

HERMISTON

Christmas Express, assemble!

Volunteers fill 500 food boxes in less than an hour

By GARY L. WEST
East Oregonian

The Christmas Express is about ready to roll, feeding families in Hermiston for its 46th year.

Staff from the Hermiston Police Department and other city departments gathered with their families Wednesday night at Thompson Hall on the Umatilla County Fairgrounds to put together about 500 food boxes. The boxes will be disbursed from the Agape House next week, Monday through Wednesday, to families that would most benefit.

Police Chief Jason Edmiston said, all together, about 100 pounds of food will be distributed per family, including bags of onions and potatoes donated by local growers, turkey, dry goods and canned food. In addition to the food donated by growers like the Columbia Basin Onion's Alan Cleaver and the Walchli families for both produce and equipment, canned food collected with the help of local students in food drives and financial contributions from individual donors and groups like the Hermiston Rotary Club, which are used to buy additional food.

"I never knew how generous this community was until I took this over," Edmiston said. "I can call any farmer and tell them what I need" and the next thing he knows, the need is met.



Janie Santoyo of Hermiston and Greg Griffitts, chaplain with Hermiston Police Department, finish filling food boxes on Wednesday at Thompson Hall on the Umatilla County Fairgrounds. Behind them is a portion of one of the assembly lines used by Christmas Express volunteers to put the meal boxes together.



Mike Ellwood of Hermiston Police department moves one of the pallets of filled food boxes assembled by more than 100 volunteers Wednesday at Thompson Hall on the Umatilla County Fairgrounds.

Christmas Express also spends between \$8,000 and \$13,000 each year for food.

Edmiston said he seeks bids on the other food goods, and this year the additional food was purchased through

Walmart.

Members of Living Faith Church have also volunteered to help this year with presents for the children up to fifth grade in families that receive food boxes.

Schools and area churches also help to identify those in need of the donated food and gifts.

This is the second year that all city departments have joined the program. And city workers put the boxes together in two assembly lines, filling enough boxes, stacked six rows high, to fill 12 pallets.

Christmas Express began in 1969 when Dick Hodge, a local insurance agent, asked then-police chief Bob Shannon to help distribute leftover toys to children who may not have received gifts that year. The police department now coordinates the annual charity drive that distributes food boxes with a turkey and other staples to 500 local families in need, as well as gifts for children up to age 11 in those families.

Staff photo by Gary L. West

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PENDLETON

City officials want businesses to take lead on parklets

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

City officials may have re-introduced the idea of parklets, but now they're taking a back seat.

"We want to be a helper. We don't want to be a leader," said Pendleton Development Commission Associate Director Charles Denight, who moderated a public meeting about parklets Tuesday that was mostly attended by downtown business owners.

Parklets are publicly accessible decks located on top of on-street parking spaces, built parallel to the curb and containing outdoor seating and planters.

The commission explored the idea of adding them to the downtown area several years ago, but tabled the issue once insurance costs were projected to be too high.

Now the city has restarted discussions but wants merchants to lead the charge in determining if parklets are worth revisiting.

Denight said the city would need to be involved at some level because it involves a public right-of-way. Ownership and implementation of the parklets would be left to the downtown business

community.

According to Denight, a similar setup has led to parklets in the downtown areas of The Dalles, La Grande and Astoria.

Bruce Gianotti, a downtown building owner, said downtown patronage comes mostly from motorists, not pedestrians or bicyclists. In Gianotti's view, taking away one or two parking spaces per parklet could hurt businesses in the area.

Michelle Manion, a member of the Pendleton Downtown Association, said that as a consumer, she likes downtowns with a dynamic, safe pedestrian experience.

"I shop more and I stay longer if I have to walk," she said.

With more pressing issues on the city's agenda, Zimmerman True Value Hardware owner Jim Naughton said municipal officials needed to communicate that the city wouldn't invest significant resources into parklets.

While reaction was mixed when Denight polled the room to gauge support for parklets, attendees were supportive of holding another public meeting on the subject.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

PENDLETON ROUND-UP

Fans will help choose 2016 kickoff concert

Website allows voters chance to rank artists

East Oregonian

Selecting talent for each year's Pendleton Round-Up kickoff concert is usually done by Round-Up and Happy Canyon boards. This year, organizers are reaching out to the public.

Those who want to vote on their favorite will find four choices at Pendleton.viberoom.us/. The list of country artists include Trace Adkins, Billy Currington, Gary Allan and Montgomery Gentry, the duo of Eddie Montgomery and Troy Gentry. The website, which goes live Friday, links to information about

each performer. To weigh in, click on the Vote Now button and rank your preferences.

Happy Canyon Director Corey Neistadt explained that the change in the selection process came because organizers wanted to get inside the minds of fans.

"We all come to it with our own ideas of what people will like," Neistadt said. "At the end of the day, we really want to know what fans want to see."

Each of the performers represents a slightly different genre within country music. Concert organizers can't guarantee being able to book the winning artist, but if not, will take note of the preferred style.

BRIEFLY

I-84 closes again at Cabbage Hill

For the second day in a row, Interstate 84 closed between Pendleton and Baker City because of poor road conditions and multiple crashes.

The closure, which started about 2:30 p.m., affected almost 100 miles of roadway. The eastbound closure began at exit 216 in Pendleton and the westbound closure begins at exit 304 in Baker City. There was the ability to drive westbound from La Grande to Pendleton through much of the night. Crashes on the westbound lanes near Cabbage Hill were noted about 9:30 p.m.

The highway remained closed as of press time Thursday night.

In addition, two Union Pacific trains had come to a stop in Pendleton, one for nearly two hours starting about 2:15 p.m., that blocked traffic. The cause was unknown as of press time.

School District seeks distinguished alumnus

HERMISTON — Hermiston School District is seeking nominations for its 2016 Distinguished Alumnus award.

The award is granted annually to recognize exceptional Hermiston graduates who went on to become leaders in their chosen professional field.

Last year's Distinguished Alumnus was Stuart Allen, who graduated from Hermiston High School in 1980. In 2001 he founded Allen Trust Company and Allen Capital Management and serves as president and CEO.

Nominees must have attended Hermiston High School for at least two consecutive years prior to graduation, be considered a leader in their chosen field with least 15 years of verifiable professional success, be active in community service, have a clean criminal background, have strong references and be willing to serve as a mentor to youth in the community.

The 2016 Distinguished Alumnus will be revealed during Hermiston High School's Evening of Excellence on May 10, 2016, and

will speak at the high school's commencement ceremony on June 4, 2016.

Applications are available at Hermiston High School, the Hermiston School District offices and online at hermiston.k12.or.us.

Storm brings snow to mountains

Mountain snow should continue to pile up through Friday afternoon in the Blue Mountains and Grande Ronde Valley, changing to mostly rain across the lower elevations.

Mary Wister, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Pendleton, said the forecast is messy but should see about 4-6 inches of snow in the northern Blues and 2-4 inches near La Grande.

Precipitation in Pendleton and Hermiston should fall mostly as rain, Wister said. A cold front is expected to move into the area Friday night, which will bring snow farther down the foothills.

Snow accumulations in the Columbia Basin measured between 1-2 inches in some areas, Wister said.

A winter weather advisory was set to expire at 4 a.m. Friday, calling for slick

driving conditions. Wister said blowing snow could also be a problem on Interstate 84 between La Grande and North Powder.

To check for road hazards and delays, visit www.tripcheck.com.

Utility fees to see slight increase

IRRIGON — Irrigon residents will see a slight increase on their sewer and water bills next year after the city council voted Tuesday to adjust minimum rates.

The council approved lowering bond fees for sewer and water as more users gradually come onto the system. The difference, however, was shifted to the basic utility charges, resulting in an overall increase of \$1.67

per month for single-family homes.

City Manager Aaron Palmquist said the revenue will be dedicated to building reserve funds for infrastructure projects. In particular, Palmquist said the city's water pipes are decades old and in need of attention.

"We're already financially strapped in debt," Palmquist said. "We're trying to be good fiscal managers."

For a single-family home, the basic utility charge for sewer will be \$46.17 and \$14.88 for the bond fee. The basic utility charge for water will be \$23.63 and \$15.32 for the bond fee. All changes will take effect July 1.

Local businesses should contact Irrigon City Hall at 541-922-3047 for their adjusted fee schedule.

Tom Phelan
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Notice of Availability of the Naval Weapons Systems Training Facility (NWSTF) Boardman Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (as implemented by the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 1500-1508)), the U.S. Navy, in cooperation with the National Guard Bureau and Oregon National Guard, has completed a Final EIS to evaluate the potential environmental effects associated with ongoing and proposed military readiness activities within NWSTF Boardman and associated airspace.
Proposed Action:
The Navy and Oregon National Guard propose to:
• Increase the types and the number of certain training activities conducted at NWSTF Boardman
• Develop and enhance training facilities at NWSTF Boardman
• Create additional special use airspace to support existing aircraft training
The Proposed Action is needed to enhance the training environment at NWSTF Boardman — including ranges, training areas, and instrumentation — to better support current and future unit and personnel training requirements.
The Final EIS will be available for public review from Dec. 18, 2015, to Jan. 19, 2016.
The document is available online at www.NWSTFBoardmanEIS.com and at these locations: Multnomah County Central, Salem Central, West Salem, Oregon Trail Heppner, Oregon Trail Boardman, and the Stafford Hansell Government Center.
For more information:
Visit the project website at www.NWSTFBoardmanEIS.com or contact:
Naval Facilities Engineering Command Northwest
Attn: NWSTF Boardman EIS Project Manager
1101 Tautog Circle, Suite 203
Silverdale, WA 98315-1101
Comments may be submitted by U.S. postal mail to the above address by Jan. 19, 2016.
Public Involvement:
The completion of the Final EIS follows years of research, analysis, and public involvement. The Navy held two public scoping meetings in October 2010 and two public meetings in September 2012 to provide information and receive public comments. The Final EIS includes responses from the Navy and the Oregon National Guard to the public comments received on the Draft EIS. Regulations provide for a 30-day public review and wait period after the Final EIS is published before action may be taken.