

# Motorcycles thunder through Echo on annual toy run

By **BEN LONERGAN**  
STAFF WRITER

The sound of more than 50 motorcycles thundered through the town of Echo on Saturday, Dec. 5, as the 17th annual Echo Toy Run departed to take donated gifts to children at Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston.

The parade of riders left Echo with their motorcycles adorned with stuffed animals and brightly colored toys, a small line of cars trailing behind them loaded down with even more gifts.

The event, started by Al Sells 17 years ago, has taken on new meaning following Sells' death in a motorcycle crash in 2019. Sells' daughter, Amanda Silvani, said it was incredible to see support from the community for the event and her father's memory even in the midst of a global pandemic.

"I was a little worried about this year," she said. "But there was a great turnout."

Silvani, who works in home health for Good Shepherd, said she used to work in the emergency department at the hospital and had the opportunity to see firsthand the joy the toys would bring to children spending the holidays in the hospital.

"It's usually their worst day that they're in the ER," she said. "To be able to give them a toy is incredible."

Silvani expressed her gratitude to the many people involved in carrying on the toy run in her father's memory and the many people who donate toys each year. This year, participants filled three large hospital linen carts with toys and stuffed animals.

"I think it's pretty incredible to see everyone's support — that they want to help with this every year," Silvani said.

Leading off the group of riders were Phil and Beth Spencer on their 2006



Riders leave Echo for the 17th annual Echo Toy Run on Saturday, Dec. 5, 2020.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

A stuffed animal adorns a motorcycle during the Echo Toy Run on Saturday, Dec. 5, 2020.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Motorcycles fill a portion of the parking lot at Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston on Saturday, Dec. 5, 2020, following the Echo Toy Run.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Toys fill a large bin in the parking lot of Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston at the conclusion of the Echo Toy Run on Saturday, Dec. 5, 2020.

*"IT'S A REAL HONOR TO BE PART OF THIS  
— WITH AL SELLS' MEMORY — AND EVERYTHING.  
IT'S AN HONOR."*

Phil Spencer, who dressed as Santa Claus for the event

Honda VTX 1800, Phil dressed as Santa Claus with Beth riding in a sidecar beside him. The pair said they have been taking part in the ride for seven or eight years and enjoy the opportunity to give back to

the community.

"It's a real honor to be part of this — with Al Sells' memory — and everything," Phil Spencer said. "It's an honor."

For the Spencers, this year's toy run served as

more than an opportunity to bring joy to children and celebrate Sells' memory, it served as a release from the stresses of a global pandemic and an opportunity to bring joy to an entire community.

"We've all had our stress and this is an excellent release for everybody," Phil Spencer said.

Kandie Jensen, Sells' ex-wife, said Sells would have found a way to make the toy run happen no matter the circumstances, and she commended the community for continuing through in his spirit.

"They weren't going to let it die," she said. "He wouldn't have. He would have done it if he'd been

the only one riding."

Although Jensen has long had a part in collecting toys for the Echo Toy Run, she said the event was one of Sells' greatest enjoyments and something that he took great pride in each year.

"He was always one of those people that he liked to help the kids — no matter what. He would do anything for children," she said. "This was his pride and joy."

## Boiler fails at Hermiston High School

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

Hermiston School District is ending 2020 with an unexpected expense after staff discovered major damage to the boiler in the "92 wing" of Hermiston High School.

The school board had a brief emergency meeting over Zoom on Thursday, Dec. 3, to declare an emergency regarding the boiler, allowing the district to immediately work with its contracted heating and air service to fix the problem rather than go through its usual lengthy bidding process.

The resolution passed Dec. 3 described the boiler failure as "catastrophic." Katie Saul, director of business services for the

district, told the board that a temporary fix was allowing the boiler to provide some heat for now, but the district would need to purchase a new boiler, which a preliminary quote showed would likely cost about \$200,000.

"Right now we're limping through with the current boiler but it's only a matter of time before it fails, and this time of year we cannot be without heat in that part of the high school," she said.

In an email to the *East Oregonian*, Superintendent Tricia Mooney said maintenance staff initially found evidence of the boiler leaking into a classroom, and investigation of the leak found a crack in the boiler. She said the boiler heats the wing of the

school that includes the gym, fitness room, locker rooms and about 15 classrooms. For now, Mooney said, because staff have temporarily patched the leak and are adding extra water to nurse it along, no staff who are teaching from the school have been displaced from that wing.

She said the money for the new boiler and its installation will come out of the school district's general fund.

The section of the school where the boiler failed was built in 1992. Other sections of the school opened in 2001 after the community passed a bond in 1999, and the district plans to add another wing to the high school using money from a bond passed in 2019.

### PET OF THE WEEK FOSTER NEEDED

**Bode (Blu), who recently had a leg amputated, is in search of a foster home. He is a year old, high flight risk, needs a fence. He needs a low-key foster to heal and learn to trust people. Prefer no young children.**



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