

HERMISTON

City to partner with Head Start to expand preschool for 80 children

School board approves Faaeteete as new head football coach

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

A new Hermiston Center for School Readiness will put preschool into reach for 80 more children next year.

Hermiston School District's board voted Monday to approve a partnership with Umatilla-Morrow Head Start to create the center, which will consist of four classes with 20 students each.

The classes will be open to four-year-olds living in Hermiston and taught by certified Head Start teachers.

Recruitment for the classes will center on children from families at 100 to 200 percent of the federal poverty line, a demographic that often misses preschool because their parents can't afford private schools but make too much money to qualify for services like Head Start.

According to a news release from the district the school will meet two days per week, for 3.5 hours per day, from September 1, 2015, through June 10, 2016 in one of the modular buildings next to Rocky Heights Elementary School that currently house the district offices.

Umatilla-Morrow Head Start will lease the classrooms next year after the district offices are moved to the former El Gran Chaparral building at the corner of NW 11th Street and Orchard

Avenue. The school district has budgeted \$180,000 to pay UMHS to run the program next year.

In addition to academics, the center will also offer children and their families services that include free screenings, parent education classes and other resources in both English and Spanish.

During its May 11 meeting the school board also approved the hiring of David Faaeteete as Hermiston's new head football coach. Faaeteete is a former defensive lineman for the University of Oregon and a current Social Studies teacher and assistant coach. For more on the hire, see today's sports section.

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

HERMISTON

City opens taxi company up to competition

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

Taxi riders in Hermiston are about to get more options.

The city council ended the city's exclusive franchise agreement with Hermiston Transit Services Monday night, opening the cab company up to competition for the first time in 51 years.

The franchise, which expires at the end of June, will be replaced by an open taxi licensing system with annual costs of \$50 per company and \$25 per driver. The city can approve a license for any company that operates at least 18 hours a day, provides "safe, clean and reliable" service, maintains proper insurance and has drivers that pass a background check.

"This system allows for some minimal competition to make sure the taxi community polices its rates and level of service," assistant city manager Mark Morgan said.

He told the city council an exclusive franchise made sense to protect Hermiston's taxi service back when the city had 4,500 residents. But today, close to 39,000 people live within a 12-minute drive of Hermiston's downtown.

In addition to picking up fare-paying customers, Hermiston Transit Services will also have competition for the city's senior and disabled ride program. Elderly and disabled residents can purchase tickets at city hall for \$2 a ride and at the end of the month the company can redeem those tickets at city hall for \$6.15 apiece.

Last year Hermiston Transit Services redeemed 29,000 tickets.

Morgan said the city's decision to end its taxi franchise came in part because of complaints about Hermiston Transit Services, most recently from Midway Bar & Grill owner Stuart Rice, who said poor taxi service has hurt his business because people do not want to get stranded after a night of drinking.

"With competition comes motivation to provide the best service possible so as to earn the business," he wrote the city. "Currently we have a company that is entitled and does not care if they answer service requests."

Employees of Hermiston Transit testified Monday night that they go the extra

mile for their customers, especially the senior and disabled ones who often take trips that cost significantly more than the \$6.15 a ride the city reimburses.

Driver Nancy Gomez said she goes above and beyond, getting out and help elderly riders carry in their groceries, making special accommodations for mentally disabled riders and occasionally using their own money to buy baby clothes or other items for regular riders who can't afford them.

"I can honestly say we love these people. They're not just a paycheck for us," she said.

Chantel Robinson said as a night driver she often works well past the company's official 2:30 a.m. closing time even though she isn't obligated to, just to make sure everyone gets home safely.

Sean Robinson said the company is barely surviving, thanks to competition from an ever-growing list of non-taxi transport services, including the CareVan run by Good Shepherd Medical Center to take people to appointments and the van that CAPECO uses to transport clients who used to be paying customers of Hermiston Transit.

Milton Farr supported the taxi company, saying before the Robinson family took over about 10 years ago he often had to wait an hour and a half for a ride because "cash people came first."

Jill Hayes of the Peer Support Network, however, said she heard complaints from members, including concerns that the company's open mic system violated their privacy because other riders could hear where they were being dropped off.

Mayor David Drotzmann said he had used Hermiston Transit Services a few times and never had a bad experience. He told representatives of the company that he was sympathetic to their worries but if they were truly providing a good service then the free market would reward that.

"I'm not sure this is something we should be afraid of," he said.

The city council voted 7-0 to not renew the franchise in favor of creating an open taxi licensing system. Morgan said Sundi Marquez, owner of Umatilla Cab Company, has already expressed interest in applying for a license.

UMATILLA

Committee approves \$4.5 million port budget

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
East Oregonian

A budget committee for the Port of Umatilla met Tuesday morning and approved a roughly \$4.5 million proposed budget for 2015-16 that includes allocations to each of seven separate operating funds.

And, while working capital is nearly \$460,000 less than it was at the beginning of the last fiscal year, committee members noted prospects appear to be headed in the right direction, especially if a \$40 million water right can be used to bolster the local agricultural economy.

Meanwhile, the port's general fund should see a jump of more than \$38,000 in revenue from property leases and Puzey said the district will collect about \$717,000 in property taxes as new data centers come online

at McNary Industrial Park.

Legal expenses should drop by \$150,000-\$200,000 after the port wrapped up its water right agreement and settled a year-long zoning dispute with the city of Umatilla earlier this year.

The budget committee did, however, lament nearly \$280,000 to maintain the port's container dock, which is not being used since virtually all ocean carrier service has stopped at the Port of Portland.

Puzey said he has looked hard into short sea shipping on the Columbia River to bypass the Port of Portland and help producers get their products to the Puget Sound without having to spend more on trucking over Washington's highways. He and Hermiston Chamber Director Debbie Pedro said they will raise the discussion with U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, who is set to

visit Umatilla and Morrow counties Saturday.

Though Puzey agreed the cost of upkeep is tough to swallow, he said they cannot simply walk away from the container dock.

"We have at least a \$10 million asset on the river that needs to be inspected, ready for use and cared for," Puzey said.

Other allocations in the 2015-16 budget includes \$166,179 set aside in a strategic reserve fund, which Puzey said can be used for incentives to attract industry. The port also has a \$1.4 million grant from the Oregon Department of Transportation which it will use to build a freight shipping warehouse.

The port commission will vote to adopt the budget at its regular June meeting.

Contact **George Plaven** at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4547.

BRIEFLY

PSD to collect community input on 10-year plan

PENDLETON — The Pendleton School District is soliciting public input for an important project, but not in the usual way it has in the past.

Instead of a public meeting, the district is contracting with Canadian software company Thoughtexchange to provide an Internet-based survey for the district's 10-year plan.

"This is an important first step in the development of long-term strategic thinking for our district," Superintendent Jon Peterson said in a Monday press release. "We believe the Thoughtexchange process will provide a user-friendly, interactive way to elicit crucial community input."

Starting Wednesday, parents and other community members will be sent an email with a link to the survey. If someone isn't sent an invitation, they can join an email list through the district's website or Facebook page.

Once they're in the survey, participants will be asked a series of open-ended questions. From there, users will get the chance to rate other survey takers' ideas using a star system.

For more information, contact the district office at 541-276-6711.

Guardian Angel Homes announces groundbreaking

HERMISTON — A pair of specialized homes will focus on care for individuals with Alzheimer's disease or dementia.

The public is invited to the groundbreaking of the Memory Care Homes at Guardian Angel Homes. The event is Thursday at 3 p.m. at 540 N.W. 12th St., Hermiston. The expansion will include 16 suites and center around a home-like atmosphere.

For more information about Guardian Angel Homes, call Jennifer Baus at 208-619-0483.

Author to speak at drug court graduation

PENDLETON — Gordie Bufton, author of the best-seller "Eluding Reality," is the special speaker at the Umatilla County Drug Court graduation.

The public is invited to the event Friday at 3 p.m. in the Vert Club Room, 345 S.W. Fourth St., Pendleton. The ceremony will honor graduates and alumni of the Umatilla County Drug Court alcohol and drug treatment program.

In the memoir, Bufton shares about his rebellious and selfish descent into the underbelly of society, as well as his path to finding himself and living in reality.

For more information,

contact pastor.assistant@livingwordcc.com.

Veterans event in Boardman

BOARDMAN — Information for veterans benefits is planned for an upcoming event at the Port of Morrow.

The Morrow County Veterans roundtable is Friday at 9:30 a.m. at 2 Marine Drive, Boardman. There is no admission fee. Those planning to attend are asked to RSVP.

For more information, contact Linda Skendzel of Morrow County Veterans Services at 541-922-6420 or mcvets@co.morrow.or.us.

Rocky Heights hosts carnival

HERMISTON — Carnival gems, concessions and an FFA petting zoo are all part of the Rocky Heights Elementary School Carnival.

The public is invited to attend the event Friday from 5-8 p.m. at the school, 650 W. Standard Ave., Hermiston. The admission bracelet for games is \$5 per person or \$20 for a family. It includes entry for everything except the dunk tank. Throws for the dunk tank are 25 cents each or five for \$1.

In addition, raffle tickets are \$1 each and a silent auction runs from 5-7:30 p.m.

For more information, call 541-667-6600.

Grange meeting includes pancake supper

HERMISTON — Information about participation in the Columbia Grange is included with a free pancake supper.

The public is invited to learn about grange activities, what the grange does in the community and enjoy the free meal. The event is Friday at 6:30 p.m. at 32339 Diagonal Blvd., Hermiston.

For more information, call Doris at 541-567-8663.

Submit information to: community@eastoregonian.com or drop off to the attention of Tammy Malgesini at 333 E. Main St., Hermiston or Renee Struthers at 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. Call 541-564-4539 or 541-966-0818 with questions.

Fish hatchery to close during construction

The Irrigon-Umatilla Fish Hatchery Complex will close to the public for repairs and construction from May 26 through July 15.

Manager Marc Garst said the Irrigon hatchery is 30 years old and in need of work. Construction will not impact hatchery production, Garst said.

The complex is managed by the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife and funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Garst said they typically see between 3,000 and 4,000 visitors per year.

For more information, call the hatchery at 541-922-2762.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES OF PENDLETON, LLC

MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH. HOW'S YOURS?

WWW.PENDLETONPSYCH.COM
541-278-2222

Happy Spring

From Dr. Hibbert,
Lacey, Jessica, Bailey, Heather, and Sarah
541-612-3707

SEE HOW FAR YOU'VE COME!

Emily Ann Smith

PILOT ROCK HIGH SCHOOL
Congratulations! We are so very proud of you.
Love Mom & Dad

Tell your favorite graduate how proud you are in our Graduation 2015 special section in the East Oregonian and Hermiston Herald & share their "Then" & "Now" Photos!

Publishes: May 30th
Send in your text and photos to psmootz@eastoregonian.com or bring to Paula at the East Oregonian office by May 18th.
Mailing address: Attn: Paula Smootz
211 SE Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801

\$25.00
Private Party Only

Your Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Graduate's Name: _____

Graduate's School: _____

Message to Graduate: _____