

YOUNG: Good Shepherd has four fulltime and one half-time pediatrician

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Fetter said the city's unusually large youth population does put a burden on the department. Three months of outdoor swimming weather doesn't leave time to schedule enough swim lessons to accommodate everyone, he said, and the city needs to get out ahead of the demand for more soccer and softball fields.

"From the parks side, it's scrounging for grass in a desert," he said.

Fetter said non-city leagues like youth football and AYSO are crucial for filling in gaps on the recreation side.

"The city could not accommodate, nor are we interested in accommodating, everyone's needs in the city," he said.

Recreation director Dan Earp said the department does offer a "fairly comprehensive program" for a city of Hermiston's size, because of its young population. Those offerings stretch beyond sports into educational programs, enrichment classes and drama productions like the performance of "The Little Town of Christmas" that is currently in the works.

"We do offer a lot of classes, and they keep filling up," Earp said. "We have a waiting list."

At the Hermiston Public Library, programming is also affected. Library director Marie Baldo said the library gets 400-500 children and teens signed up for the summer reading program each year, and activities during the school year can have as many as 100 children or teens attending. Even the Baby Boogie sessions can attract more than 50 children and their parents every Wednesday morning.

"It gets rather lively," she said.

Baldo said for teenagers, the library tries to host activities — like scavenger hunts — that can be done over the course of a day instead of having everyone show up at once.

"Those type of static events allow us to serve more and more people even as our staff doesn't grow," she said.

As for circulation, Baldo said the staff buys new books for children and teens monthly. Baldo said she likes to take the library's Teen Advisory Council on "mall crawls" where they head to Barnes and Noble in the Tri-Cities to browse the aisles and pick out new young adult literature for the

library.

"Quite frankly they're better equipped to pick out books they want to read than a 60-year-old lady," she said.

The most obvious and well-documented effects of Hermiston's "youth tsunami" are in the school system.

Enrollment in Hermiston School District rose by more than 200 students this year, causing the district to plan for another five two-classroom modulars to the 24 portable classrooms it already has.

Deputy superintendent Wade Smith described the lack of permanent classroom space for the district's growing population as a "desperate situation" Monday. The district has been looking at possible bond measures to address the growth but is limited by how much debt it can take on until the community pays off the district's previous capital construction bonds.

Preschool is also expanding in Hermiston. In March Umatilla Morrow County Head Start received a \$780,000 grant from the federal government to train and certify private preschool providers as Head Start teachers, allowing them to take on some of the students that have been relegated to a waiting list for regular Head Start classrooms due to the area's high number of preschool-aged children.

In the private sector, the needs of a younger-than-average population also come into play.

Nick Bejarano, director of marketing and communications for Good Shepherd Health Care System, said the hospital is aware of Hermiston's young population and is committed to doing what is necessary to meet the needs of local families.

Good Shepherd currently has four fulltime and one half-time pediatrician, in addition to the family doctors who also provide general wellness visits for children. Bejarano said pediatricians are hired based on population ratios recommended by organizations like the American Medical Association. The hospital wants to make sure its pediatricians are able to take their time to get to know each patient, he said.

"If we know our pediatricians are kind of being overwhelmed we look and say 'Maybe we need to hire another,'" Bejarano said.

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CRASHES: Safety corridor designation lifted several years ago

Continued from 1A

northbound turning lane, and the vehicles collided, Cooney said. Fortunately, Mota-Sotelo and Brooks were the only vehicle occupants, and neither was transported to a hospital. Cooney said Brooks was cited for driving while her license was suspended. But Jerrad Little, the OSP trooper investigating both wrecks, said he did not believe impairment or speed contributed to either of the collisions.

Cooney said this is not the first and second times concerns have been voiced about the highway north of Hermiston.

"For as many businesses that are in there with a 55 mile per hour speed limit, there is a higher potential for crashes because you've got a lot more people coming in and out of traffic," he said. "It used to be a safety

corridor, which is based in part on the total number of crashes. During the period it was a safety corridor, that number of crashes dropped, so it lost its safety corridor designation."

The roughly four-mile stretch from Hermiston's northern city limit near Theater Lane to Highway 730 was first designated as a safety corridor in February 1997, according to Oregon Department of Transportation documents. Cooney said the designated was lifted several years ago, but he was not sure exactly when.

ODOT data from 1995-2004 show seven people were killed in crashes on Highway 395 north of Hermiston. From 2005-2014, two people died in the four-mile stretch north of the city and two people died in the eight-mile section to its south.

The average traffic

volume actually decreased in the northern section, from 16,000 per day at Joy Lane in 1995 to 14,100 in 2005 and to 13,100 in 2014, even while traffic within the city increased. Despite the volume fluctuations, the total number of crashes for the northern section remained at about 215 for both decades, but crashes on the southern section decreased from 736 to 609.

Tom Strandberg, an ODOT public affairs employee in La Grande, said he believed the median barrier installed between Hermiston and Stanfield decreased the number of wrecks on the southern stretch.

"We had a lot of crashes," he said. "People were using the middle lane for passing instead of turning."

There are far more business access points along the highway to the north of Hermiston than

to the south, however, and about twice as much traffic. Cooney said these factors make the northern stretch more dangerous.

"This is the world we live in," he said. "The more drivers we have on the road, the more opportunity we have for crashes."

Cooney said he was not sure whether OSP has been responding to more wrecks lately, but Hermiston Fire & Emergency Services Chief Scott Stanton said the department responded to 18 wrecks between Aug. 1 and Oct. 27 last year and 38 in the same period this year.

Although the actions will not prevent all wrecks, Cooney said drivers can and should take precautions to reduce the risk.

"The number one thing is just flat pay attention," he said. "Watch traffic at a farther distance ahead of yourself, increase following distance and slow down."

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