

HERMISTON GIRLS WIN IN OVERTIME BASKETBALL/1B

Youth outreach a safe place for teens to grow up **LIFESTYLES 1C**



NATION: Supreme Court to make ruling on gay marriage **8A**
OUT OF THE VAULT: Til Taylor statue the first Pendleton bronze **7C**

EAST OREGONIAN

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WINNER OF THE 2013 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

\$1.50

PENDLETON



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The business occupancy rate for Pendleton's Main Street did not change over the course of the last year, although the overall downtown occupancy rate has dropped since 2012.

Downtown vacancy stays steady

Main Street grows by 7.8 percent in 4 years; rest of downtown shrinks by 3.1 percent

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

No two Main Street vacancies are created equal.

That was the message that Keith May, a member of the advisory committee to the Pendleton Development Commission and a former city councilor, gave to the commission at a meeting Tuesday.

May presented the results of his annual storefront count of Main Street and downtown businesses, which he conducted Jan. 1.

His report states 82.2 percent of first floor storefront on Main Street are occupied — the same as the year before.

May offered the caveat that the numbers didn't note some of the larger vacancies that were filled.

May pointed to buildings like the former Bank of American branch, which had been abandoned by its tenant for two years before Old West Credit Union moved in.

May's report also noted that three new

See **PENDLETON/10A**



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A "for lease" sign sits in the window of an empty storefront Friday at the corner of Southwest Court Avenue and First Street in downtown Pendleton.

Sipe to see State of the Union

Sen. Merkley invites Umatilla superintendent to be guest for speech

By **KATHY ANEY**
East Oregonian

Heidi Sipe hasn't missed a State of the Union address on television since childhood. This year, she will listen in the House Chamber gallery, mere yards away from President Obama.

Sipe, the superintendent of the Umatilla School District, will attend as the guest of Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley. Sipe got the word Tuesday shortly after her cell-phone buzzed during a meeting in Portland and she excused herself to field the call.



Sipe

Sipe had recognized the number on the display as one of her contacts from Merkley's office. The caller, Merkley staffer Jessica Stephens, quickly dropped the bomb. How would Sipe feel about being the senator's guest at the State of the Union address? Dumbfounded, Sipe thanked Stephens and hung up, but called back two hours later just to make sure she had heard correctly.

"I'm having a hard time believing it," Sipe admitted.

Those who know of Sipe's past relationship with Merkley are having less trouble believing the senator would choose the superintendent. The two have something of a mutual admiration.

Sipe credits Merkley for nudging the district's robotics program into existence a couple of years back and he periodically calls or drops in to check on the program's progress. In November, the senator stopped to eat tacos with students and drive the team's award-winning robot. The team qualified for and competed in robotics world championships in 2013 and 2014.

Sipe and Merkley first connected at a No Child Left Behind discussion in 2011. After hearing the teenage member of a Portland-area robotics team speak, Sipe got Merkley's ear. Chief

"The opportunity to go in person — I'm overwhelmed by it."

— **Heidi Sipe**,
Umatilla SD superintendent

See **SIPE/10A**

PENDLETON

Sheriff: Evidence doesn't support woman's version of shooting

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

The woman who reported masked men fired at her car last week near Pendleton may have made up the story, Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan said.

"I think from our perspective the story that was reported — we're not finding the evidence to support the version of events the female told us,"

Rowan said Friday. "So it's possible at the end of the day she may end up being charged with initiating a false report."

If that happens, her identity would be a matter of public record, Rowan said.

The case began the evening of Friday, Jan. 9, when she told Pendleton police that masked men forced her car to the side of a rural road north of the city, shot her vehicle and fled. The fe-

male also gave information that helped law enforcement arrest members of the local United Aryan Empire gang.

But Rowan said the story she told detectives "was all over the board," and she changed details, from two men to three to four. And the crime scene that Pendleton police Chief Stuart Roberts reported was on Snyder Road between Highway 37 and Hagen Road

See **SHOOTING/10A**



Rowan

PENDLETON

Kindergarten could clash with early start

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

The two biggest changes to the Pendleton School District this year could conflict with each other.

The Pendleton School Board approved a motion Wednesday to move the first day of school for the 2015-2016 calendar to Aug. 31, but not before Superintendent Jon Peterson revealed that kindergarten will be affected as a result.

School officials have long aimed to have the renovation

of Hawthorne School, now known as the Pendleton Early Learning Center, complete by the beginning of the school year.

But that was before the school district considered starting the school year before Round-Up. Under the old schedule, school would have started Sept. 21.

Peterson's statement was prompted by comments from board member Dave Krumbin about his opposition to the calendar change.

See **KINDERGARTEN/10A**



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A boom crane is used to place the front façade of the new Pendleton Early Learning Center on Friday in Pendleton.



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