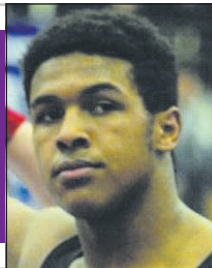


Mounted band to
grand marshal
parade **REGION/3A**

**COLBRAY WINS
NATIONAL TITLE**
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EAST OREGONIAN

TUESDAY, MARCH 31, 2015

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BETWEEN MILTON AND FREEWATER



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
The Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance is coordinating a grassroots effort to revitalize the city's two distinct downtown areas, Milton and Freewater (top).

City hopes to bridge gap between downtowns

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

No city in Oregon has been affected more by a piece of punctuation than Milton-Freewater.

While a hyphen joined the towns of Milton and Freewater in 1950, consolidating the cities' downtown areas remains a challenge.

Highway 11 becomes South Main Street, historically Milton's downtown area, as drivers enter town from the south. It then splits off and heads for Walla Walla, bypassing Freewater's former downtown which is clustered around North Main Street to the northwest.

This awkward marriage of downtown areas creates an exceptionally long Main Street, with the whole northern part untouched by the city's main thoroughfare.

This development, along with other factors including the city's proximity to the more prosperous Walla Walla, has contributed to large swaths of vacant and underutilized storefronts on Milton-Freewater's Main Street.

The most recent effort to revitalize the city's sagging downtown area is the Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance, a nonprofit established in 2012.

Alliance Director Randy Grant said a plan to improve Main Street has been proposed every decade but never materializes.

"It never goes anywhere because it never pushes through the grassroots," he said.

The alliance hired SERA Architecture of Portland and have had a series of public meetings to gather community input.

The latest meeting was held at a packed Milton-Freewater Community Building March 16, with officials from the Milton-Freewater City Council, the Milton-Freewater Unified School District, Umatilla County and Blue Mountain Community College in attendance.

Instead of a traditional meeting, attendees sat at tables featuring a map of Milton-Freewater in the center.

Audience members were asked to not only mark where they live and their favorite spots in town, but

See MILTON-FREEWATER/8A

Umatilla Co. ranks among least healthy

A third of county residents are obese

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

We smoke. We don't exercise enough. We weigh too much.

Umatilla County would earn about a D- in health if grades were awarded on a perfect bell curve.

The 2015 County Health Rankings rated Umatilla County as 26th — two positions better than last year, but still near the back of the pack. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute produce the annual study.

The healthiest Oregon counties include Washington, Hood River and Benton. Klamath landed on the bottom, edging out Harney and Douglas for the dubious honor. Morrow County ranked 10th, up nine places from last year.

The study looked at the factors affecting health such as exercise, health care availability, education, pollution, transportation, crime and unemployment. This year and last, Umatilla County landed far below the state average in about 10 categories.

In Umatilla County, 22 percent of residents smoke, compared with 16 percent for the state as a whole. The number has remained exasperatingly steady, despite stop-smoking campaigns launched by the county's public health department.

A third of residents are obese and almost a quarter are physically inactive. Umatilla County's obesity rate of 33 percent is higher than the state average of 27 percent. Sixteen percent of Oregonians are inactive compared with Umatilla County's 24 percent. More than a quarter of the county's adults and 9 percent of children are uninsured.

Availability of health care is another concern. Umatilla County has one primary care physician to every 2,259 Umatilla County residents, compared with a ratio of 1,105-to-one statewide. The ratio for dentists is 1,871-to-one in Umatilla County and 1,363-to-one statewide.

The report revealed some bright spots such as fewer alcohol-related driving deaths and sexually transmitted diseases.

Dr. Jonathan Hitzman, health officer for Umatilla County, and Umatilla County Public Health Administrator Meghan DeBolt both expect the county's collective health to gradually improve.

A recent shift to focusing on prevention is the key, they say, but takes time. School-based health centers, early learning centers, programs to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, and other efforts will eventually make a difference.

"We are really infiltrating into the community in terms of prevention," DeBolt said.

They don't, however, expect speedy change.

"We won't see instantaneous results," said Hitzman,

Health comparison

	Umatilla	Morrow	Oregon
Smoking	22%	23%	16%
Obesity	33%	27%	27%
Inactivity	24%	22%	16%
Teen births*	55	43	31
Uninsured	21%	21%	17%

*per 1,000 population of females 15-19
Source: 2015 County Health Rankings

who is also a primary care provider in Pendleton. "Many years down the road, we will reap the harvest of our efforts."

In the meantime, they worry about those who can't shake ingrained unhealthy habits.

"The top three culprits are obesity, tobacco and poor diet," Hitzman said. "They are the three leading risk factors for preventing illness and disease."

DeBolt and Hitzman also said the 26 percent uninsured rate could start dropping over the next year now that the Affordable Care Act is hitting its stride. The health department will soon have three trained "assistors" to help people sign up for coverage. Two will be bilingual, DeBolt said.

In addition, on April 15, uninsured Americans who haven't signed up for health insurance will face fines.

"Nobody's felt the first penalty," Hitzman said. "The incentive might not have struck home yet."

The high smoking rate frustrates both officials. A tobacco prevention program has been in place since 1998 and cessation classes are available. Smokers often resist well-intentioned advice to quit.

In an effort to put the county's health on the front burner, the health department will hold its First Annual Public Health Awareness Dinner & Fundraiser at Hamley & Co.'s Slickfork Saloon on April 8. Tickets are \$40 for one, \$75 for two and \$280 for a table of eight. Tickets and information is available at www.ucohealthph-ad.net. Doors open at 5. Proceeds will support two county health programs — CARE and Nurse Family Partnership.

Seizing animals not easy for police

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

A horse in a pasture near Milton-Freewater is battling an infection of its left rear foot. And authorities for now are powerless to help.

The horse lives in a pasture across the road from Nila Jackson of 85144 Hurst Lane, Milton-Freewater. She called the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office about the horse on Feb. 18, according to the agency's call logs. More than a month later the animal continues to suffer.

"The horse's foot looks like it's rotting off," she said Wednesday. "The whole leg is swollen."

Jackson, who is retired, said she has owned horses in the past and has lived near the pasture since 2004. She said this is the first time she has seen horse neglect out there. She said sheriff's deputies have checked the horse but told her the agency lacks the resources to seize the animal.

"I've called everyone and contacted everyone I can think of," Jackson said. "This poor horse is suffering so bad."

Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan said he would look into this incident, but law enforcement

See ANIMALS/8A



Photo contributed by Nila Jackson
This photo shows the hoof of a horse in a pasture on Hurst Lane in Milton-Freewater. A neighbor has complained to the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office about the condition of the animal, but without a warrant and probable cause the agency can't seize an animal.



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