

HERMISTON

School district makes music a priority

Emphasis on the arts earns Hermiston second award

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

As school budgets have shrunk, music education has faded in most communities.

It's a different story in Hermiston.

The Hermiston School District has chosen to continue to fund a separate full-time music teacher for each of its elementary and middle schools, as well as band and choir directors at the high school.

"It's an incredibly important component to the education of the whole child," said Mike Kay, operations director and former activities director for the district.

That dedication to giving kids access to multiple hours of music instruction a week is one reason why Hermiston School District was the only district in Oregon to receive a "Best Community for Music Education" award from the National Association of Music Merchants this year. The district received the same award in 2014, which looks at factors like funding and teacher quality.

Kay said fundamentals like math and reading are important, but students are better educated when those classes are paired with an exposure to music, physical education and other subjects outside of the core curriculum.

"It's an opportunity to explore," he said.

He said the district is proud not only of the quantity of music classes it has continued to fund, but also



Flautists in the combined six-grade band play during the performance of "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" last February in Hermiston. Hermiston School District was the only district in Oregon to receive a "Best Community for Music Education" award from the National Association of Music Merchants this year.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

the quality.

"Our instructors are doing an incredible job," he said.

Music students in Hermiston are often given the opportunity to perform outside of school concerts. Next week the middle school bands will play at the Cherry Festival parade in The Dalles, and next year the Hermiston High School band is taking a trip San Diego to play in the Holiday Bowl parade.

At the elementary level, music teacher Dean Mason at Sunset Elementary School said classes include singing, experimenting with instruments, learning to write music and dancing. Mason, who plays the keyboard by ear, likes making up songs with the children or playing familiar tunes for them to sing along.

"If someone is in a bad

mood, music usually perks them up," he said. "Most of them like the signing."

Studies have shown that music classes improve students' academic performance, and Mason said he has seen benefits from certain exercises, such as having students listen to a rhythm he taps out and then write it out in the form of musical notes.

"It seems to help in their classroom work too, with their ability to listen and respond," he said.

For most students, their time in band or choir will remain with them into adulthood as merely an enriching hobby, but some Hermiston alumni have translated those skills into a career.

Kelly Kuo, class of 1990, has conducted more than 75 operas and currently works as the music director of the

Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra, artistic director of the Oregon Mozart Players and music director and conductor of the Butler Opera Center in Austin, Texas.

Another notable name is R. Joseph Scott, who started the Hermiston Symphony while still in high school in the 1950s, then went on to found and conduct the Bellevue Philharmonic Orchestra in Bellevue, Washington for 30 years, before conducting another 16 seasons with the Sammamish Symphony Orchestra.

Ron Blessinger, class of 1983, is a violinist for the Oregon Symphony and the music director of Third Angle Musical Ensemble.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

BRIEFLY



Former dispatcher misused police data system

PENDLETON — A former dispatcher for the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office is facing revocation of her state 9-1-1 certification after she abused the state's Law Enforcement Data System.

Alison Revoir was a dispatcher from June 2007 to March 2014 when she resigned during an investigation, according to Umatilla County officials and the Telecommunications Policy Committee of the Board on Public Safety Standards and Training. The committee met Feb. 4 at the Oregon Public Safety Academy, Salem, and discussed Revoir's case, among other issues.

Oregon State Police maintains the system to law enforcement agencies statewide to share and access information, which includes criminal history and driver information. The meeting minutes did not reveal how Revoir abused the system but that she did so on many occasions. Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan and county counsel Doug Olsen also did not specify what she did.

The committee found Revoir was not insubordinate nor dishonest, but her behavior involved gross misconduct, misuse of authority and "disregard for the rights of others when Revoir violated citizens privacy by accessing protected information multiple times." The committee also noted the "sheer number of and intentional and knowing violations of LEDS policies" put the sheriff's office access to LEDS at risk.

The committee recommended revocation of her telecommunication and emergency medical dispatcher certification and that she not be able to reapply for up to 15 years. The State Board on Public Safety Standards

and Training will consider the recommendations when it meets Thursday at the Oregon Public Safety Academy.

Hermiston receives financial reporting award

HERMISTON — The city of Hermiston was recognized for its financial reporting for the 23rd year in a row by the Government Finance Officers Association.

The Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting is the highest award in governmental accounting and financial reporting, according to a news release from the city. Hermiston received the award for its annual financial report known as the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report.

An impartial panel judges the format and content of municipalities' CAFR report on their "spirit of full disclosure" to the public.

M-F chamber plans special luncheon

MILTON-FREEWATER — In recognition of Administrative Professional's Day, a special lunch and program is planned by the Milton-Freewater Chamber of Commerce.

The event is Wednesday, April 22 at noon. Tickets are \$14 per person. In addition, door prizes are still being accepted for the event.

For more information, call Susan Dohrmann at 509-520-2104.

Briefs are compiled from staff and wire reports, and press releases. Email press releases to news@eastoregonian.com

Oregon officials renew wildfire insurance

By **HILLARY BORRUD**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon officials and forest landowners decided this week to renew the state's wildfire insurance, despite costly changes to the policy.

Under this year's plan, the state's deductible will more than double from \$20 million to \$50 million. The cost increase followed two severe fire seasons, in which Oregon filed claims for the full amount of coverage offered under its insurance policy.

Rod Nichols, a spokesman for the Oregon Department of Forestry, wrote in an email Thursday that "the deal is officially on," after state officials accepted the policy offered by Lloyd's, the Lon-

don insurance market.

On Monday, a committee of forest landowners voted unanimously to purchase the policy, according to a letter from the group to State Forester Doug Decker.

Oregon's unique wildfire insurance policy covers the state's firefighting costs once they exceed the deductible. This year, insurers said they would issue a policy with \$25 million in coverage, which would kick in after the state spends at least \$50 million on wildfire suppression. That \$50 million, plus the \$3.75 million premium, will now be built into the Oregon Department of Forestry budget.

Forestry officials had been getting anxious as the state headed into fire season and a

fifth year of drought without the policy, and budget writers in the state Legislature also needed to know whether the state would buy the policy.

"Our budget is currently in the Legislature, so it's

always a race to the finish," Nichols said Thursday.

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