

PILOT ROCK



Photo contributed by Mike Morehead
Lightning sparked several fires in Eastern Oregon on Thursday night, including this one north of Pilot Rock. This photo was taken from Mike and Barbara Morehead's front porch. According to Barbara: "There were extremely high winds. We were packing things ready to leave our home, getting animals safe when the wind suddenly stopped and slowed the progress of the fire. Our quick response volunteer firefighters from Pilot Rock were able to contain the fire."

Grass fire crept within 50 feet of farmhouse

Table Rock Fire burns about 400 acres

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

Firefighters dealt with a rash of lightning-sparked grass fires Thursday and Friday around Pilot Rock as dry thunderstorms moved in over the area.

On Friday morning, crews finished mopping up the 400-acre Table Rock Fire that crept within 50 feet of at least one home. By evening, another large blaze ignited between Highway 395 and Yellow Jacket Road near the Cunningham Sheep Co. Ranch.

Pilot Rock Fire Chief Ron Neely estimated that fire at roughly 5,000 acres in size. He did not immediately have further details.

The Table Rock Fire started at about 7:45 p.m. Thursday and was contained overnight. Sixteen fire engines, one hand crew and two bulldozers responded to keep flames away from structures.

“Due to some really good cooperation from our rural fire departments, they were able to get out there and get a hold of it,” said Jamie Knight, district spokeswoman for the Oregon Department of Forestry.

ODF led the initial attack, with help from fire departments in Helix, Echo, Stanfield, Pendleton, Pilot Rock and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. The Umatilla National Forest and Bureau of Indian Affairs also provided assistance.

Local farmers used their equipment, too.

Up-to-date information about fires is available at www.bluemountainfire-info.blogspot.com. To report a fire, call the Blue Mountain Interagency Dispatch at 541-963-7171 or dial 9-1-1.

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

PENDLETON

Bounty placed on puncture vine

By **JONATHAN BACH**
East Oregonian

For a cyclist, there’s nothing worse than a flat tire, so the Pendleton bike club is doing something about it.

Between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. on the next two Saturdays, the Pendleton on Wheels Bicycle Club will pay people for each full bag of goatheads, also known as puncture vine, they bring to Olney Cemetery at 865 Tutuilla Road. For a regular grocery bag, the club will pay \$1. For a larger, contractor-sized bag, \$5, according to Sue Peterson of the club. It will set up at the cemetery with a table and yellow awning, she said.

spider’s legs from the main part of the weed, she said.

“If you can get the whole plant and put it in a bag, then you’ve got it made,” said Peterson.

The club wants to raise awareness around goatheads, she said. It got the idea from a newspaper article on a similar project in Echo last year.

The company Slime makes a tire sealant for those riding through areas with puncture hazards, though it works with varying degrees of success. Puncture resistant tires are also available on the market from retailers like REI.

Contact Jonathan Bach at jbach@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0809.

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IRRIGON

Boy helps family escape burning home

By **GARY L. WEST**
East Oregonian

A 6-year-old Irrigon boy is being called a hero by his family for helping four other people, including 2 infants, escape a fire that destroyed a mobile home Friday.

“I was in the living room watching a movie, then I smelled smoke,” said the boy, Joel Koertje.

He alerted his 20-year-old sister Shaughnessi Ellison and her friend, Reba Carter. Carter said she had just finished a shower and was starting to dress when Joel told them he could smell smoke. She turned around, looked out the window and could see flames.

Ellison and Carter grabbed Joel as well as Ellison’s two 5-month-old infants and headed out the door. Ellison didn’t even have time to put on a shirt, she said.

“My 6-year-old brother saved us,” Ellison said. “Any later and we’d have been screwed.”

Ellison said they had just got out of the house and to the yard gate when a propane tank exploded.

“It went so quick, so



Staff photo by Gary L. West
A firefighter clears debris from a fire that destroyed a mobile home Friday in Irrigon. Five people, including two infants and a 6-year-old boy, escaped shortly before the home was engulfed in flame.

quick,” she said.

The family, including their parents Cory Koertje and Kathi Hamner, had just finished moving into the three-bedroom trailer that day.

“We brought the last load in this morning,” Cory Koertje said, while looking and the smoldering shell of the home. Cory Koertje and Hamner were on their way

to Boardman to go to work when the fire broke out.

They were looking forward to living in the larger home with a fenced yard.

“It was perfect,” Hamner said.

But she looked on the bright side.

“Everybody got out. Everything can be replaced,” Hamner said.

Irrigon Fire Chief Larry

Burns said at the scene it was too early to identify the cause of the fire. He said a state deputy fire marshal based out of Pendleton was en route to try to determine the cause. Seven firefighters from Irrigon responded to extinguish the blaze along with five from Boardman who responded for mutual aid. The mobile home was a total loss.

Hermiston Auto Parts moving into former PGG store

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

Hermiston’s former Pendleton Grain Growers retail store will get a new occupant next week when Hermiston Auto Parts moves into the space.

The move will mean twice as much room for the NAPA retailer, owner Kevin Cleaver said, as well as a more visible location than the store’s current spot at 292 W. Hermiston Ave.

“The biggest advantage is probably going to be the location,” he said.

Cleaver and his wife Georgia have owned the store, which was established in the 1960s, since 1994. He said the store has outgrown its original location, which is why he became interested in the building at 200 S. First



Staff photo by Jade McDowell
The former PGG retail store on South First Street in Hermiston stands empty in preparation for Hermiston Auto Parts to move in.

St. after PGG closed its retail store there in the fall.

Cleaver said having twice as much space will mean more inventory.

“We’ll have stuff we’ve never carried before,” he said.

The store currently has seven employees, but Cleaver said he will probably hire three more people after the expansion.

The plan is for NAPA’s Portland distribution center to

bring “as many people as they can” to help move inventory on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday while the store remains open at its current location, then transition to being open at the new location on Thursday while the rest of the inventory is moved over.

Over the weekend, Cleaver said, the outside of the store will be repainted. New shelves are being installed inside, and eventually the store will get new signage marking it as Hermiston Auto Parts.

Cleaver said he hasn’t set a date yet but plans to have a grand opening celebration for the community after they get settled in at their new location.

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

HERMISTON

Noise waiver, taxi license amendment on council agenda

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

A request for a noise ordinance waiver might keep Highland Avenue residents up at night, if it is granted by the Hermiston city council on Monday.

The waiver would allow heavy machinery to continue paving work on Highland Avenue until 3 a.m. for two nights on the week of July 20.

According to a memo to the city council, allowing crews to work at night will minimize the traffic impact of the paving project and the cooler temperatures will

result in “much better project quality.”

However, the noise from the machinery being operated runs in the range of 70 to 80 decibels from 50 feet away, which the memo stated is the equivalent of the sound of a garbage disposal or vacuum cleaner.

The city council will also consider an amendment to its new taxi license ordinance, which took effect July 1.

The ordinance currently requires a background check, and currently prohibits drivers who have ever had any criminal convictions for crimes involved “moral

turpitude or dishonesty.”

A memo to the city council signed by assistant city manager Mark Morgan and city attorney Gary Luisi noted that one taxi driver who had been successfully working in town was barred from getting a license under the new ordinance because of a theft conviction in 1977 and another in 1982, but has had no issues in the 33 years

since.

They recommended the ordinance be amended to allow drivers who have had no criminal convictions for the past 10 years.

The city council will meet at 7 p.m. Monday at city hall, 180 NE 2nd St. in Hermiston.

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

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