

HERMISTON

# PGG lot picked for new skate park

By JADE MCDOWELL  
East Oregonian

The city of Hermiston is planning to purchase property for a new skate park across the street from the police station.

On Monday the city council authorized staff to make an offer of \$40,000 for a triangular-shaped piece of property directly across South First Street from the Hermiston Safety Center, which houses the police, fire department and municipal court.

For 2015-2016 the city had budgeted \$35,000 for land acquisition for a skate park and another

\$50,000 for capital improvements. City Manager Byron Smith said preliminary discussions with Pendleton Grain Growers, which owns the property, indicate that the co-op will accept an offer of \$40,000.

Mayor David Drotzmann applauded staff for finding a piece of land that fits the needs of a new skate park, which has been a goal for the city council for years.

“What an exciting opportunity for the city of Hermiston,” he said.

On Monday the council also approved a contract amendment for C&E Trenching, moving forward a crucial piece of the project to certify

the Port of Umatilla’s water right and increase irrigation to local farmland.

“This is the best birthday present I could ever ask for,” Northeast Oregon Water Association director J.R. Cook told the council.

C&E Trenching has been under contract with the city to extend the Regional Water System to the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center. The \$664,000 contract extension approved Monday hires the company to install an additional pump at the Regional Water System’s river intake station and create a flush system.

Cook said the project should be

ready for testing in March.

Prior to the regular city council meeting, city councilors, staff and budget committee members attended a work session titled “City Budgeting 101” to discuss the laws and policies surrounding city budgets.

City finance director Amy Palmer said budget requests from department heads are due March 4 and the budget should be completed by April 22, with budget committee meetings on May 18-19 and a public hearing June 13.

Contact Jade McDowell at [jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com](mailto:jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com) or 541-564-4536.

PENDLETON

# Teens in custody after running away for a day

By PHIL WRIGHT  
East Oregonian

Two Pendleton High School freshman are in custody after running away for a day.

A 15-year-old girl and 14-year-old boy took off from the high school Monday at about noon, Pendleton police Chief Stuart Roberts said, but a call Tuesday helped officers find the pair.

Roberts said Pendleton police received a report Monday at 4:28 p.m. that the students did not go home after school. And the boy’s mother, who teaches at the high school, reported her 1999 Ford F-150 was missing.

Roberts said video from the school showed the two left in the pickup. The boy at some point dropped his mother’s purse at home, but kept \$20.

They also did not seem to have any credit cards, Roberts said, and no cellphones. The pickup also did not have a satellite-based navigation system. That left police in a pinch for tracking down the teens using modern technology.

Police questioned friends of the teens and searched social media, but those efforts also did not help.

Roberts said the parents signed the two as runaways, and Pendleton police notified law enforcement throughout the region to be on the lookout for the youth and the vehicle.

The teens kept off police radar for almost 24 hours. Roberts said the Umatilla County dispatch center in Pendleton took a call Tuesday at 11:54 a.m. from a concerned citizen who reported seeing what looked like the missing pickup Monday near the Little League Park on the 1900 block of Southeast Byers Avenue.

Officers responded 10 minutes later, he said, and soon took the teens into protective custody. Police also told their parents, the high school and cleared information from law enforcement databases.

Contact Phil Wright at [pwright@eastoregonian.com](mailto:pwright@eastoregonian.com) or 541-966-0833.



Courtesy Photo by Pendleton High School yearbook class

Students at Pendleton High School dressed in pink and formed in the shape of a ribbon at the school gymnasium Tuesday in support of Spanish teacher Kathryn Youngman, center, who is in the midst of her third battle with cancer. Students are currently rallying behind Youngman to put her on “The Ellen DeGeneres Show,” using #YoungmanOnEllen on social media. Hermiston High School has joined the effort, making their own video appeal on Tuesday.

## Show of support

# Irrigon man gets two years for copper theft

By KRISTIN M. KRAEMER  
Tri-City Herald

An Irrigon man owes more than \$61,000 in restitution after admitting he stole a large amount of copper wire from an irrigation pump station near the Snake River.

Orin A. Whitbeck, 51, was sentenced last week in Franklin County Superior Court to two years in prison.

He pleaded guilty earlier this month to first-degree theft, acknowledging that damage to the property was more than three times the value of the stolen commercial wire.

Officer Chad McGary was on duty for the Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife the morning of Jan. 15, 2014, when he came upon a vehicle parked near the roadway on the Pasco-Kahlotus Highway, according to court documents.

A woman was alone in the vehicle, which had an Oregon license plate. She told McGary that she was out of gas and her boyfriend had gone to get some.

At that point, Whitbeck came out from behind a potato shed, identified himself, and said a friend

was coming with some gas, documents said.

McGary left the scene but was notified a short time later by the Washington State Patrol that Whitbeck had an outstanding warrant out of Kennewick. The officer returned to the area and found Whitbeck driving the SUV, so he stopped it and waited for a warrant officer to arrive.

Whitbeck looked through the vehicle’s windows and noticed a blanket covering the whole back of the SUV. He noted in court documents that it looked like it was covering something.

Asked what was in the

back, the woman said she was moving, opened the back door and gave the officer permission to look, documents said.

McGary lifted the blanket and found “a large pile of wire” that appeared to have been cut several times.

Whitbeck admitted at the scene that he had stolen the wire from an irrigation pump station. He removed the wire from the SUV and placed it in the Fish & Wildlife officer’s patrol vehicle.

The manager of the pump station said he wanted to press charges against Whitbeck.

The restitution ordered

Tuesday is \$58,558 to an Idaho company to cover the insurance claim and \$2,500 to Flat Top Ranch in Prescott for the insurance deductible.

Whitbeck was told he can serve the Franklin County sentence along with an Oregon prison term he’s been serving since March 2014 for two counts of possessing stolen vehicles and possession of methamphetamine.

His criminal history also includes possessing and manufacturing controlled substances, burglary and theft. A majority of his crimes are out of Umatilla and Morrow counties.

HERMISTON

# Chamber provides tips on handling succession in family businesses

By JADE MCDOWELL  
East Oregonian

Hermiston Chamber of Commerce members got advice about tackling the challenges of a family-owned business from Carl Sohn of Northwest Farm Credit Services.

Sohn was the speaker at January’s Business to Business luncheon, and discussed his work with family businesses to create succession plans.

He described a family where five siblings owned equal shares in a ranch after the parents died, but only one of the siblings was living and working on the ranch. When the other four wanted to sell off the property to raise cash for one sibling’s medical bills, the sibling who had been working the ranch was angry that they wanted to destroy the family legacy their parents had left them, and soon everyone was talking to attorneys.

He said it was important not only to have a business plan, but also a succession plan (who is going to run the business next?) and an estate

plan (what will happen to the assets?) all in alignment with each other.

He compared running the business to driving a bus, and said if different family members are taking turns driving the bus it won’t turn out so well if they have different ideas of where they are going, where they started out from or what route they should use.

That can get even more complicated, he said, when the parties involved have a family relationship in addition to a business one. Small resentments that have been building since childhood can carry over into the business side of things, and Sohn said he has seen issues like who got the top bunk growing up surface during business disputes.

He said he once saw a company in which the two brothers who ran it had gotten to the point where they only communicated by letter despite working across the hall from each other. When they finally got to a point where they enjoyed working with each other again the

business grew.

To help businesses get to that point — or avoid a breakdown in the first place — Sohn said Northwest Farm Credit Services helps teach better communication skills. It’s important to have the difficult conversations

right away when there is a problem, he said, and it is also important to approach those conversations in the right way at the right time. Once families master those skills they are ready to work on aligning their business plans, succession plans and estate

plans into a united vision for the future.

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## STUDENT OF THE WEEK



Ryan Hahn  
ARLINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

Ryan works hard and helps other students by encouraging them to do well. He is out for multiple sports and involved in many activities both in and out of school. Ryan works locally for the Arlington Child Care Center and really likes his job and the children. Ryan is Senior class president and successful in his college prep classes. He enjoys playing video games and building stuff. Ryan is headed for college somewhere in Oregon fall of 2016 with a goal to study career opportunities

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