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EAST OREGONIAN

WEEKEND, JULY 4-5, 2015

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The City of Pendleton kicked off the Fourth of July early with a fireworks display Friday off Southwest Court Avenue in Pendleton.

Happy Fourth of July

Water dollars flowing

$50M funding package passes Legislature

By GEORGE PLAVEN
East Oregonian

Oregon's budget will include $50 million for water development and efficiency projects in a funding package approved Friday by the Joint Committee on Capital Construction.

That's good news for northeast Oregon farmers trying to pump more irrigation water from the Columbia River to expand the region's agricultural economy.

Prior to his resignation in February, former governor John Kitzhaber called for $51.6 million in a statewide water development account to help pay for new water supplies and restoration. Gov. Kate Brown also backed the request after her appointment.

What the committee ultimately approved was $20 million in lottery bonds and $30 million in general obligation bonds to accomplish that goal.

Part of the money could be used for pipes and infrastructure to pump additional Columbia River water onto farms between Hermiston and Boardman, growing high-value crops such as potatoes and onions.

The proposal, crafted by the Northeast Oregon

See WATER/10A

HERMISTON

More heat, more sweet

Hot summer is good news for watermelons

By GEORGE PLAVEN
East Oregonian

The sweltering heat makes for long days, but Jack Bellinger couldn't ask for better weather to grow ripe, delicious watermelons.

"Everywhere I go, I'm seeing a lot of melons in the field," said Bellinger, owner of Bellinger Farms in Hermiston. "This could be a year for the books."

That's really saying something in Hermiston, a city famous throughout the Northwest for high-quality watermelons. Florida, Georgia and California might grow the most, but locals insist Hermiston watermelons are second to none.

The juicy secret lies in the region's unique desert climate, said Phil Hamm, director of the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center. Not only does the Columbia Basin provide a longer growing season, but the combination of hot days and cool nights means higher sugar content in the fruit.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Field hands collect watermelons from a field owned by Bellinger Farms on Friday outside of Hermiston.

"I think it could be a year with really high quality and really good yield. This is the signature of our town."
—**Jack Bellinger,** owner of Bellinger Farms in Hermiston

It works like this: Watermelons spend all day taking in heat, which is turned into sugar as a source of energy, Hamm said. At night, the respiration process slows down and all that sugar becomes stored.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Hunter Dodson, left, and Brooks Bellinger cull watermelons before the melons are weighed and sorted at the Bellinger Farms sorting warehouse Friday outside of Hermiston.

Hamm said nights in Hermiston are cool enough to allow the melons to retain more sugar, giving local fruits their distinctive sweeter flavor.

"Basically, the net gain on the sugar they make is much higher than in other places," Hamm said.

Given temperatures in the triple-digits by day and mid-60s by night, the idea is Hermiston watermelons should be even sweeter, faster this year.

Crews began picking melons Monday at Bellinger Farms, about two weeks

See WATERMELON/10A

Students pass expectations for new test

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

After years of hype around the Smarter Balanced state test the Oregon Department of Education had some good news Thursday: Oregon students are exceeding expectations on the new test.

The state announced that with 95 percent of this spring's tests graded, Oregon students are outperforming projections on every subject and in every grade level, with the exception of 11th grade math.

"There is still much work to do, but these early results indicate our state is headed in the right direction," state deputy superintendent Salam Noor said in a statement.

Expectations were not high for this year. The Smarter Balanced test is longer and more difficult than the state's former assessment of choice, with essay questions and interactive math problems that preclude multiple-choice guessing. The more

See TEST/10A

PENDLETON

City council facing decision on gas tax

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

The Pendleton City Council has only two business items listed on its agenda for their Tuesday meeting, but they're important ones.

The council will consider proposing a 5-cent gas tax for the November ballot and adopting $5 transportation utility fee.

City Manager Robb Corbett said Friday the vote is meant to affirm their commitment to pursuing them. The actual placement of the gas tax ballot question and implementation of the utility fee will have to come in the form of a resolution or ordinance and will be voted on at a later meeting. City officials have previously estimated a gas tax and utility fee would add about

See COUNCIL/10A