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One dollar

Oregon Senate advances bill expanding background checks

By **SHEILA V KUMAR**
Associated Press

SALEM — Legislative efforts to tighten gun control in Oregon cleared an important hurdle Tuesday after senators approved a measure designed to expand background checks for most private gun sales.

Under the bill, gun buyers and sellers who aren't closely related would have to appear in person before a licensed gun dealer who can run a background check, for a fee, through the Oregon State Police. Sellers who don't do the background check face a misdemeanor charge for a first offense and a felony charge for a second one.

Supporters of the measure say it closes a "loophole" that allows people to buy guns from unlicensed sellers online without having to go through a background check, and that it would make it harder for people with mental illnesses and violent criminal records to gain access to a firearm. "What we will do is take one

step to close a major loophole which is a floodgate for allowing these types of transactions where people who are not supposed to have guns have easy access to guns," said bill sponsor Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene. The bill now moves to the

See **GUNS/10A**

HERMISTON

Center of attention

EOTEC may push out
conference center

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

The future of the Hermiston Conference Center is assured until the end of 2016, but the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center could soon take its place in the city's budget.

The city council discussed the facility's future Monday night, noting that once it starts putting more than \$50,000 a year into operating EOTEC, it wouldn't make fiscal sense to subsidize two competing event spaces.

However, they also recognized the amount of money and donations that have gone into the center and the important role it currently plays in the community.

"There's a lot of moving pieces to this and we just don't have a good recommendation yet," said councilwoman Jackie Myers, who also sits on the subcommittee tasked with looking at the conference center's future.

The one recommendation the committee did have was to sign a contract for the Chamber of Commerce to continue running the center through the end of 2016, giving the city time to make a thoughtful decision and giving the chamber some certainty in booking events that are often scheduled a year in advance.

Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said the city uses money from the transient room tax fund to pay the Chamber of Commerce about \$64,000 to run the conference center and also gives the chamber office space there and free use of the center for events. The city also acts as landlord, paying almost \$30,000 a year for insurance, utilities and maintenance.

Morgan said the center's main hall, which can seat up to 600 people, is used about twice a week, while the Altrusa/Rotary room is used about three times a week and the smaller conference room is used twice a week.

The center costs about \$179,000 a year to operate but only brings in \$130,000 in revenue from events. A recent insurance appraisal valued the facility and property at \$3.2 million.

In 1994 the community raised \$600,000 and added it to \$250,000 from the city and a \$300,000 loan from the city's general fund to turn what was an abandoned grocery store into the Hermiston Conference Center.

Hermiston resident Liz Marvin reminded the council of the community's contribution and said the way the community rallied to turn a blight into an asset typifies what she loves about Hermiston.

"I think there's danger in

See **EOTEC/10A**

RSVP program gets seniors to give back



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Vivian Larsen, bottom, plays the piano as Jim Leinweber sings "I can't stop loving you" and Dorothy McCauley looks on Tuesday during lunch at the Senior Center in Pendleton.

Older volunteers find their groove

259 participants worked 40,000 hours in past year

By **KATHY ANEY**
East Oregonian

Vivian Larsen doesn't think she is anything special.

That is a common sentiment among the 259 volunteers of the RSVP program, a nationwide volunteer network for people 55 and older. Local volunteers do everything from food services, driving, teaching, clerical work,

reception and other requests from service-oriented organizations and businesses in Umatilla, Morrow, Gilliam and Wheeler Counties.

Larsen goes daily to the Pendleton Senior Center where she serenades the lunch crowd with piano music and keeps the organization's books. On Tuesday, the 91-year-old parked her wheeled walker by the piano, sat down and launched into an energetic rendition of "Roll

Along Prairie Moon," her fingers flying. A trio of men at the pool table in the corner paused playing for a moment and glanced over with smiles before bending back over the green felt.

Some of the seniors tapped their goes as they gathered for lunch. A few songs in, Chuck and Yvonne Bunker stood up and started waltzing.

Larsen, a former auditor, makes

music Monday through Thursday and sometimes Fridays. It's just what she does.

"It gets me out of the house," she said. "I'll do it as long as I'm breathing."

Larsen learned to play on her family's old pump organ during the Depression as a fourth- or fifth-grader after her mom traded laundry services for piano lessons. As a teen, she played organ at her church in Union. She has outlived

See **RSVP/10A**

PENDLETON

Students prepare for trip to Minamisoma

First exchange
since tsunami

By **KATHY ANEY**
East Oregonian

With a soccer ball, Riley Kendrick can bend it like Beckham. With chopsticks, she is not as adept.

The talented Pendleton High School soccer player came in dead last during a chopstick competition at the Pendleton Center for the Arts on Sunday but still came up grinning.

Kendrick is one of six students headed to Japan in July to experience life in Pend-

leton's sister city of Minamisoma. This is the first time local students will travel to Japan since a magnitude 9 earthquake unleashed a tsunami in 2011 that killed more than 18,000 and damaged a nuclear facility.

The six — Kendrick, his sister Hailey Kendrick, Katie Ward, Raana Mikel, Steven Machado and Cheney Chrisman — gathered Sunday at the Pendleton Center for the Arts for the first of many weekly sessions to learn Japanese customs, culture and language. All attend Pendleton High School, except Ward who goes to Nixyaawii

See **JAPAN/10A**



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Katie Ward (second from right) smiles as she attempts to pick up M&M's with a pair of chopsticks. Ward will travel in July with five other students to Pendleton's sister city, Minamisoma, Japan.

