

# EAST OREGONIAN

SEPTEMBER 3 – 4, 2022

146th Year, No. 110

WINNER OF THE 2022 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

\$1.50



Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

Construction continues Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2022, on the future nonprofit Pendleton Children's Center at 510 S.W. 10th St., Pendleton.

## Pendleton Children's Center eyes October opening

By DAKOTA  
CASTETS-DIDIER  
East Oregonian

**P**ENDLETON — Through a ruckus of hammers, saws and construction equipment at work on Tuesday, Aug. 30, Brittney Jackson described what the new Pendleton Children's Center could accomplish.

"I'm so excited about all of the possibilities," she said. "It's a difficult time for families when children are little. We can really get in, strengthen families, support their children and get them where they need to be before kindergarten."

Jackson is the director of the center, 510 S.W. 10th St., which plans to open its doors to the public in October. The nonprofit seeks to address a need for child care in Pendleton that Jackson emphasized was crucial to the community and the success of its children.

Jackson has five children of her own and is a 22-year veteran of the child care industry. She said the industry is misunderstood.

"It costs families a lot to pay for child care, but child care is also extremely expensive to provide, especially if you're shooting for high quality," she said. "It's a profession that you can have a degree in and still make somewhere near minimum wage."

Jackson explained that, when the coronavirus pandemic began, the child care industry was among the first to fall. It became quickly apparent, she said, how essential a part of the work force child care providers truly were.

"There is a term in the child care world, called a child care desert, which is what they use to describe a community that has about 33 child care slots for every

See Opening, Page A8

### Opening:

Continued from Page A1

100 that need them," Jackson said. "The Ford Family Foundation came out with a study that Pendleton has seven child care slots for every 100 that need them, so that's a huge need."

The Pendleton Children's Center states its core mission is to address this need with high-quality care for infants, toddlers and preschoolers that is as affordable as possible in a safe educational environment to enhance the economic vitality of Pendleton and the surrounding communities.

The center is dividing its operations into two distinct phases that illustrate its intent to scale up and become Pendleton's largest child care facility.

Phase one of the center includes two preschool classrooms that will be able to host approximately 40 children. Phase two includes the purchase and renovation of a second building, built as a school in 1948, and then increasing to three preschool classrooms, bringing capacity to more than 100 children.

The second building is beside the first and will allow the center to merge into a single, cohesive campus.

This will all be funded through programs such as Oregon's Preschool Promise, which is subsidizing 36 child care slots for phase one, to be followed by even more in phase two. Jackson also expressed a desire for the center to work with

local businesses to help subsidize the cost of child care at the center for their employees, and to create scholarships with local funding. Outside Preschool Promise hours, child care will be available for an hourly rate.

"We're really hoping to reach out into other entities that are aware of this problem and offering support and assistance," Jackson said. "The Preschool Promise program is one of them, grants, hoping to work with other employers in town to help work out some situations where they could subsidize part of the child care for the families. We're exploring all options."

Local business owners, educators and parents make up the board behind the center's construction and operation. Kathryn Brown, vice president of the EO Media Group, the parent company of the East Oregonian, serves as the board's secretary-treasurer.

The board has worked closely with Jackson, who was initially brought on as an adviser to the project but eventually became its director.

"They've been absolutely wonderful and super-helpful. Having thought about something like this for 20 years on my own, it was definitely something I thought I'd have to pull back and reevaluate if I were to pull together something like that myself," she said. "It's going to take something as big as a board like that and community support to really make this happen."

The Pendleton Children's Center will release details on registration soon.



Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

Brittney Jackson, 43, director of Pendleton Children's Center, discusses the facility's mission statement Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2022, as she works from her office in Pendleton. "Once it gets going, my hope is that people will see what a benefit it is, and how everyone benefits, and then hopefully there will be more buy-in from the community," she said. "But I think it's something people need to see before they can believe."