washington is one essential piece of our final mission,” she said.

The Impact of Education

AICs have used programs provided by the department to rehabilitate and reintegrate back to their community.

“Simply attending school behind bars reduces the likelihood of reincarceration by 29%,” said a study by the Department of Education.

The study reiterated how higher education prevents people from returning to crime. Instead, higher education transforms people into skilled workers who contribute to the economy.

“Every dollar spent on education returned more than two dollars to the citizens in reduced prison costs,” said the department.

For incarcerated people looking to transform themselves for reentry, it will be up to the states to demand clarity and develop best practices.

| ECHO

INCARCERATED STUDENTS TO HELP THE BLIND

Six Students Celebrated for Learning to be Braille Transcribers

Written by Phillip Luna

On Nov. 20, the Oregon Department of Corrections and Oregon Corrections Enterprise celebrated six adults in custody for their progress in the Unified English Braille course.

The self-study course, which began in July 2024, is an OCE program offered at Oregon State Penitentiary and Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. OCE is preparing to launch transcription services that will allow AICs to contribute directly to the community.

Two of the six students earned their UEB Literary Transcriber certification and became nationally certified Braille transcribers. The other four students are on the path to certification.

The students earn accreditation through National Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped in partnership with the National Federation of the Blind. Graduating students are qualified to work as Braille transcribers in the United States.

David Washington, a former resident of Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, was one of the two students who earned his Braille certification. He was relocated to OSP after he was accepted to the program.

The Echo interviewed Washington in January. Although the course provides students with valuable job skills, Washington said he wanted to learn

Braille to have a better relationship with his parent. His father lost his eyesight from diabetes.

To earn certification, Washington completed 19 lessons, passed a Braille reading test and produced a Braille manuscript, each reviewed by a nationally certified grader.

While teaching incarcerated people valuable job skills is one goal, the program’s primary mission is to provide transcription services and help create accessible education materials.

The Oregon Textbook and Media Center collaborated with OCE to create the program and to help meet the state’s growing need for accessible educational materials for blind and visually impaired K–12 students.

The course is funded by the Federal Bureau of Justice Assistance. **| ECHO**

LINES FOR LIFE TRAINING

Mental Health Peers Completed Training at OSCI

Written by Phillip Luna

Mental health peers at Oregon State Correctional Institution recently completed Mental Health First Aid training provided by Lines for Life.

Lines for Life is a regional nonprofit dedicated to preventing substance abuse, suicide and promoting mental wellness.

The Mental Health First Aid training built on the existing 40-hour peer support certification program the mental health peers had previously completed.

Lines for Life partners with the Oregon Department of Corrections to deliver Mental Health First Aid training to incarcerated people.

According to the Line for Life website, “nearly 50% of Oregon adults in jails and prisons live with a mental illness and lack the tools to manage their mental health.”

The training strengthens the mental health peers’ ability to recognize and respond to individuals experiencing mental health challenges. | **ECHO**

AROUND EOICI

REUSABLE SANDWICH BAGS PENDING APPROVAL

Single-Use Sandwich Bags May Be Discontinued, Reusable Bags to Replace

Written by Logan Gimbel

with contributions from Phillip Luna

Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution may be reducing cost in the near future.

Administrators of EOICI are reviewing durable, washable sandwich bags as an alternative to single-use bags.

In 2022, graduates from Roots of Success, an environmental literacy class, proposed replacing the current single-use sandwich bags with an eco-friendly option.

Three years later, residents may be getting this eco-friendly replacement.

It is currently unclear how the reusable bags would be supplied, but more likely than not the bag would be issued to each resident, similar to how the red sporks are provided.

Resident Troy Kirk tested the eco-friendly option for two weeks. He used the bag to store coffee, creamer and other items. He also prepared and cooked food with the bag.

“It’s a great way to use [fewer] plastic bags,” said Kirk. “It would be nice if we could buy more. I don’t know



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

how many they will issue us, one or two, but I would buy more.”

The bags measure about 7” long and 4” tall, and can hold 16 ounces. Kirk said it is enough to fit a jar of Coffee-mate hazelnut creamer.

The bags have a flat bottom, are microwave safe and can be washed in hot water. They are intended to withstand heavy use.

Some residents use the single-use sandwich bags, sometimes dozens of bags, for cooking. Kirk said the reusable bags may be harder to prepare with because there will be less of them.

“People will adjust and figure out work-arounds,” said Kirk.

Overall, Kirk said he recommends the bag as a good sustainable alternative to single-use plastic. | **ECHO**

AROUND EOCI

SOLVING A \$370 MILLION PROBLEM

Prisons Unlikely to Close, But Deficit Still Exists

Written by Chris Ainsworth

Oregon lawmakers met in November to discuss budget cuts due to a projected major deficit. Oregon lawmakers asked all state agencies to provide options that would reduce their legislatively approved budgets by 5% in an attempt to overcome an anticipated deficit of at least \$373 million.

The Oregon Department of Corrections submitted over 30 options that would help reduce spending.

Recommendations included a reduction in traveling expenses, purchasing of office supplies, community corrections and probation funding and closing two prisons in Oregon – Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution and South Fork Correctional Institution.

“I don’t think shutting down Oregon prisons will directly impact anyone who has a good amount of time left,” said Joshua Schoen, an EOCI resident with 20 years remaining on his sentence.

“All that would happen is people would get shipped to different institutions,” he said.

While rumors about closing the institution circulate periodically, shutting down prisons in Oregon is an option that would have a greater negative impact than the \$100 million dollars it would save annually. Closing down prisons would increase unemployment in small communities.

Closing EOCI or South Fork, however, was one of the most extreme recommendations submitted by ODOC.

Budget Cuts Could Affect People Exiting Oregon Prisons

Communities across the state will receive nearly \$60 million less for parole and probation officials than what they need to supervise the nearly 22,000 people currently on post-custody release.

Part of that money goes to housing and treatment resources for people recently released from jail or prison. Some counties will be forced to reduce bed space and some will have to completely eliminate housing for people recently freed with nowhere to go.

As part of addressing the problem, release program funding could also be reduced, impacting programs that provide state identification prior to release. This could leave men and women returning to society without proper forms of identification or resources to gain employment following release.

The Oregon Employment Department and ODOC could see an impact on in-prison WorkSource Reentry Centers across Oregon. The centers provide employment and reentry services for adults in custody prior to release.

“People getting out of prison probably aren’t going to be affected by cutting funding to programs for people releasing from prison,” Justin Denney said, who returned to the Oregon prison system two years after his release in 2016.

“Let’s be realistic, it is going to be victims in society that will be impacted the most,” said Denny. “People are getting set up for failure. And failure looks like victimizing people.”

“If you take away assistance for people who have been in prisons, people are going to go back to what they know,” Schoen said. “Not because they want to,

but because they have to. Because they believe that is the only way to provide for themselves.”

Budget Cuts Wide Spread

The State of Oregon’s proposed cuts could also impact the court system. While the state constitution prohibits reducing compensation for judges, both defense and district attorneys could face hurdles due to budget cuts.

The Oregon Public Defense Commission said reductions could be found by ending payments to district attorneys for discovery evidence requested by defense attorneys.

Oregon State Police proposed closing two forensic labs, one in Bend and the other in Pendleton, to help with the budget issues.

Financial assistance for low-income seniors who either have unstable housing or are homeless, state funding for homeless shelters and other outreach services for homeless Oregonians may also see a reduction in money or lose funding altogether.

Many of the options discussed could lead to more crowded prisons, less aid for education programs and fewer beds for Oregonians with housing issues.

Federal initiatives impacting state taxes, such as the exemption of overtime pay and tips from being taxed, could be to blame for Oregon’s budget issues.

During Oregon’s most recent legislative session, the Oregon House of Representatives voted to divorce the state’s tax code from the federal code to avoid further budget shortfalls.

The Oregon Senate, however, did not vote to decide the outcome, leaving many questions about the budget crisis to be discussed when legislative sessions resume in 2026. |ECHO

SINK REPLACEMENTS

Collaborative Project for Welding and Plumbing Department

Written by Chris Ainsworth

A **stainless-steel** countertop with dual sinks was installed on honor housing unit H1 in December. Several other sinks were installed around the facility in December and January.

For H1, rust issues prompted the replacement of the old single sink with a new dual sink unit.

The sink – originally highlighted in the Echo’s October 2025 article “It’s Not All Fun, Flags and Fire Pits” – was built by welding shop workers Benjamin Jones and Jacob Whitman.

“At first people didn’t know what to think because they fear change,” said H1 resident Dion Patino. “Now it’s like it was always there. People enjoy the counter space when they are cooking or cleaning.”

EOCI’s welding shop has been tasked with building replacements for all sinks in the institution that have fallen into disrepair.

The plumbing shop will be installing the counters and installing faucets. The first to be replaced will be single sinks

on the west side of the facility, starting with the most damaged.

“It’s a little bit of work to get the old countertops out because they have been there so long, but not very long on the install,” plumbing shop worker James Renfro said.

“This project is great because it gives something new on the units and the chance to practice our skills,” he said.

Designs for the counters were developed by AICs in the facility’s welding program.

When fabrication is finished, sinks and counters will be replaced according

WORKERS BACKPAID AFTER GREEN SHEET MISHAP

Some Workers Shorted Pay in November, Here’s What to Know

Written by Phillip Luna

Dozens of adults in custody had short PRAS payouts in December, but the problem was quickly corrected.

Several departments, such as recycle, did not receive PRAS credit for working Nov. 28, the day after Thanksgiving. The day is a holiday for the Oregon Department of Corrections, but some areas were still working.

The prison pays incarcerated workers through the Performance Recognition Award System, or PRAS.

The system awards the worker points for each day worked, and each month the Work Programs Department tallies the points, which turns into monetary value between \$11.88 and \$106.80.

“With PRAS, staff have to sign off each day for their worker to get credit,” said Ray Peters, Institution Work Pro-

grams Coordinator. “We didn’t issue awards to these departments because we did not know they were working.”

The Institution Work Programs Department issues staff and work supervisors “green sheets” every day. The sheets, named because they are printed on light green paper, allow the staff member to account for their workers.

If the work supervisor signs and returns the green sheet to Work Programs, the workers earn PRAS for the day.

“After PRAS was paid out for the month, we were contacted by multiple AICs claiming pay discrepancy,” said Peters. “After determining they were correct, we fixed the issue.”

Peters said it is important for staff and AICs to understand the PRAS process.

For staff, signing a green sheet for

each worked day is essential. If a work program does not receive a green sheet for a day they are working, the supervisor should contact the department.

For incarcerated workers, Peters recommends they track days they work each calendar month and use the PRAS matrix on housing unit bulletin boards to ensure their award is accurate.

“There is always the potential for mistakes,” he said.

He also reiterated that PRAS is determined by calendar month. The December PRAS payout is based on days worked in November, and so forth. The award can vary because some months have more working days.

“If you believe you are missing part of your award,” he said, “contact Work Programs for an explanation.” | **ECHO**

AROUND EOCI

BIRRIA TACOS COMING SOON

GOGI's Next Fundraiser Expected In April

Written by Alex Dewhurst

GOGI at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution plans to sell a meal from Mari Tacos in Hermiston for club fundraising around April.

GOGI leadership expects the meal to consist of 8 oz of birria, rice, beans, four fresh tortillas, green and red salsa, cilantro, onions, lime.

Gonzalo Barbosa-Salgado, a member of GOGI leadership, said the meal should cost around \$22 per person and will include two sodas.

Money raised will go towards buying GOGI books.

Keaton Stephens, also a part of GOGI leadership, said they received mixed reactions from a previous fundraising event in October 2024.

"We're hoping everyone will recognize that this is a new vendor and will walk into this with an open mind," said Stephens.

Adults in custody bought more than 700 burritos, but some participants

were unhappy with the quality and size of the meal.

"By putting a picture in The Echo, we hope to give people a chance to see the meal before they buy it," he said.

Stephens said he hopes AICs will give this new vendor a chance.

Order forms will be distributed to housing units when the event is finalized.

GOGI, which stands for Getting Out by Going In, is an independent and group study program based around 12 cognitive tools which help AICs develop critical thinking skills.

To learn more, AICs can contact correctional rehabilitation or search for "GOGI" on the Edovo application on tablets. | **ECHO**



Photo provided by Joe Byrnes/EOCI

Make-your-own Birria Tacos from Mari Tacos. The meal includes 8 oz of birria, rice, beans, four fresh tortillas, green and red salsa, cilantro, onions, lime.

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SEEKING

ARTISTS

FOR QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHT

The Echo will be featuring artwork from several artists in a quarterly spotlight. All forms of art are welcome, such as painting, pencil art, woodworking, metalworking and even photography.

If you are interested in sharing your most recent work, contact the IWP: Journalism Department.

KEEPING THE DOORS HINGED

A Job Spotlight on the Door Crew

Written by Jamil Chavis

Incarcerated maintenance workers keep Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution's doors hinged.

There are hundreds of doors and multiple gates in the institution, all maintained by a three-man maintenance team, dubbed the "door crew."

Maintenance worker David Nemoede said doors can be complicated.

While on the job, he said the door crew workers maintain or replace handles, hinges, knobs, rollers, cylinders, pin locks, mortises and closers.

The crew is tasked with a monthly preventative maintenance routine. Cell doors, television room doors, closet doors and staff bathroom doors are oiled and greased during those checks. Even with preventative measures, some doors still break down.

"I maybe getting ready for yard and out of nowhere I get called to fix a

door," said Nemoede.

Door crew workers are called to fix most doors within the institution. Since there are no training manuals or classes for door repair available, workers rely on shared knowledge or trial and error.

The facility was built in 1910 and purchased by the Oregon Department of Corrections in 1981. Because of the facility's age, the door crew works fairly regularly.

Nemoede started on the door crew in early 2025 and was promoted to crew lead in August. Be it repairs or rebuilds, Nemoede does it all.

"I've had to repair other people's work...sometimes it looks like Swiss cheese," he said.

Some doors are eroded, which makes them easier to break because they are hardened steel. Nemoede passes along this specialized knowledge to his new team members, residents Kyle Winters

and Jason Brown.

Winters became a maintenance worker Sept. 16.

He decided to switch to the door crew to build job skills before he releases, he said.

"This is my chance at holding a more physical job with more labor before I go home," he said.

Winters will certainly get his chance – EOCI has more than 500 cell doors alone. H building housing units, disciplinary segregation unit and all west side housing units are cells.

"I enjoy what I do, so it is not much of a job for me," said Nemoede. "I get to work with other [physical plant] shops and learn too."

The door crew is on call seven days a week, with typical work hours from 7 -10:30 a.m. and 12:30-2:30 p.m. PRAS begins at 12 points and caps at 16. PRAS is a system which allows adults in custody to earn monetary awards.

Those interested in applying for the door crew can send an application to the office of Institution Work Programs. | **ECHO**

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Artwork by Michael Ledbetter



Woodworking and wood burning from the carpentry shop.

HOLIDAY RECAP

SING ALONG continued from page 1



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

In the chapel, Tyson Weddle, left, sings while Tim Taylor, right, plays guitar during the annual holiday sing along in December.

Lyrics and Christmas imagery were projected behind Taylor and choir. Attendees gradually clapped and sang along with hearty, masculine voices – albeit pitchy.

Halfway through the event, EOCI resident Tyson Weddle sang a starkly serious and baritone solo of “Angels We Have Heard on High.”

“I have been singing in choir since I was a little kid,” Weddle said with a laugh. “It’s been about four years since I sang like that.”

Weddle said he used to have terrible stage fright.

“But then I started doing it for God and it wasn’t about me anymore,” he said. “I just let the music fill me up and carry me along.”

After Weddle’s solo and subsequent duo with Taylor, Nathaniel John, sang “Mary Did You Know.” The crowd roared with applause.

As the sing-along neared conclusion, Cary stepped into the limelight.

The crowd gave a standing ovation for her rendition of “A Baby Changes Everything.”

The sing-along concluded at around 7:30 p.m. | **ECHO**

EOCI’s Two Clubs Hand Out Treats to AICs



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

Enrichment Club member James Renfro mixes popcorn with caramel, chocolate and marshmallows. The club made and handed out popcorn balls in December. EOCI’s other club, GOGI, gave out small bags of candy to the AIC population.

Gospel Echoes Hands Out Cookies And Sings Carols



Photo by provided Chaplain Zuleta

Chaplain Zuleta poses selfie-style with the Gospel Echoes Christmas Carolers in the background. Gospel Echoes gave out Grandma’s Cookies, address books and hand-colored holiday cards in December.

TEN YEARS OF ANGEL TREE

EOCI Staff Partner with the Salvation Army to Provide Gifts for Kids

Written by Phillip Luna

EOCI's 10th annual Angel Tree event occurred in December 2025. The Salvation Army's Angel Tree program allows employees at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution to purchase holiday gifts for needy children in the Pendleton and Hermiston area.

"I think it returns every year because we have a lot of families in the area that qualify for it, and we have a huge pool of staff that contributes," said Emma Shelden, office specialist at the facility.

Shelden was one of the staff members that helped organize the event.

Each year, staff set up a Christmas tree in the front lobby of EOCI. The Salvation Army provides Angle Tree tags, which Shelden and other staff members used to decorate the tree. Each tag correlates to one child, listing their age, gender and a wish list of gifts.

"On our end, it doesn't take a lot of effort," said Shelden. "We just put up the tree and hang the tags."

EOCI's employees can select tags from the tree and purchase the gifts. The employees place the wrapped gifts under the tree.

Prior to Christmas, the gifts are picked up by the Salvation Army and delivered to families.

Shelden said they ran out of tags this year and had to request more. She said their gifts included a handful of bicy-



Photo provided by ODOC

In the EOCI lobby, Salvation Army volunteers pose with Christmas gifts for families in need in December, 2025. The gifts were purchased by EOCI employees. This year was the 10th consecutive year the facility has participated in the Angel Tree gift event.

cles, as well as bags full of clothing, books, shoes and toys.

Our staff is very generous. They go all out for the kids.

- Emma Shelden,
Office Specialist

"Our staff are very generous," she said. "They go all out for the kids."

She also said this year was challenging because of the rising prices on consumer goods, which has made it more difficult for staff to participate.

Despite the challenges, however, EOCI employees still purchased more than 50 tags.

"People have their families to buy for, bills to pay, and they still donate gifts to these families and children, not expecting anything in return," she said.

The donations are anonymous.

The Salvation Army is responsible for screening the applicants and setting up the tags. Ages range from 2 to 17 years old.

Many of these children are from single parent households, the foster care system or the child of an incarcerated person.

"This event is important because it helps families in need have a normal Christmas," Shelden said. "Working with the Salvation Army connects us with the general public. It shows our staff are compassionate and they genuinely care about the community."

EOCI and the Salvation Army plan to continue their partnership in 2026.

| ECHO

HOLIDAY RECAP

THE SIXTH ANNUAL STOCKING STUFFER EVENT

Residents of EOCI Send Stuffed Stockings Home

Written by Logan Gimbel



Photo by Chris Ainsworth/The Echo

Residents Charlie Kygar, left, Kula Adric, middle, and Justin Denney, right, all pose for a photo during the Dec. 5, 2025 stocking stuffer event.

On Dec. 5, Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution had its sixth annual stocking stuffer event. While some adults in custody may not be home for Christmas, that did not stop them from filling a stocking to bursting and sending it home.

Throughout the day, 69 residents personalized and hand-stuffed 132 stockings which were mailed to a family member.

There were two requirements for AICs to attend: 1) they must have minor children; 2) and the child must be on their visiting list.

Residents were called to D2 and were greeted with the sounds of holiday music and foldout tables covered in small toys, cocoa mixes and various types of candy, along with hats, socks, gloves and every young child's favorite holiday item – a toothbrush.

Each attending resident picked out stockings and selected goodies to stuff them with.



Photo by Chris Ainsworth/The Echo

On Dec. 5, 2025, stocking stuffers move along the table selecting goodies to send home.

After the stocking was filled and placed in a shipping box, residents were free to fill the box with any items they were not able to fit inside the festive sock.

Resident Charlie Kygar, a two-time stocking stuffer, said words can't really describe what it felt like to send something home to his son.

Last year, Kygar said his son was ecstatic to receive the stocking and that it meant a lot to him.

"Guys walk out of here in good spirits knowing they got to provide something for their kids during the holiday season," said Counselor Joe Byrnes. "Seeing the joy on guys faces totally makes it worth it."

"It really is a blessing to be able to send some gifts to my kids knowing I am incarcerated," said resident Elando Broussard while stuffing four stock-

(...continued from previous page)

ings. “Knowing that [my children] are thought about, cared about and loved.”

Resident Justin Denney’s family lives almost 10 hours away. He said he loves the opportunity to reach out to his family and give them a touch of who he is and how he feels about them.

Denney said he loves hearing from his family about the stocking. When he sent a stocking home last year, his family’s reaction was filled with joy.

Correctional Rehabilitation hosts the stocking stuffer event each year in the first week of December.

Dray Williams, Correctional Rehabilitation Manager, said the event was very well received. He thanked residents Juan Diaz, Keaton Stephens and Seth Mathews for their support.

The three volunteers helped attending AICs with stocking and gift selec-

tion. Diaz, who is bi-lingual, assisted the Spanish-speaking participants.

“I think that it is amazing that [EOCI] and the staff do this,” said resident Kula Adric who attended the two previous stocking stuffer events.

For residents interested in participating in 2026’s stocking stuffer event, notices will be placed on housing unit bulletin boards about one month prior to the event. | **ECHO**

CLEANING UP FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Food Services Department Gives Out Hygiene Packages to Workers

Written by Logan Gimbel

On Dec. 12, the Food Services Department at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution helped its resident workers clean up by providing them with hygiene packages. They contained commonly purchased items such as toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner and mouthwash, to name a few.

“It’s like \$30 worth of stuff, so it helps out with canteen,” said resident Jacob Stursa, who worked in the kitchen’s tool room prior to being hired in the library in December.

“I actually ended up relying on it, so it was nice,” he said.

The total value of the provided hygiene items is \$27.14. An average kitchen worker will earn about \$73.60 in a 20-day work month. The provided items add up to just over a third of those earnings.

“I thought it was a pretty cool idea. It’s something that we could use,” said Sean Theriault, a line server.

Line server Jayden Taylor started in the kitchen three months ago and said it was “awesome and unexpected.”



Photo by Chris Ainsworth/The Echo

Line Server Jayden Taylor poses with his hygiene package on Dec. 12, 2025.

Taylor said that maintaining a good appearance helps with his mental health, especially in prison.

Kitchen workers are responsible for preparing, cooking and serving EOIC’s nearly 1,400 adults in custody.

Food Services Manager Liza Emory said, “It is no easy feat feeding the institution each day.”

She said she appreciates the hard work the kitchen workers do each day and put together the hygiene package so the workers could buy what they want instead of what they need.

“It feels that we are being appreciated for our hard work,” said Cristobal Garcia. “Just knowing that they appreciate us is nice.” | **ECHO**

HOLIDAY RECAP



ANNUAL COOKIE HANDOUT

Over 6,000 Cookies and 200 Pounds of Frosting

Written by Chris Ainsworth

Photo by Chris Ainsworth/The Echo

On Dec. 16, 2025, bakery worker Mitchell Whitefoot stops to pose for a quick photo while another bakery worker cuts out a star-shaped cookie.

More than 6,000 cookies and 200 pounds of frosting were made by bakery workers at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution on Dec. 16.

The cookies and frosting were prepared for an annual cookie decorating tradition that began in 2020. The treats were passed out with the evening meal on Dec. 18.

Bakers packaged cookies in the shapes of Christmas trees and stars two at a time. In a different part of the facility's kitchen, workers scooped green and red frosting into single-use plastic cups.

The process kept more than 15 kitchen workers busy for most of the work day.

"If it was a different group of guys it would have been hectic," said bakery worker Mitchell Whitefoot. "But all the guys fell in line with their jobs. The whole process was pretty painless."

Bakery workers typically use an

automated cookie maker to cut out cookies. However, the machine only makes round shapes. Instead, cookies were hand cut.

Before cooking large amounts of any-



Photo by Chris Ainsworth/The Echo

On Dec. 16, 2025, large baking sheets containing star and tree shaped cookies sit on cooling racks in EOCI'S bakery before being packaged.

thing, bakers complete a test run.

"We tested one batch to determine the best bake time for the cookies," lead baker Neil Watford said. "We had to find the perfect balance between soft cookies and cookies that wouldn't break when we bagged them up."

The workers baked about 195 sheets of two shapes.

AICs received four cookies, two of each shape, along with a cup of red frosting and a cup of green frosting.

"I look forward to it every year. It's nice the institution does this, and I like cookies," said AIC Robert Buhrman.

"I like baking and used to bake on the streets. The cookies remind me of that freedom," he said. | **ECHO**



CHRISTMAS CHERRY PIE PRIDE

Over 1,400 Cherry Pies Were Prepared For Christmas Eve

Written by Alex Dewhurst

Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

The three different stages of cherry pie production sit on top of a table in the EOCI bakery on Dec. 24, 2025. The bakers mold the pie crust, pile on the cherry filling then cover the top before baking.

More than 1,400 cherry pies were prepared to serve at Christmas Eve dinner for adults in custody at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution.

Rolled, filled, topped and baked, AIC bakers hand-made around 150 four-inch pies an hour. More than 400 pounds of cherries – a pallet jack full amount – was at the ready for the massive baking project. Bakers prepared pies for three days to serve to more than 1,300 residents, on top of standard meal preparation.

Covered in flour and darting between stations, baker Michael Scott said the pies were a compromise in size. He said the four-inch pies were more realistic for their small crew.

Molding pie crust in his hands, he said there was a sense of pride in baking for the facility despite pressure from the holidays.

The bakery fulfills special orders for events on top of standard meals. Orders come from in and outside the prison.

Special orders from inside the prison are for events related to holidays, religious gatherings and concerts. People from the community can also put in requests to the bakery.

“We try to make the quality we would

want to eat ourselves,” Scott said.

Another baker, Jason Garmoe, is entering his second holiday season in the bakery.

“It gave me anxiety because I started with no baking experience, but when it turns out well, it’s rewarding,” he said.

Garmoe said the bakery teaches skills he can use upon release: teamwork, communication, adapting to change and time management.

He demonstrated those skills when lead baker, Neil Watford, asked him to pivot to another station.

Watford said he tries to lead by example and likes to help new workers. He said he has been a leader from the time he was 18 when he managed people at a grocery store. Watford said he improves on one or two things each week to build his work skills before release.

The bakery concluded the holiday season with giant cookies served at New Year’s dinner. | **ECHO**



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

On Dec. 24, 2025, lead baker Neil Watford poses for a photo. In the background, two bakers prepare pie crusts.

HOLIDAY RECAP

TIME TO DECORATE THE HOUSE

A Popular Event Returns to the Visiting Room; Residents and Families Decorate Gingerbread Houses

Written by Chris Ainsworth



Photo by Chris Ainsworth/The Echo

Above: During the Dec. 20, 2025 visiting event, Gerry Cunningham’s daughter stops in the middle decorating to pose for a photo while he looks on.

Snow covered the roofs of numerous houses on Dec. 20.

Children and adults decorated the houses in the visiting room at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution.

“The visitors didn’t know we were doing gingerbread houses today, so it was a fun surprise for everyone,” said Leslie Halbert, executive support specialist. Halbert helped run the event. “It is such a joy to be part of families making memories.”

Visitors and residents were given gingerbread house-making kits in visiting. The kits were provided by the Special Housing Department.

“It was pretty cool to be able to build something, and to build a bond,”

Gerardo Aguilar said after making a gingerbread house with his girlfriend. “It gave us an opportunity to do something together. She loved it.”

The kits included gingerbread cutouts for the roof, four walls and chimney; icing to glue the walls together and trim the house with snow; and M&M candies for decoration.

“My mom took the gingerbread house, put it in the car and made it all the way home,” participant Jasiah Lance said.

“She stuck it with the gingerbread houses she made with my sisters. It is part of a little village now. She took a picture of it and sent it to me,” he said.

Historically, the first gingerbread houses were made in Germany in the 1800s, inspired by the result of a well-known Grimm’s fairy tale, “Hansel and Gretel,” in which two children abandoned in the forest found an edible house made of confections and sugar decorations. Germans began baking ornamental houses of lebkuchen (gingerbread) after the story was published. | **ECHO**

Right: During their visit event, Gerardo Aguilar and his girlfriend take a photo with their gingerbread house.



Photo by Chris Ainsworth/The Echo

Left: Jasiah Lance and his mother pose for a photo with their gingerbread house in the visiting room.



Photo by Chris Ainsworth/The Echo

TWO WINTER SOLSTICE EVENTS

Yule Events Held in December

Written by Logan Gimbel

On Dec. 22, the chapel at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution hosted two separate winter solstice events, called Yule.

Residents attending the events were provided a special holiday meal and spent time coming together and celebrating the end of the year and planning for the next. While the Asatru gathered to revel, the Wiccans celebrated rebirth.

A Time for Revelry

The first winter solstice event started at 10:30 a.m. and was attended by Asatru members. The 17 residents gathered in the chapel in the spirit of kinship. For a couple hours, the residents cele-

brated, boasted, reveled and made oaths to Odin, temporarily turning the chapel into a Viking feasting hall.

“It’s all about fellowship,” said resident Jericho Jamison, who is celebrating his first Yule in prison. “We come together and break bread as brothers.”

Old and new members greeted each other as they entered the chapel. Thomas Anderson was one new face joining the Yule celebration. He said he was looking forward to the food and experience of celebrating Yule.

A Time for Rebirth

The second Yule event started at 1 p.m. and was attended by Wiccans.

Sixteen residents gathered in the chapel to celebrate winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, and the rebirth of the sun.

“It’s a time for inspiration, reflection and planning for the next year,” said resident Jordan Akin.

Part of the ritual to invoke the gods and goddess require the Wiccans to pour salt on the ground, creating a sealed circle.

Gathered within this circle of salt, the Wiccans are separated from outside influences and spent the time eating, conversing and reflecting on the year.

Shane Goins said the event is very interesting and one of his favorite times of the year. He said that Yule can have different meanings between people, but for him it means he is one year closer to release. | **ECHO**

ANNUAL CONCERT, FROM RUSSIA

Russian Baptist Brass Band Performs

Written by Alex Dewhurst and Kurtis Thompson

Music drifted from the chapel at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution on Dec. 14. The rumbling thrum of a tuba, punctuated by pitches of trumpets, trombones and a snare drum floated in the air from 1 to 2 p.m. It was the Russian Baptists returning for their annual open bible brass band Christmas concert.

Ten volunteers played for 38 residents who attended the event. The musicians performed 11 songs, including instrumental and traditional hymns. But during the hour of music, a foreign sound was briefly heard; Russian singing. It was the first time the group had performed a song in their native language because most attendees do not speak Russian.

Resident Mykola Musiyenko, an event attendee, requested the performers sing in Russian, his first language. Volunteer Andrey Ozerov translated the song title as “We are Congratulating You with Christmas.”

Ivan Savitskiy, also a Russian resident, said, “On the outside I always went to church every Sunday, and this is the first time I went in 8 months, so it was a little emotional.”

Resident Jaime Gomez said the music performance reminded him of his home village, San Gabriel, in Jalisco, Mexico.

“The banda goes around town for nine days,” he said. “Every night they play in the square and you can see it’s

pretty much the same vibrations to your soul here.”

Gomez said some adults in custody turn to religious services for a sense of brotherhood during the holiday season. He said events such as the brass concert provide opportunities to form bonds.

“It helps you feel at home anywhere you are,” he said with a laugh. “I feel like I am on a Bible retreat.”

Gomez believes prison is a feeling rather than a place.

“Incarceration is in your heart. It’s not behind bars. It’s in your mind,” he said. “You understand that God has power to get you out of here if he wants, but if you are here we understand it’s God’s way.”

The crowd was invited to stand and sing Silent Night for the finale. The concert concluded with a short prayer for members in the audience. | **ECHO**

HOLIDAY RECAP



Photo by provided by the chaplain

In December, the Mennonite Choir performs their annual Christmas concert. The choir performed for about 60 residents, including traditional Christian Christmas songs and common songs from regular worship.

ANNUAL MENNONITE CHOIR

Volunteers Sing in December

Written by Alex Dewhurst and Kurtis Thompson

Singers from Grande Ronde Mennonite Church in Cove, Oregon, visit prisons around the state during the Christmas season. Their group does not have a regular choir and consists of volunteers from their congregation. Even so, their skillful performances have drawn audiences year after year since 1998.

On Dec. 13, the annual Mennonite Christmas concert was held at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Ten women and 17 men made up the caroling group. They sang 16 songs to about 60 residents and one dog in attendance.

Resident Myron Moore said, “I’m not affiliated with any religious organization. I don’t even really care for Christmas either, but I love hearing the

Mennonites sing. It’s such a wonderful escape, not just to get out, but to experience different things..”

Moore said the Mennonite choir reminded him of classical theater performances he had seen before.

“I’ve been here at EOCI for three years, and I’ve gone to see them each time,” he said. “I feel like they’ve improved in that time.”

Mike Heroux has attended every Mennonite performance for the last five years. He previously worked as a chapel clerk and said the holiday events draw large and diverse crowds.

“It means a lot to us,” he said. “You see more guys go to these types of services than you see in normal services throughout the year.”

Heroux said while he was a chapel clerk, he noticed people attending the performances who were not religious.

“You see people who don’t go to normal services, regardless of what their faith base is,” he said. “This is a good thing, because regardless of what your faith is, you’re getting a good message.”

Mennonite volunteer Pete Martens said two types of songs were meshed to express a message. Traditionally Christian Christmas songs performed included “Oh Beautiful Star of Bethlehem,” “O Come All Ye Faithful” and more, but other songs were common for regular worship.

“This is a Christmas program, but Christmas doesn’t last all year,” he said. “The messages in the songs, though, they live on.”

“I think part of the message is to just be good to one another”

“I think part of the message is to just be good to one another, like Christ did when he was here,” Heroux said.

“These volunteers were willing to travel an hour and a half to give us a special show ... that means a lot,” he said.

The choir travels on a highway pass between La Grande and Pendleton.

“We just want to wish you all a merry Christmas and share the message of Jesus Christ,” said Martens. | **ECHO**



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THE ECHO INTERVIEWS



Staff and adults in custody at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution have developed a conflict management and prevention program for AICs.

In the program, AIC mentors work with AIC mentees to mediate issues before they escalate. Mentor Christopher Bickford said he joined after spending time in segregation about a year ago.

Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

With Chris Bickford

Written by Alex Dewhurst

The Echo: Where did it start for you? How did you get involved in the program?

Bickford: I lost it all. I lost my level three. I went down to level one. My honor housing, my job. I spent about 40 days in seg. Sergeant Holden made a comment like, hey, I think you could benefit from this program whether you are working with somebody or helping somebody out. I just said why not.

The Echo: What is the mentor program? What is it called?

Bickford: The contact officer program.

For example, if I had an issue I didn't want to bring up to an officer, is there a friend or somebody that knows what it's like to be in the gutter for a few years? What do they have to say? What is their advice so I don't allow

this to become a bigger issue down the road?

That's what we are there for. There's a list of us that can go to and from units. You can set up times to talk at yard, clothing room. We are trying to work on being able to walk around the compound and talk.

If you have an immediate issue, like if a CO gave you a dirtbag slip and you are riled up about it and you don't have anyone on the unit you can talk to, maybe there's a mentor on a unit.

When you work with us you can be like, hey, can you get in contact with this officer because I'm having an issue and I don't want this to become a bigger issue.

We do mostly high-risk reach outs at the moment. We meet every other Monday, just the mentors, to discuss

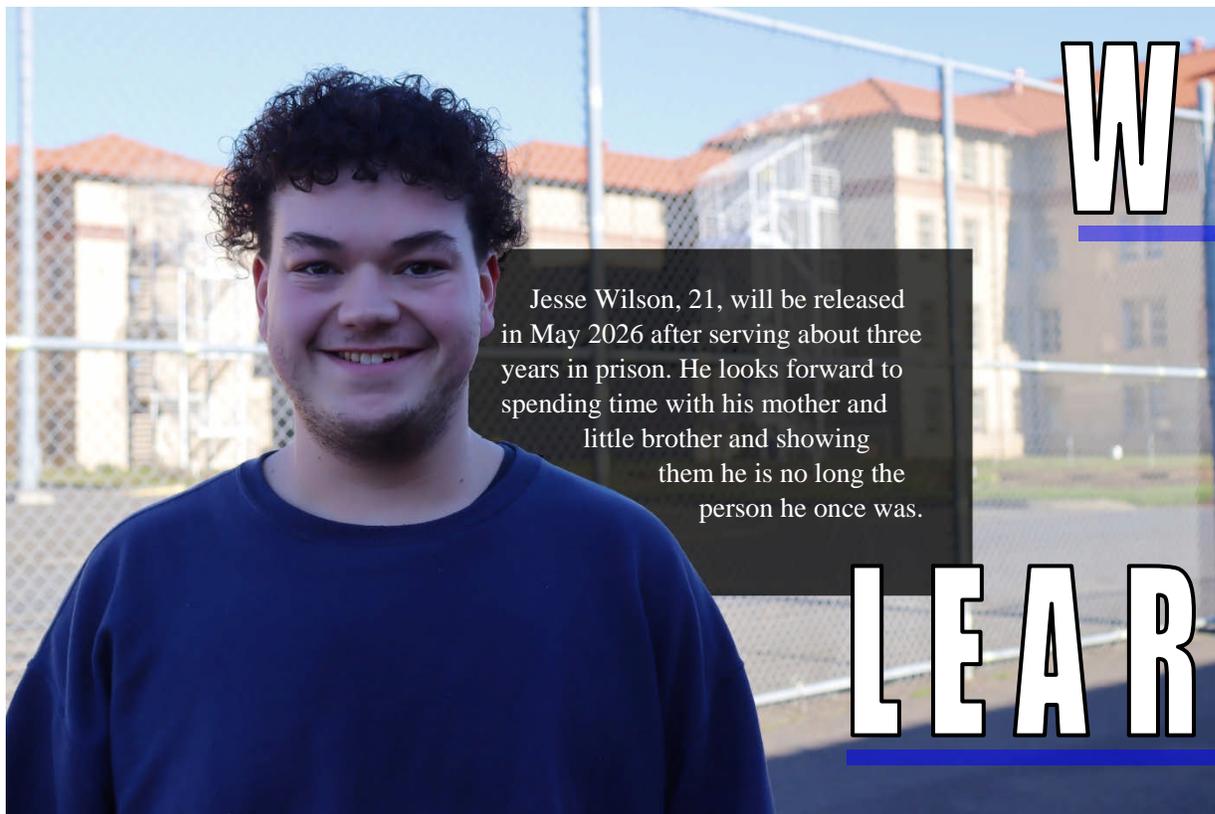
what things we can do for the guys seeking this program and setting up times with officers.

The Echo: What does it look like for mentees?

Bickford: Lieutenant Booker or officer Taylor typically run it. They will bring us down to the dining hall at around 7:45 p.m. every Thursday, the mentors and mentees meet. That's when we try to establish open communication about what is changing, what is coming, what we are working on and these are the opportunities available.

The Echo: Is this something people can sign up for?

Bickford: Right now, it's just set up for the east side. You can send Lieutenant Booker a kyte or officer Taylor. You can also send your counselor a kyte if you are not sure. | **ECHO**



Jesse Wilson, 21, will be released in May 2026 after serving about three years in prison. He looks forward to spending time with his mother and little brother and showing them he is no longer the person he once was.

Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

With Jesse Wilson

Interview by Jamil Chavis

One thing that surprised me about prison was... How much it reminds me of high school, the way in which people don't mind their own business and the drama.

Best advice I could give someone is... Find the person who can be there to help you no matter what you're going through. Find a friend who will be there at your worst times and at your best times. An unconditional friend.

The best item to buy from canteen is... It's probably going to have to be the cheddar jalapeño Cheetos. They're good.

One thing I regret the most during my years here is... Hanging out with the wrong people because those very same people led me to a lot of drug use, which caused me to make the wrong choices.

The food I'm looking forward to eating the most is... My mother's chicken-bacon-ranch-tater-tot casserole.

I wish I had spent less time and money on... Drugs. It altered my thought process.

The program that helped me the most... None of them. I currently work in the kitchen as a linebacker five days a week. For me, being able to work in a fast pace environment, espe-

cially during meal service, helps me focus on the task at hand. Having those skills for when I get out is going to be really beneficial.

Before coming to prison, I would consider myself... A person who usually stayed to himself most of the time. I have been at [EOCI] since Feb. 10, 2025. I was at a different facility, I had a couple of jobs, but I just stayed to myself. Things have changed for the better since coming to this facility. Mostly because of the people. I'm kind of the same as I was on the outside. I'm a very social person. I talk to a lot of people.

The change I would like to see the most in prison... That's a hard one because there's a lot that needs to change. The way [AICs] are treated. We are antagonized and it affects me every day. I'm a people person and I sit locked in my cell.

What I've learned is... Patience, because nothing gets done fast enough to help us. That has made me want to get back home to my little brother and my mother so I can show them that I'm better than I was before prison.

A piece of advice I would give to someone new to prison is... Be observant of your surroundings and find like-minded individuals who can help. Do what is best for yourself no matter what some may think of you. | **ECHO**

SETTING GOALS



Andrii Yalanskyi/Shutterstock

PLANNING WITH THE END IN MIND

People releasing from Prison Face Higher Rates of Homelessness

Written by Chris Ainsworth and Alex Dewhurst

People exiting prisons enter a job desert and often have no place to live.

Formerly incarcerated people are 10 times more likely to be homeless than the average person in the United States, according to Prison Policy Initiative.

In part, the likelihood of homelessness stems from a 27% unemployment rate among people with felony records, which is higher than the national rate during the Great Depression.

But adults in custody can begin to navigate the tricky terrain of reentry before exiting prison. Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution has resources to help AICs prepare for release, such as educational programs, career fairs, counseling and transition courses.

“One of the best steps is beginning with the end in mind,” said Release Counselor Mike Markle.

Markle is a liaison between Oregon Department of Corrections and Community Corrections, also known as probation. He starts working with AICs when they approach six months to release. Markle said he wants AICs to think about their future long before they arrive in his office.

Education and Trades

Before they are eligible for release programming, AICs can start with the end in mind by participating in education programs.

Discounted college courses are available through the New Directions Education Project to obtain transfer degrees, and AICs may be eligible for Pell Grants in the future.

There are also work opportunities available at EOCI where AICs can obtain training in various trades, such as plumbing or electrical.

Opportunity Oregon

Part of preparing for release is taking advantage of job search and workforce preparedness resources. Started by a previously incarcerated individual, Opportunity Oregon is a staffing and employment-preparedness agency that helps job-seekers who are, or were previously, incarcerated. The organization offers workshops multiple times a year at EOCI. AICs can gather information and ask questions of CEO and co-founder Nancy Pance at these events.

Pance said the organization has helped more than 2,800 AICs since 2022. As of July 2025, the agency has compiled a database of 384 business and 10

unions who hire people with criminal records.

“We’re statewide. We’re free,” Pance said. “If I don’t see you in person or staff doesn’t see you in person, we will help you over the phone and we will not stop until you find employment.”

Second Chance Career Fairs

Additionally, Pance coordinates with Sue Robson, the transition services coordinator at EOCI and Two Rivers Correctional Institution, to bring the Second Chance Career Fair to the facility. The first fair was held in August 2024.

Organizations participating in the Second Chance Career Fair fall into four categories: employment services, such as the ironworker’s union and Union Pacific Railroad; transitional services, such as Golden Rule Reentry and The Miracles Club; housing services, such as Oxford Housing and Urban Alchemy; and treatment services, such as Provoking Hope.

Adults in custody can attend the Opportunity Oregon workshops and the Second Chance Career Fair at any point during their incarceration. However, more programs are available when AICs approach six months to release.

“Often times, it’s not what brought you to prison, but what you did in prison that people are interested in,” said Robson. “Roads to Success is about trying to help AICs look at things from a different perspective.”

Markle is available to create release plans with AICs. He works with the benefits coordinator to get AICs signed

up for state benefits such as food stamps and Oregon Health Plan. Markle also works with state agencies to help AICs obtain identification before released.

WorkSource Oregon

The final resource is available to AICs when they are 90 days away from release. AICs meet with a representative from WorkSource Oregon to discuss employment and training options.

The representatives help AICs review and edit their resumes, complete skill assessments, learn about education and training opportunities, review labor market information in their area of release and practice interview skills.

“The whole idea of this program is to help AICs as they reenter society,” said Paul Shively, WorkSource Oregon’s workforce programs manager. “We help them navigate the employment journey.”

Information on educational programs can be obtained by contacting the education department. Opportunity Oregon and Second Chance Career Fair events are advertised on unit bulletin boards.

When AICs are six months from release they can contact Markle or Robson to be added to release classes and meet one-on-one to create a release plan. | **ECHO**

THE GENERAL SAVINGS ACCOUNT

An Option for Saving Money For Release and Earning Interest

Written by Kurtis Thompson

Trust accounts, commonly referred to as books, are where AICs keep earned monetary program awards and funding from outside sources. AICs have one trust account which can have subaccounts attached.

For example, AICs can utilize the general savings account and the TRSA.

According to Susan VanEpps, EOCI’s accounting technician in the business service office, the “general savings is additional savings for AICs to use for their release; a Transfer Form CD 1832 is available from the business office to request the movement of monies from general spending to general savings, (with a) \$5.00 mandatory minimum amount, one request per month.”

The Transition Relocation Savings Account has a lump-sum deposit cap of \$500 where the General Savings does not, and the TRSA is protected from any debt collections where the General savings is not.

Van Epps also said the “Salem Financial Services Administrator rarely authorizes use of general savings to be sent out to friends or family; you must provide detailed justification with your request in your kyte you send to the business office.”

If AICs wish to continue saving to prepare for transitional costs after the TRSA \$500 cap is reached, then the general savings is an option.

AICs cannot continue to add 5% of deposits to the TRSA if they have any court-ordered DOC debt. COFOs are collected at 10% of all eligible deposits. When the TRSA reaches the \$500 minimum, the collection of court-ordered financial obligations will increase to 15% until paid.

Once court-ordered debts have been paid, AICs can request to continue adding

5% of eligible deposits to their TRSA account.

To continue adding 5% to the TRSA after the minimum has been reached, VanEpps said AICs should “send a kyte to the business office asking to continue with the 5% collection of future deposits; Salem Central Trust administrator must approve and will notify Central Trust of any approvals.”

Trust account subaccounts earn interest at rates based upon the Federal Reserve, and Salem Central Trust applies that interest to the general spending account which can be viewed on their monthly statement. | **ECHO**



SETTING GOALS



Photo by Pro Stock Studio/Shutterstock

MAKING RESOLUTIONS SMART

Tips for Making Achievable Resolutions Using SMART Goals

Written by Brian Daniel Bement and Chris Ainsworth

Some people around the world make New Year's resolutions after the holidays.

Studies by Mental Health News reports in the United States approximately 90% of those resolutions fail. The rate of failure is so high that the second Friday in January is known as "Quitters Day."

Goals are more likely to be achieved when they are detailed and measurable, and setting SMART goals can increase the likelihood of success. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound objectives.

Specific

Two versions of the same goal may be, "I want to lose weight," versus "I want to lose 20 pounds in six months by eating more vegetables."

The first example is vague. There is no detail to the goal. The second, how-

ever, lays out the amount of desired weight loss and the plans to achieve it: lose 20 pounds through changing diet to include more vegetables and exercise.

Measurable

Another example could be, "I want to be a musician," versus "I want to learn how to play my partner's favorite song on the guitar. I will sign-up for guitar lessons and practice for an hour each day, and in six months I will play that song for their birthday."

The first goal has no measurable achievements.

The second goal lays out a measurable plan of taking lessons and practicing for one hour each day. The goal specifies when it will be achieved.

Achievable

A third example may be, "I want to reconnect with my brother," versus "I want to send my brother a letter asking

to reconnect. If he is willing, I want to write him a letter each month, regardless of his response."

The first example is not a goal the creator is in control of. Reconnecting with someone is partially dependent on the other person being open to the connection.

In the second example, the goal setter focuses on what is in their power to control. They set a goal of reaching out, then add a follow up goal which lays out a specific and measurable achievement.

Relevant

Another example might be, "I want to write a book," versus "I want to enroll in school and take some writing classes. Once I have an understanding on what is required, I want to complete a book of short stories within 12 months. I will complete one story a month."

If someone doesn't understand the basics of writing, then setting a goal to write a book, even if it is a SMART goal, may not be relevant.

To make a goal more achievable, set goals for needed skills and training first, then follow that with a goal to complete.

Time-Bound

A final example could be, "I want to save money," versus "I want to save \$100 within six months so I can use the money to buy a pair of shoes. I plan on doing this by setting a monthly budget to limit extra expenses each month."

The first goal is vague and does not have a timeframe. The second version gives the amount the goal setter wishes to save and a deadline.

Setting SMART goals may be more effective than making resolutions. | **ECHO**

A SILENT VOICE: A WHOLESOME STORY

Book Review for a Popular Manga Series

Written by Kurtis Thompson

A **Silent Voice** blends a love story's sweetness with a shameful past's bitterness, topped off with earnest amends.

This seven-part manga series follows several childhood relationships into adulthood, with the unique twist of physical disability.

Shoya Ishida is a middle-school kid – loud, energetic and a known mischief-maker. If he's not pressuring his friends to jump off bridges with him into nasty water, he's pouring salt on slugs. Ishida's fighting a war against boredom, and he'll do anything to win.

Then, along comes a new transfer student, Shoko Nishimiya. Everyone in

class is excited to have a new peer, except Ishida. It's a girl, and girls are boring, he says. But then she introduces herself with a notebook on her first day in class.

"I would like to get to know everyone through this notebook," she wrote. "I can't hear."

The students thought of Nishimiya's deafness as a novelty at first, but her situation quickly devolved. They begin resenting her for her disability and bully her, especially Ishida.

Ishida doesn't understand the impact of his actions, and Nishimiya believes the bullying she receives is her fault.

They make the kind of memories people pretend to forget, because it is less painful than facing them. Even if he wanted to forget, Ishida cannot get Nishimiya out of his mind. Life may have gone on, but those tumultuous childhood memories previously buried by age bubble to the surface.

The author, Yoshitoki Oima, depicts Ishida's inner turmoil and the situations so believably a reader might wonder if they're based on real events.

This series also provides a realistic look into the daily lives of average people in Japan. No country or peoples are perfect, and the self-deprecating nature of the author's style lends authenticity to the story.

A **Silent Voice** could be a great pick and conversation starter for parents and young teenage kids. | **ECHO**

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Authorized by the FCC in 2000, 211 is an easy-to-remember and universally recognizable number that enables a critical connection between individuals and families in need and the appropriate community-based organizations and government agencies. 211 can help you connect with resources when you release.

HOW TO CONTACT 211

Call 211 or 1-866-698-6155

Text your zip code to 898211

Email help@211info.org

Search 211info.org online

Download the 211 app



211's Director of Outreach Nickie Carter sits at a booth during the 2025 Second Chance Career Fair at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution. 211 can help people connect to resources, such as housing assistance, child care and health care, after release.

SPORTS

ALL STARS COMPETE

Multi Holds All Star Basketball Skills Challenge and Game

Written by Brian Daniel Bement and Kurtis Thompson

Basketball All-Star competitors faced off in two events spanning Jan. 14 and 15.

The first event, a skills challenge, featured gauntlets of agility, passing and shooting skills, and one player set an institution record. The second event pitted 2025's top east and west ballers at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution against each other for the annual All-Star Game.

Basketball Skills Event

In the skills challenge, 13 players faced five challenges: passing, agility, free-throw, 3-point and 3-point resistance band trials.

Competitors passed basketballs into target garbage cans and through a hula-hoop while maneuvering around cones in the passing challenge. B1's Kevin Clay came in first at 24.15 seconds.

Players maneuvered around cones in the agility challenge while shooting baskets and dribbling forward and backward. Zyyon Stephens was quickest at 26.25 seconds.

Then there was F3's Lawrence Phillips.

Phillips swept the other three events. He nailed 12 of 12 free throws and 4 of 4 resistance band 3-pointers, but his straight 3-point challenge performance had spectators roaring.

Forty-two 3-point baskets in two minutes – an institution record.

"I wanted to bring home the wins to F3, the east side, and prove we're the best," Phillips said.

He also said he hoped to win against

west side's team in the All-Star Game.

All-Star Game

Twenty-eight players were selected by votes and statistics for the All-Star Game – 14 from the east side compound, 14 from west.

They represented 2025's best ballers, but more west team members led in seasonal points, rebounds and assists.

Of the three categories, there were 18 players who scored top placements. The east team had only two players in those placements – Phillips and Dion Patino, third and fourth respectively in assists.

The first quarter was 12-20 west, and east slowly began closing the gap. West was still up in the second quarter at 35-40, but the margin was hair-thin at 55-56 west by close of the third.

It was anyone's game at start of the fourth. But, west combined their better performance in rebounds, assists and steals with double-teaming tactics to stop east's top scorer, Phillips.

By the final buzzer, east's Phillips and west's Dwight Dew held nearly even individual scores at 33 and 34 points respectively. But by hounding Phillips, the rest of west's scorers outpaced east. The final score, 65-76 west.

"They had us in the end, but we made them earn it," said east player Michael Epperson. He said the double-teaming on Phillips caused many turnovers, clinching their loss.

"It's more competition than I thought it would be," said west's assistant coach, Xabian Riley. "It was physical. They have more in size than we did, but we handled them." | **ECHO**

EOCI

Written by Shahid Baskerville
with contributions from Kurtis Thompson



With two minutes left on the clock, B1's Xabien Riley ties the score with A1 on Jan. 20, 2026, during the west side championship game.

B1 housing unit was crowned 2025-2026 basketball champions of Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution. They defeated F3 and defended their title from the previous year.

Jan. 16 was the beginning of the playoffs for both east and west side housing units, and culminated in a championship three-game series that ended on Jan. 25.

Playoffs: Round One

B1 had a bye in week one because of their regular season standings.

F3 won their first playoff game versus E4. Consistent 3-point shots put them 30 points ahead and their victory pushed them into the next round.

Basketball Championship 2026



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

On Jan. 20, 2026, F3's Lawrence Phillips shoots over G4's Paul Reyes in the east side championship. F3 won the game, but the contest was disputed causing the recreation department to schedule a replay on Jan. 21, 2026.

"We're going to be the east side champs. Just watch us," said F3's Jeray Bridges.

Playoffs: Round Two

On the east side, F3 continued their 3-point shooting, making 12 in the second round.

Lawrence Phillips of F3 had a triple double against E3. He scored 32 points, rebounded 13 times and had 12 assists.

After beating E3, Phillips' team was in the finals. The winner of the H1 and G4 match up would be their opponents.

"It doesn't matter who we play in the championship game, H1 or G4, we winning," said Phillips. G4 beat H1.

On the west side, B1 breezed their

way into a championship spot and would face the winner of the A1 and A3 match up.

A1 and A3 played into overtime. A3's Tahrin Brown said defending A1 was always going to be hard, since A1's Dwight Dew was the tallest player on the court.

A1's high-scoring and consistent rebounder, Dew, delivered the win 65-61.

"It was a good game, but now we're onto B1," said Dew.

West and east side championship

During regular season, B1 and A1 split the series 2-2.

In the championship game, B1

quickly ran up the scoreboard. With Kevin Clay's speedy scoring, Anthony Mack's repeated steals and Lamar Stanton's resilient rebounding, B1 led by 13 points at end the half.

A1 clawed back into the game during the second half. A1 took the lead by one point with 50 seconds left on the clock.

The game would end up tied at 63 with 20 seconds left. Kevin Clay for B1 made a layup and was fouled. After the foul shot, A1 attempted to call a time out, which is against the rules with less than two minutes left on the clock.

A1 received a technical foul for at-

(continued on next page...)

SPORTS



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

On Jan. 20, 2026, A1 takes the lead by one point with 50 seconds left on the clock. The game would end up tied at 63 with 20 seconds left. Kevin Clay for B1 made a layup and was fouled. B1 won by 4 points.

tempting to call a time out, which subsequently ended the game.

“I had to guard Dew, he’s a big dude,” said B1’s Stanton. “A1 is a team of skillful players. They brought the best out of us.”

The east side championship game between F3 and G4 was played twice.

The first game ended with an F3 win, but the win was vacated after administrative review. F3 had subbed in a player that had fouled out, and the scoring table did not catch it. Additionally, there were other technical difficulties at the scorers’ table, prompting the recreation department to reschedule the game.

“If they want more, then that’s exactly what we are going to give them,” said F3’s Jeray Bridges. “We going to beat them worse than the last game.”

F3 played a 3-2 zone defense, which eliminated uncontested shots by G4. F3 scored 39 points from 3-point land and won 69-56.

“G4 did their thing, but defense wins championships, period,” said F3’s Scott Boyd after shaking hands with G4 players.

Overall Championship

During game-one warm ups, Stanton said B1 had been to the EOCI championships before and left with a win.

“It’s just a new face, but we giving the same results – a [win],” said Stanton.

B1’s scoring in game one led them to a 16 points victory. Their defense stuck to F3 players, keeping them from making double digit 3-pointers as they had in all other games.

Game two began the same as game one –with fast and efficient shooting by B1. Eight minutes into the half, B1 led by 20 points.

At half time, F3’s Bridges rallied his teammates after a few disagreements between players. He said if the negative energy stopped, then they could play better.

F3 was able to pull within 5 points by playing a 3-2 zone defense and selecting better shots.

Towards the end of the game, B1 noticed how tired F3 players were. B1 began moving the ball faster to exploit the vulnerability and won 52-43.

B1 remained EOCI’s basketball champions.

“I was out there dunking the ball, getting rebounds and, most of all, having fun,” said Stanton. |ECHO



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

On Jan. 20, 2026, F3’s Lawrence Phillips is chased by two defenders.

COMEBACK PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Ernesto Quiroz Recovers from Sports Injury, Returns for Basketball Season

Written by Jamil Chavis



Photo by Chris Ainsworth/The Echo

Ernesto Quiroz dribbles on the basketball court on Feb. 3, 2026.

Ernesto Quiroz rejoined the basketball team this season after a soccer injury threatened to sideline him for an extended period of time.

Quiroz, resident of EOCI, is an avid sports player. During 2024's spring soccer season, however, Quiroz suffered a severe knee injury.

He was moved from his housing unit to a lower unit to reduce the flights of stairs he had to walk up with crutches each day.

Quiroz, 28, said he did not know if he would return to G3, his previous unit.

Sports teams at EOCI are created among the unit residents. Quiroz was not only injured, he was separated from his teammates.

"I have been playing sports since I was a kid," said Quiroz. "The injury hurt my pride more than anything."

He said soccer is in his veins. He lives for the sport and it was a part his Mexican American culture. His father and other brothers played soccer and put a ball at his feet at age 2.

After his injury, Quiroz said he sat on the sidelines watching teammates have an early exit from the playoffs. Clinging to a pair of crutches, Quiroz wanted to help them.

He had a successful surgery at St. Anthony's Hospital a week after his injury.

After five months of rehabilitation, he was medically cleared to return to his unit and rejoin his teammates.

"Getting back to running is a lot tougher than I thought it would be," he said.

Back in the Game

EOCI has four main organized sports that are played by the residents each

year: soccer, softball, basketball and volleyball.

By the time his rehab was complete, it was mid-basketball season.

"My role on the basketball court has changed," said Quiroz. "I no longer drive to the hoop every time. I am distributing the ball more and making my teammates better."

"Though I am smaller than most of these guys here, I could cross them up and deliver the meanest bucket, said Quiroz. "I will get it back and everyone will see."

Quiroz said losing was never accepted in his household. But for now, at least, he loses more than he wins.

"I never shy away from challenges in life and I've got a competitive spirit," he said.

Quiroz's New Role

Resident Marvin Harley has been G3's basketball coach for six years.

When Quiroz arrived on G3 in 2023, Harley gave him the role of a team captain. When Quiroz suffered the injury, Harley said he thought Quiroz would be unable to return to G3's basketball team for years.

But, in 2025 Quiroz returned.

"Getting him back changed the dynamic of the team. With new players, we needed a veteran who understood the game," said Harley. "This season is not about winning. It is about us teaching each other and having fun."

"Next game I am going to turn up," Quiroz said. "We got this. There is no 'I' in team." | **ECHO**

IMMORTALIZED CELL LINES: HeLa

Almost 75 Years After Her Death, Henrietta Lacks Lives On

Written by Chris Ainsworth

It is not uncommon for medical staff to collect samples from patients. Samples come in the form of blood-work, urine, and even cells biopsied during treatment. In rare instances, the cells are used to further medical research.

In 1951 cells were collected from a biopsied tumor of African American woman Henrietta Lacks during her treatment for cervical cancer at John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Md. Due to mutation, those cells would become the source of one of the most important cell lines in medical research.

Lacks underwent radium treatment at John Hopkins Hospital, one of a limited number of hospitals that offered treatment to impoverished African-Americans. She passed away at the age of 31, in October 1951, after losing her battle with cancer.

Her cancer cells were forwarded to Dr. George Otto Gey, a prominent cancer and virus researcher. He collected cells from all patients, regardless of race and socioeconomic status, treated for cervical cancer at John Hopkins University.

Lacks, born Loretta Pleasant but affectionately known by her loved ones as Hennie, had a rare mutation that allowed her cells to continue undergoing cellular division under the right conditions. Unlike anything Gey had seen, her cells doubled every 20 to 24 hours instead of dying like the other cells he collected.

Her cells were the first to be found

with the mutation that would allow them to keep undergoing division, making her line an important tool for research in biochemistry and cellular biology. Cell lines with this mutation are known as immortalized cell lines.

The cells line was nicknamed HeLa by Gey, created using the first two letters of her first and last name. The

“The HeLa cell line has been used to study the effects of toxins, drugs, hormones and viruses on the growth of cancer cells without experimenting on living people for more than 70 years.”

HeLa cell line has been used to study the effects of toxins, drugs, hormones and viruses on the growth of cancer cells without experimenting on living people for more than 70 years.

At the time, permission to harvest cells was not required or sought, so neither Lacks nor her family were aware the cells were collected and subsequently used for medical research.

Even though information from her cell line was known to researchers after 1970, the Lacks family did not find out about their existence until 1975. In the 1980s the family medical records were

published without consent.

The Morehouse School of Medicine wanted to give recognition to Lacks, her cell line and “the valuable contribution made by African Americans to medical research.”

In 1996, the school held the first annual HeLa Women’s Medical Conference. The mayor of Atlanta declared October 11, 1996, the first day of the conference, Henrietta Lacks Day.

In March 2013 the Lacks family was notified by author Rebecca Skloot that the DNA sequence of the genome from a strain of HeLa cells would be published. The family raised objections about making the genetic information public. Jeri Lacks Whye, grandchild to Lacks, told the New York Times that “the biggest concern was privacy.”

Later that year another group working on a different HeLa cell line under the National Institutes of Health submitted their findings. In August 2013 the NIH announced an agreement with the family that gave some control over access to the sequence and a promise of acknowledgment in scientific papers.

The Lacks’ estate filed a lawsuit in 2021 against Thermo Fisher Scientific for profiting from the HeLa cell line without consent asking for “the full amount of [Thermo Fisher’s] net profits.”

The Lacks family reached a settlement in July 2023 with Thermo Fisher for undisclosed terms. | ECHO

UNTOLD HISTORIES

A MAP TO FREEDOM

Enslaved People Created Maps Using Their Own Braided Hair

Written by Phillip Luna

Cornrows, braids very close to the scalp that are formed using an under-hand technique, are part of cultural identity for Black people. Throughout history, however, cornrows and braiding have been used to define tribes, social status or even for mapping escape routes for slaves.

From Africa

In ancient Africa, braid patterns typically indicated which tribe a person was a part of and their stature within that tribe. Warriors and kings also used hair styles to show their status in society. Braids were also used to signify marital or social status.

There are many different types of braids which have their roots in Africa. But braids of different variations also have roots in Viking, Native American and some Asian cultures.

Cornrows, specifically, can be traced back to 3000 B.C. Africa. It is likely the hair style was called “kolese”

which means “a creature without legs” in Nigerian.

The term “cornrows” originated in America. Many other braid and hair types originated in Africa. Dreadlocks, for example, were first seen in Egyptian carvings dating back to 2500 B.C.

In many parts of Africa braids are still used to signify a person’s age, marital status, wealth, religion or tribe.

To Slavery in the United States

Cornrows, which were sometimes called canerows to represent the sugar cane fields that slaves worked in, became a way for slaves to secretly communicate with each other.

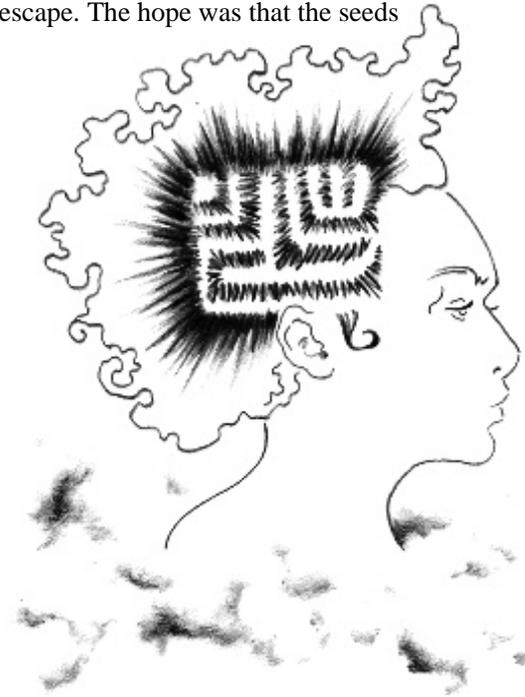
In the late 1500s, slaves began using hairstyles as maps, with curves representing roads that could be used to escape. Enslaved people would style their cornrows in patterns as a means of coded messaging.

A particular number of braids could

indicate possible escape routes or even signal a meet up time.

Enslaved people often had no education, and their only expertise was in the crops they had spent lives working.

Escaping slaves would hide seeds in their cornrows when they attempted escape. The hope was that the seeds



FREEDOM'S JOURNAL

The First Black Owned and Operated Newspaper

Written by Phillip Luna

Freedom’s Journal was a weekly newspaper first published March 16, 1827 in New York City. The paper was in circulation until 1829 and was the first Black owned newspaper.

Freedom’s Journal was founded by Rev. John Wilk and other free Black men.

In the 1800s, print journalism became an important part of the African American protest and empowerment when some Black Americans were

emancipated. Freedom’s Journal was also an attempt to improve literacy rates among Black people and argue for social and political equality in their community.

Freedom’s Journal often published poetry and fiction writing. “Theresa – a Haitian Tale,” is considered the first published piece of short fiction by an African American author. The unknown author went by the designation “S.” and the story featured a female protagonist of African descent.

“Theresa – a Haitian Tale” was published in the Freedom Journal in 1828.

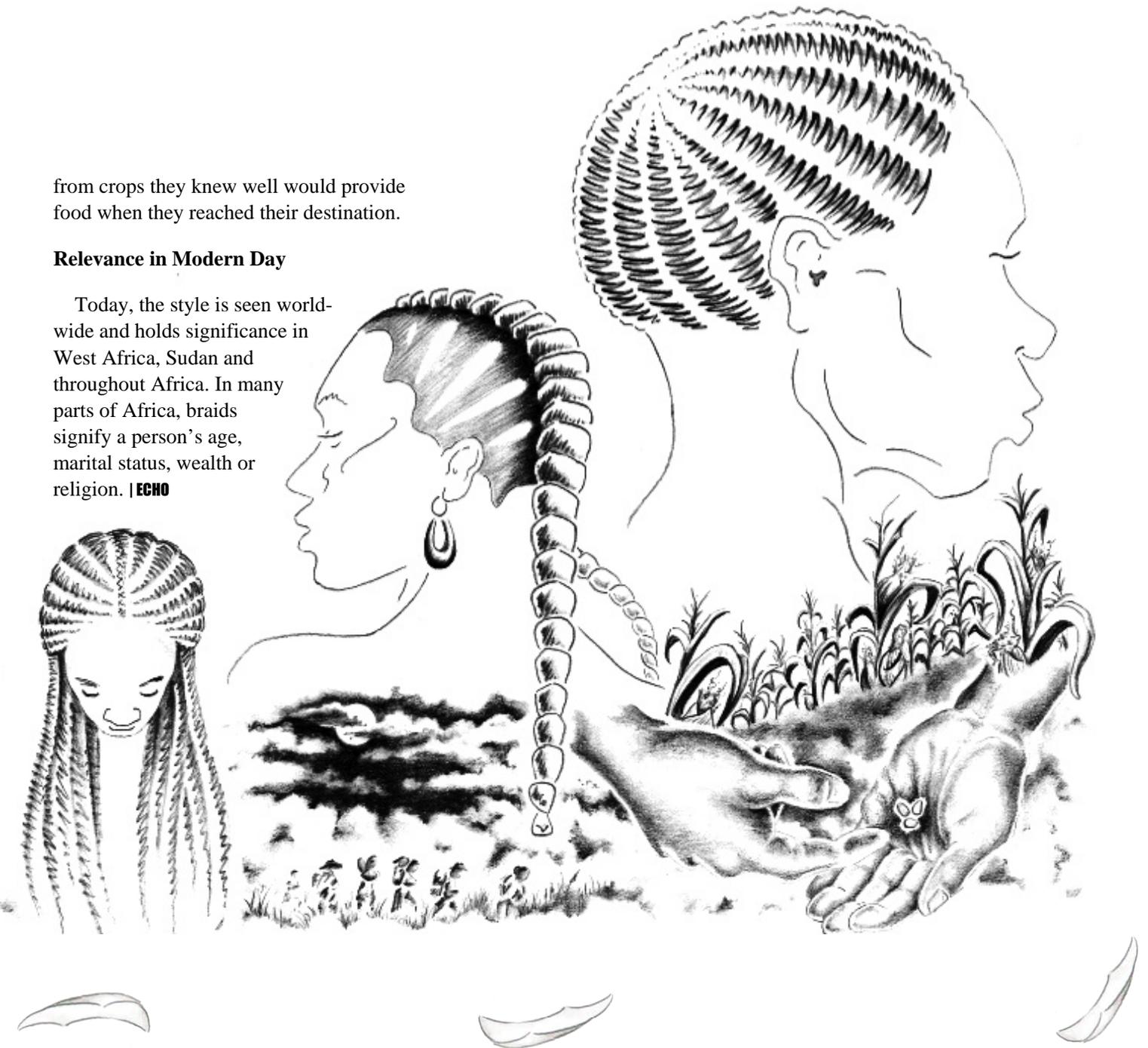
In 1827 there were approximately 300,000 free Black Americans in the United States, which stemmed from many new emancipation laws. In 1799, New York had passed the gradual emancipation law. Enslaved children born in New York after July 4, 1799, after a period of indentured servitude into their 20s, would be emancipated.

The United States and Great Britain

from crops they knew well would provide food when they reached their destination.

Relevance in Modern Day

Today, the style is seen worldwide and holds significance in West Africa, Sudan and throughout Africa. In many parts of Africa, braids signify a person's age, marital status, wealth or religion. | **ECHO**



had banned African slave trade in 1808, but slavery was expanding in the Deep South of America.

According to African American journalist Irvine Garland Penn, the objective of Freedom's Journal was to oppose New York newspapers that attacked Black people and encouraged slavery.

Newspapers at the time mocked African Americans and openly supported slavery. While New York State passed

emancipation laws, the state's economy was tangled with the South and slavery.

The Freedom's Journal founders selected John Brown Russwurm and Samuel Cornish as editors for the publication.

Russwurm was born in Jamaica to an enslaved Black woman and a white merchant. Later, his father moved to Maine and remarried a white woman. Russwurm was raised by his father and step-mother. He studied at Bowdoin

College, and eventually became the second known Black American to earn a bachelor's degree from a U.S. university.

Cornish was born to free Black parents in Delaware. In his life he was an advocate for the abolition of slavery and helped establish the first Black Presbyterian Church in New York.

Russwurm and Cornish were critical to the publications significant, but short-lived success. | **ECHO**

VIDEO GAMES



Gameplay for *Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night*, which is available from Fully Loaded Electronics for \$58.

Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

BLOODSTAINED: RITUAL OF THE NIGHT

A Spiritual Successor to the Popular Castlevania: Symphony of the Night

Written by Logan Gimbel

Explore a castle spawned straight from hell and battle demons in *Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night*.

This game is a spiritual successor to the popular game *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*, and in many ways plays just like it.

Bloodstained is a potentially challenging platformer with a robust crafting system not found in *Symphony*.

Players control Miriam, a woman taken as a young child by the Alchemy Guild and implanted with a crystal that allows her to wield a variety of demonic powers, called shards.

Miriam was to be sacrificed in a greater demon summoning, but became

comatose and was spared. She wakes up 10 years later when a large, demon-filled castle appears.

While exploring the world, players will fight over 200 different types of enemies.

Each enemy has different attack styles players must adapt to. Some demons are weak to magic, while others are weak to physical attacks. Each boss battle is unique and requires creativity in order to beat.

Defeating bosses rewards players with unique abilities. Some boss abilities are required to fully explore the castle.

Defeating regular demons grants experience and may reward items or shards

that can be used in crafting.

Johannes is an alchemist that accompanies Miriam and acts as the players crafting hub.

Using alchemy, players can craft weapons, armor, accessories, enhance shards and prepare meals. Enhancing shards increases their effects, while consuming a prepared meal for the first time gives Miriam a small, but permanent stat boost.

Eating a prepared meal will also restore Miriam's health. The more complex the meal the more health will be restored.

Miriam's mana is restored at a fixed rate, but consuming an ether potion

restores it as well.

Players will need to manage Miriam's health and mana as they explore the castle and battle the forces of hell.

Not all areas are immediately accessible. As Miriam learns new abilities, such as double jump or the ability to move large objects using a spectral hand, new areas of the world become accessible.

Hidden around the castle are various characters players can interact with, such as a barber that allows players to customize Miriam's looks or a vampire named O.D. that runs a library.

Save points and warp points are also hidden around the map and players may want to prioritize finding them.

Bloodstained does not have an auto-

save feature, so players will want to save often, as dying will return the player to their most recent save. Using the save points will restore Miriam's health and mana.

The warp points allow Miriam to return to previously explored areas, such as Arvantville, which acts as the main base for players.

Located in Arvantville are several different characters that Miriam can interact with.

Lindsay, Abigail and Susie will ask the player to complete specific tasks, such as killing a certain number of specific demons or finding certain items. Completing any of these quests rewards players with items, food, weapons or armor.

Dominique acts as a shop where players can buy and sell items. She will also

give hints on what players should do next.

Once players unlock an item, either by finding or crafting it, the item will be available in Dominique's shop.

Fans of platformers, the Castlevania series or action games may enjoy Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night.

It is available from Fully Loaded Electronics for \$58.

The game requires a profile linked with a Nintendo account to start.

All consoles come with this master profile from FLE. If it is deleted, there is no way to re-link the account.

Estimated play time: approximately 14 hours for a speed run and 35+ hours for 100% completion. | **ECHO**

ON EDOVO

RESOURCES FOR ROLEPLAYING GAMES ON EDOVO

App Has Several Resources for Dungeons & Dragons

Written by Brain Daniel Bement

Dungeons & Dragons is a tabletop role-playing game which pits players against puzzles and enemies in a fantasy environment. It is one of the most popular games of its type in the world, and available on Edovo.

Three core books are needed to play the game: The Dungeon Master's Guide, Player Handbook and Monster Manual. They are broken up into 29 different sections on Edovo and are compatible with Dungeons & Dragons version 3.5.

Players can use the books to create unique characters such as wizards and fighters, or to battle hordes of enemies such as zombies or bandits. If combat is not preferred, people can play as court jesters who are spies, or an in-

vestigator searching for clues.

The books contain all the information needed to play the game. Players will need a pen, paper and scientific calculator to simulate die rolls. These three items can be purchased from commissary.

For beginners, Edovo has books that provide information and character creation instructions. Players will learn about equipment, money, spells, skills, abilities and weapons. They can learn how combat works, hit points and attack rolls.

The Texas Instruments 30xs scientific calculator, sold on commissary, comes with instructions on how to generate random numbers.

A common way to simulate die rolls is by using the "randint" (function found by pressing the PRB key.) For example, a six-sided die roll is simulated by entering "randint(1-6)." The first number is the quantity of dice and the second represents how many faces the dice have.

For players interested in playing a 5th Edition campaign, Edovo offers the first part of the, Tyranny of Dragons campaign called "The Hoard of the Dragon Queen."

The adventure will allow players to hit level 7 or 8, but to finish the story players will need to purchase the second half of the adventure, "The Rise of Tiamat," which is not available on Edovo. | **ECHO**

NOTICES

NEWS BRIEFS AND NOTICES**Health Services:
Tuberculosis Screening**

In February, tuberculosis screening will change for ODOC.

Health Services will continue to have TB clinic monthly in the multi-purpose building. Adults in custody are scheduled once a year during or around the month they were admitted to the facility.

AICs who miss their call out may be subject to disciplinary action.

Health Services will offer lab draws and if that is refused then a tuberculin skin test will be placed.

Labs draws are completed in medical if the AIC accepts a lab draw as the form of testing.

If both tests are refused, the AIC will be placed on TB observation daily.

- Charlotte Persinger, RN

Clothing Repair with WFD

Work Force Development has begun clothing repair sign ups again. The department can mend and repair clothing, such as coats, chambrays, jeans and stocking caps, to name a few.

However, WFD cannot repair underwear, socks and personal items.

A WFD clothing repair schedule is available on housing unit bulletin boards. Once per week, the evening officer will verify repairs and the item will be placed in the WFD bag along with the unit repair sheet.

The item will be repaired and returned to the AIC.

- Provided by Officer Pullen,
Work Force Development

**Fruit of the Loom Does Not
Provide Gift Cards**

I am reaching out on behalf of Fruit of the Loom. We have been receiving an influx of handwritten letters from individuals preparing for parole, requesting Walmart gift cards and other gift cards. These letters indicate that there is a bulletin board within your facilities stating that Fruit of the Loom provides such gift cards to parolees.

Unfortunately, this information is not accurate. To our knowledge, Fruit of the Loom has never offered gift cards to individuals preparing for parole, and we do not have any programs in place that provide this type of assistance.

We truly appreciate the effort and resources these individuals are using to write to us, and we regret that they are doing so under a misunderstanding. To prevent further confusion and unnecessary correspondence, we kindly ask that you review your facility bulletin boards and remove any mention of Fruit of the Loom in connection with gift card programs. Thank you for your attention to this matter and for helping us ensure accurate information is shared.

- Amber Hancock
Relations Manager, Fruit of the Loom

Tax Forms Not Provided

The Department of Corrections will not provide federal or state tax forms to AICs, nor instructions.

AICs may write or call the Internal Revenue Service or Oregon Department of Revenue to request tax forms.

AICs may elect to reach out to their friends and family to request they send

tax forms in through the mail. All incoming mail is subject to the Department's rule on mail, 291-131-0025.

DOC staff and legal assistants are not authorized to provide tax advice or status updates on filings to AICs.

AICs may appoint a qualified and trusted person as their power of attorney to assist with the tax filing process. POA forms can be obtained by submitting a library request form (CD1714).

DOC will only issue 1099 (MISC/INT) to AICs who meet specific IRS minimum requirements.

1099 MISC issued to AICs who have received \$600 or more in PRAS.

1099 INT issued to AICs who have accrued \$10 or more in interest.

State and federal taxes due date:
April 15th, 2026.

AICs will need to use their own pre-addressed postage paid envelope for tax correspondence and filings.

Oregon Department of Treasury
Tax Forms Requests
Department of Revenue
P.O. Box 14999
Salem, OR
800-356-4222

Internal Revenue Service
Tax Forms Requests
Department of Treasury
Internal Revenue Service
Ogden, UT 84201-0002
800-829-3676

- Provided by Susan VanEpps,
Business Services



In partnership with **CURE**, the Oregon Department of Corrections Reentry and Release Unit invite friends and family of individuals nearing release to learn about the release process, support services and timelines.

To join an upcoming online Reentry and Release Community Outreach Session, please use the QR code to access the Microsoft Teams link.



Oregon CURE's mission is to reduce crime by advocating for effective criminal justice policies and practices.

We are a volunteer organization for families and friends of those in prison.

Send Writing to 23and1

Articles, short stories and other writing by incarcerated people can be submitted to 23and1 Media, out of Pennsylvania.

The magazine can be found at 23and1.org.

They are seeking submissions from

system-impacted writers. Contact 23and1 Media if you are interested.

23and1 Media
 PO Box 903
 Waynesburg, PA 15307
 23and1media@gmail.com

- Provided by Bryce Huber, 23and1 Media

NEWLY WEDS FOODS
 inspiring new tastes



Felon-Friendly Employer

POSITIONS

Bagger starts at \$18.16 per hour

Operator starts at \$20.36 per hour

Set Up positions start at \$20.36

Electrician start at \$42.00 Department of Energy Supervisors License/ \$34 per for Journeyman DOE

BENEFITS

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HOW TO CONTACT

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 Pendleton, OR 97801

Website:
 www.newlywedsfoods.com

Phone: 541.966.5904
 Fax: 773.227.4160
 Rosa Hays
 Human Resource Manager
 Cell: 541.215.9178
 Email: rhays@newlywedsfoods.com

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PUZZLES

**See how many points
you can score in one word!**

Scrabble Board: January 2025

Scrabble Basic Rules

No proper nouns like names or places

No contractions like “it’s” or “that’s”

No abbreviations like “app” or “spec”

Board Scores

TW = Triple Word Score

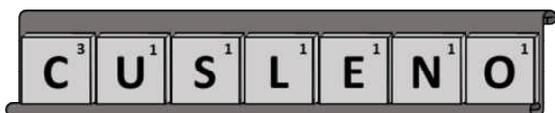
DW = Double Word Score

TL = Triple Letter Score

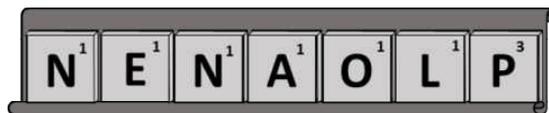
DL = Double Letter Score

TW			DL				TW				DL			TW
	DW				TL		L ¹	TL					DW	
		DW				DL	A ¹					DW		
DL			DW				B ³				DW			DL
				DW			G ²	O ¹		DW				
	TL				TL		O ¹	R ¹	TL					TL
		DL				DL	A ¹	DL				DL		
TW			DL				L ¹	U ¹	C ³	K ⁵	Y ⁴			TW
		DL						DL		I ¹			DL	
	TL				TL				TL	L ¹				TL
				DW						T ¹	A ¹	N ¹	G ²	O ¹
DL			DW					DL				DW		DL
		DW				DL		DL				DW		
	DW				TL				TL				DW	
TW			DL									DL		TW

PLAYER 1



PLAYER 2



Sudoku

Puzzle 1: Demanding

7		5	1					
					5	4		
2			9					
6								2
				9				
			7			5		1
9							8	3
		2					7	
		1		8	6	9	4	

Puzzle 2: Very Challenging

	3					6		4
	5				2			
7			9					
			1					9
	2		8	3				
	4				9			
					5	7	6	
1						9		
		3			4			8

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



“I love
my kids ...
I had to
change.”

Mychael Lee poses with the service animal he trains at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution on Jan. 30, 2025.

Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

ONE YEAR TO CHANGE

In the Spotlight with Mychael Lee

Written by Brian Daniel Bement

“My son asked me why I kept picking drugs, crime and gang life over him,” said Mychael Lee, remembering a phone call from Christmas 2024. “He said I didn’t love him, I loved the life-style.”

Lee is incarcerated at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution and said his family had stopped talking to him.

For much of his life, Lee had promised to change. His promise always

ended up broken.

But his son’s words stuck with him. He decided to spend the next year focusing on sobriety, programming and trying to get his family back into his life.

“I love my kids,” said Lee. “I had to change.”

Lee has four children. Two with his wife Danielle Nyholm and two of his wife’s children that he adopted.

He said he had many conversations with one of EOCI’s psychiatric nurse practitioner Ted Chase. Chase helped him create a plan to change his life.

Lee worked on his mental health and got involved in programs. He left the gang he had long been a part of and he quit using drugs.

He had more access to drugs in a gang and he said he had to leave both behind.



“I had to change all the way, not just doing drugs,” he said.

He struggled to quit drugs at first. His involvement in Narcotics Anonymous and GOGI, a peer support group, helped him get clean.

Lee’s sponsor, Eric Burnham, said Lee began his recovery through self-reflection.

“He had a revelation to do something different,” said Burnham.

Burnham said Lee internalized the idea that he was worth more than he had thought.

Lee has been sober for more than a year. Additionally, Lee starting taking GOGI classes.

“GOGI taught me tools, but the real change came from me putting in the work,” he said.

GOGI facilitator, Keaton Stephens, said he met Lee in segregation in November.

Stephens said he was walking the tier in segregation passing out independent studies workbooks when he saw Lee.

“He came back and forth to segregation,” said Stephens. “After his last trip, he changed a lot of things in his life.”

After completing GOGI courses, Lee became a GOGI facilitator.

Lee also became a mentor, part of the contact office program.

Contact officers work with selected adults in custody to help them become mentors. Then, the contact team pairs mentors with mentees for peer-led support.

He began as a mentee in January. By December, Lee was mentoring five people.

“Lee works every day to change,” said Andrew Greyson, one of Lee’s mentees. “He finds time to help others. It shows who he is as a person.”

Greyson said Lee came to visit him while he was in segregation and it brought him to tears.

“I have never had anyone care that much for me before,” he said.

Lee said he encourages his mentees to follow GOGI, because it was so impactful for him.

In fact, it was his success in GOGI which led to reconnecting with his family.

“My wife’s mother saw my certificates online,” he said. “She contacted me and said if I was clean, sober and doing the right things, she would bring my children to see me.”

At first, Lee was afraid he might fail and let them down. But despite the fear, he began speaking with his family again.

He had phone calls and video visits with them. He said the joy and laughter he heard from them filled him with love.

By Christmas 2025, his family came back into his life.

“I’m grateful to have them back,” he said, “but I am even more grateful that I found the courage and support to change.” | **ECHO**

PREA INFORMATION

Sexual abuse and harassment are never okay. Tell Someone. GET HELP.

Call the Inspector General's Hotline:

1. Pick up a handset
2. Press *999 to leave a message

All PREA Calls are confidential.

Send a letter to the Governor:

Governor's Office, State Capitol, Room 160, 900 Court St., Salem, OR 97301

The Oregon Department of Corrections has a zero-tolerance policy for sexual abuse and harassment. AICs’ family can report on their behalf by contacting the Inspector General's public hotline at: (877) 678-4222.

El Abuso sexual y el acoso sexual nunca son aceptables. Avisele a alguien. CONSIGA AYUDA.

Llame al Inspector General:

1. Al numero de ayuda:
2. Levante el teléfono, marque *999.

Todas las llamadas a 'PREA' son gratis y confidenciales.

También puede reportar a la oficina del Gobernador por escrito.

Governor's Office, State Capitol, Room 160, 900 Court St., Salem, OR 97301

Sus amigos o familiares pueden hacer un reporte llamando a la línea del Inspector General al 877-678-4222.

PREA Advocate:

You may write the PREA advocate at:
ODOC PREA Advocate
3601 State St.,
Salem, OR 97301

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Letters to The Editor

Edited for length and clarity

East Coast Artist:

I recently saw The Echo and 1664 on the Edovo, but a lot of the times our tablets or service has issues which sometimes limit my view on looking at them. I was wondering if by chance I would be able to get some issues of the Echo newsletter and 1664 magazines sent to me?

I really enjoy reading them. I am an artist myself. Maybe I can be a part of the artwork that gets published in your newsletter and magazine. Have any ideas you want drawn up let me know and I send my creativity.

Travis R. Elsea,
New Hampshire

Hello East Coast Artist from New Hampshire:

Thanks for writing.

We don't have a subscription service, but we can send you a few copies.

If you would like to submit artwork, we are always happy to look at it. For our magazine, each publication has a theme and upcoming themes are listed

in the magazine. If your art matches the theme, it is more likely to be published.

If we do publish your artwork, we will send you a copy of the publication it appears in.

Please keep in mind that we cannot return submitted artwork.

Thanks for reading!

- The Echo/1664

Let's Collaborate:

Within the last few years I have begun to use my time more proactively rather than begrudgingly, and I now, with some help, have created a magazine called 23and1 (check out 23and1.org) that is similar to News Inside in a way, but I am really trying to celebrate and highlight people who have flourished after incarceration, and also those who are doing cool things while still inside.

I am looking for platforms that will let their system-impacted readers and writers know that we are looking for submissions. Articles, short stories or rants.

I appreciate all that you are doing for us inside. Keep up the good work!

- Bryce Huber,
Pennsylvania

Hello Let's Collaborate from Pennsylvania:

We have included your contact information in our most recent edition of The Echo and we can republish periodically.

Always happy to help people publish their writing from the correctional setting.

- The Echo/1664

Welcome Mink:

I, for one, welcome our mink neighbor (article in December 2024 issue).

We have them in my home state of Minnesota, and if this one is the size of a ferret it's rather small. Having a predator such as this is a good indicator of a healthy eco system. Our gardens attract and provide for a flourishing rodent population, and predators such

as hawks, owls, and mink help keep that population in check. It would be an impossible task to eliminate mice and gophers from the property. This cute little critter is part of the circle of life, and the good food we grow ensures his health.

Even though the species is invasive, I encourage tolerance. The ecology of the continent is changing and species are moving into areas they did not live in before: Armadillos are moving north, coyotes in New York City, plus the countless non-native species that are naturalizing there like nutria, mys-

tery snails and those giant colorful orb-weaver spiders in the Carolinas.

All things change, and this change helps keep the rodents in check, and is otherwise better than others.

- Phillip L. Nelson, EOCI

Hello Welcome Mink from Oregon:

Thanks for reading and sharing your thoughts!

- The Echo/1664

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

If you have an article you would like to comment on, a question about the publications or anything you would like the editors to read, contact the IWP: Journalism Department.

We publish letters to the editor periodically.

YOUR VOICE MATTERS!

Help Reshape the Narrative of What it Means to be Incarcerated

One of the most challenging parts of running a prison publication is finding people to interview. Prisons are compartmentalized places and often our writers interview people who are on their unit or in their general area. We would like to expand our reach and add more voices to our articles.

If you are interested in being interviewed for an article that may appear in The Echo, 1664, with the Prison Journalism Project, the East Oregonian, or other publications, fill out this form and drop it into the kyte box. Forms are available on your housing unit.

We are creating a database of willing interviewees and will schedule you for an interview in the near future.

Here is a brief list of upcoming articles:

- **Supreme Court Ruling/County Time Applied to Consecutive Sentences**
- **Cost of Canteen/Inflation**
- **Short Staffing**
- **The Impact of Measure 11**
- **Health Care/Aging in Prison**
- **Surviving Cancer in Prison**
- **Lost in the Letters/LGBTQ+ Community and Unfair Stigmas**
- **The Unlikely Entrepreneurs in Prison**

YOUR VOICE MATTERS!

Help Reshape the Narrative of What it Means to be Incarcerated

We at The Echo/Journalism Project are looking for people to interview for our articles. We would like to expand our reach and add more voices to our articles. We would like to interview you for an article that may appear in The Echo, 1664, with the Prison Journalism Project, the East Oregonian, or other publications. We would like to interview you for an article that may appear in The Echo, 1664, with the Prison Journalism Project, the East Oregonian, or other publications. We would like to interview you for an article that may appear in The Echo, 1664, with the Prison Journalism Project, the East Oregonian, or other publications.

NAME: _____

HEA: _____

UNIT: _____

What is your job title? (Check all that apply)

What job? Cook Janitor Nurse Teacher Other _____

How long? 1-2 years 3-4 years 5-6 years 7-8 years 9-10 years 11-12 years 13-14 years 15+ years

What is your job title? (Check all that apply)

What job? Cook Janitor Nurse Teacher Other _____

How long? 1-2 years 3-4 years 5-6 years 7-8 years 9-10 years 11-12 years 13-14 years 15+ years

What is your job title? (Check all that apply)

What job? Cook Janitor Nurse Teacher Other _____

How long? 1-2 years 3-4 years 5-6 years 7-8 years 9-10 years 11-12 years 13-14 years 15+ years

What is your job title? (Check all that apply)

What job? Cook Janitor Nurse Teacher Other _____

How long? 1-2 years 3-4 years 5-6 years 7-8 years 9-10 years 11-12 years 13-14 years 15+ years

Forms on Housing Units

THE ECHO, VOLUME IX - ISSUE 88, JAN/FEB 2026

www.pollenpress.org/the-echo/

Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution

2500 Westgate

Pendleton, OR

97801

WHERE TO FIND THE ECHO AND 1664

ON EDOVO

The Echo and 1664 can be found on the Edovo application.

Readers can find the publications by typing “The Echo” or “1664” into the search bar.

ONLINE

Readers outside the correctional setting can find The Echo and 1664 at www.pollenpress.org or on the Oregon Department of Correction’s webpage under the newsletter directory. Check out www.pollenpress.org/the-echo/



Scanning the QR code will take readers to the ODOC directory of newsletters where The Echo and 1664 are available.

ON UNITS

Print copies of The Echo is available on housing units at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution. 1664 is available in limited quantities at select locations.

For EOCI, each housing unit has a magazine rack dedicated for The Echo and 1664.

ON TABLETS

The Echo and 1664 can be found in the free section on tablets under “notices.”

The Echo is available at EOCI. 1664 is available at all Oregon prisons.



The Pollen Initiative is dedicated to cultivating media centers inside prisons to shed light on the justice system. Through hands-on multimedia training, as well as leadership programs that facilitate personal growth and transferable skills, our team contributes to more balanced narratives about incarceration.

We support existing prison newsrooms, like the historic San Quentin News, and emerging newsrooms and media projects across the country.

HOW TO DONATE

Support The Echo and 1664 by making a donation to Pollen Initiative.

Donations can be made at www.polleninitiative.org.

Pollen Initiative, EIN 9202619177, is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization, and your donation is tax deductible within the guidelines of U.S. law. Please keep your receipt as your official record. We'll email it to you upon successful completion of your donation.