

HERMISTON

Dictionaries get the job done while school's Internet is down

By JENNIFER COLTON
East Oregonian

Third-graders across Hermiston received dictionaries this week, and the donation couldn't have come at a better time.

While the class iPads and SmartBoards had no Internet connection on Wednesday, the paper-and-ink dictionaries were up and running.

The Hermiston School District lost all outside Internet and telephone service around 9 a.m. Wednesday when a fiber line was severed between Hermiston and Tri-Cities. Schools could call between buildings, but all calls from numbers outside the district were met with busy signals. School and district websites were down as well. The school district is a customer of Charter Communications, which had network outages across the area on Wednesday.

For elementary school students, the technology downtime provided a few hiccups. While lessons involving technology were put on hold, the third-graders were able to learn old-fashioned research skills through the dictionaries, delivered by Columbia Grange 867 members Doris Reid and Dan Surface.

Reid and Surface gave the books to each Hermiston third-grader as part of the



Third-grade teacher Kaitlin Woodward works with Anterio Hughes and his new dictionary, Wednesday at Sunset Elementary.

"We don't know much about dictionaries yet. A few students this morning didn't even know what they were. We will definitely use these."

— Kaitlin Woodward, Sunset Elementary third-grade teacher

annual 'Words for Thirds' program.

The grange purchased 600 dictionaries to distribute, and in addition to the Hermiston School District, the grange purchased dictionaries for students at both Hermiston private schools as well as McNary Heights Elementary

in Umatilla.

In each class, the volunteers gave a book to each student and left extras with teachers for absent students.

"We've had some classes where we're still handing them out and the teacher starts teaching with them," Surface said. "It's great."

One of those classrooms was Kaitlin Woodward's at Sunset Elementary. As soon as students received the dictionaries, they started putting them to use.

"We don't know much about dictionaries yet. A few students this morning didn't even know what they were," Woodward said. "We will definitely use these."

While the Internet and phone service was down, most school operations continued as scheduled, according to area principals.

Staff Photo by Jennifer Colton

PENDLETON

Eighth Street Bridge project moves forward

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

The city of Pendleton is proceeding into the second phase of the Eighth Street Bridge project, but not without some resistance.

At a meeting Tuesday, council directed staff to enter into an agreement with the Oregon Department of Transportation to negotiate right-of-way acquisitions with nearby property owners and pay upfront to expedite the process.

The city received a \$7.42 million grant from the federal government to replace the bridge, contingent on the city putting up a 10.27 percent match. Since then, Umatilla County agreed to cover half of the match.

In order to start construction, the city needs to acquire temporary construction right-of-ways from Eighth Street property owners and some of the surrounding

areas, as well as permanent right-of-ways along the river, in order to build a retention pond for water runoff and an underpass for the Pendleton River Parkway.

Government officials don't expect the cost of right-of-way acquisition to exceed \$300,000. But Public Works Director Bob Patterson said grant funds cannot be disbursed until the permitting process is complete, which will take another year.

To meet the project's summer 2017 target start date, staff recommended the city pay the acquisition costs upfront, out of the street fund, and receive the 90 percent grant reimbursement next year.

The step into the next phase caused some confusion and consternation among the city council.

"We are truly adversely affecting the residents in that area, especially in parking and frontage in front of their

homes," Councilor Becky Marks said.

Eighth Street residents Ben and Rachel Dagley said city and ODOT staff had worked with property owners to make the project more palatable than the original designs, but they were confused about certain elements of the project and were interested in trying to mitigate the adverse effects of construction.

"I'm never going to love this," Rachel Dagley said. "I guess that's probably the biggest thing. I don't understand it. I'm not understanding the need for even 10 percent of the city's budget to be expended on this."

Councilor Chuck Wood said accepting the federal grant was necessary because the bridge is deteriorating and the city doesn't have the money to replace it or tear it down.

Marks voted against a resolution that declared the

city's intent to acquire the right-of-ways, but joined the rest of the city council in approving an agreement between ODOT and expediting the acquisition process by paying for right-of-ways upfront.

The council also unanimously approved an ordinance to return minimum density standards to one unit per acre in low density residential zones, four units per acre in the medium density zones, and 10 units per acre in high density zones.

A consultant had recommended the city increase its density levels to correspond with population projections. But Pendleton's population growth has far underperformed the projections and developers complained the higher standards made it harder to build housing.

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Morrow County clarifies 'judge' election

Position to become part-time commissioner

By GEORGE PLAVERN
East Oregonian

As of Wednesday, two people have filed to run for Morrow County judge in this year's general election.

But in reality, the candidates are vying for a different seat altogether.

On Sept. 16, 2015, the county court voted 2-1 to drop the judge position in favor of having one full-time county administrator and three part-time commissioners. The change will take effect Jan. 1, 2017, after current Judge Terry Tallman retires.

Until then, however, candidates for the newly created third commission seat have to file for county judge — even though they will be sworn in as a commissioner as soon as their term begins and the judge position is abolished.

Morrow County District Attorney Justin Nelson said the transition has created some confusion among residents who are wondering why "county judge" still

appears on the ballot. After consulting with the state Elections Division, Nelson said they can't put a third commission seat on the ballot since the position technically doesn't exist yet.

"There was no other way around it," Nelson said. "We want to make sure the public is aware."

So far, Greg Sweek and Melissa Lindsay, both of Heppner, have filed to run for a six-year term on the county commission. Sweek is a former county property appraiser and assessor, while Lindsay is owner and president of Turner Ranch. The deadline to file is March 8.

For years, the Morrow County judge has served as a county administrator and presided over juvenile court cases. With the local government shakeup, the county has since hired Jerry Sorte as a full-time administrator, who will report to the board of three commissioners.

Part-time commissioners make \$37,284 per year.

Juvenile court cases will be handled by the Sixth

District Circuit Court, which covers both Morrow and Umatilla counties. On average, Morrow County has about 10 juvenile delinquency cases every year and between 50-60 dependency cases referred by the Department of Human Services.

Shifting those cases to circuit court is estimated to save the county around \$40,000 per year in attorney costs. Judge Tallman voted against the transition, while commissioners Don Russell and Leann Rea voted in favor. Tallman was first elected as county judge in 1999.

According to the Oregon Blue Book, only six counties still have local elected judges with any judicial authority: Gilliam, Sherman, Wheeler, Grant, Harney and Malheur.

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TRCI inmates identified in Feb. stabbing

By JENNIFER COLTON
East Oregonian

A former Portland police informant was the victim in a recent stabbing at Two Rivers Correctional Institution, Umatilla.

Oregon State Police is investigating and has released few details about the Feb. 21 attack on George Robert Taylor, 53, perpetrated by another inmate.

Hermiston Fire & Emergency Services responded to TRCI at 12:40 p.m. that Sunday and an ambulance helicopter transported Taylor, who suffered serious injuries. He was hospitalized but returned to TRCI Feb. 23 and to his housing unit at the prison two days later, according to Betty Bernt, communications manager for the Oregon Department of Corrections.

State police identified Joe Daniel Robinson, 42, as the suspect in Taylor's assault. Robinson entered TRCI on Nov. 21, 2013 on a count of second-degree assault out of Linn County. His earliest release date is August 2019.

Taylor was the subject of a 2015 exposé in *Willamette Week* that revealed he was an informant for the Portland Police Bureau while simultaneously working for a Detroit crime syndicate.

Although Taylor came to TRCI on Sept. 2, 2015, his experience with the Oregon Department of Corrections goes back decades. Taylor's inmate record includes aliases of Bobby Dunkin, Bobby Manny, John Jacobsen, Bob Manning and Bobby Manning. His criminal record, out of Multnomah County, includes cases for vehicle theft in November 2007; attempt to elude police, hit and run (property), prostitution, first-degree sexual abuse in April 2010; delivery and possession of heroin in June 2011; second-degree theft in April 2013; harassment in May 2013; and coercion, strangulation and harassment in April 2015.

That case led to his conviction and incarceration at TRCI.

TRCI spokeswoman Sherry Iles said Taylor's assault is unrelated to the death of another TRCI inmate last weekend. On Feb. 27 Joel Abbot, 60, was found unresponsive in his cell. He was transported off-site for medical care at 10:30 a.m. and died at 5:05 p.m. Abbot was serving a life sentence for murder.

Abbot, originally incarcerated in 1993, had been transferred to TRCI for medical care.

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PILOT ROCK

Sex abuse case lingered for months

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

A Pilot Rock man faces a charge of felony sex abuse of a child in a case that sat open since January 2015.

Pendleton police Chief Stuart Roberts said in an email the work of police Cpl. Ryan Lehnert led to the arrest of Scott MacFadden Allen, 58, of 148 S.E. Elm St. Allen pleaded not guilty Monday in Umatilla County Circuit Court in Pendleton to first-degree sexual abuse, according to court records.

Roberts said not all the details are in, but the victim was five years old in early May 2014 when the family suspected "inappropriate activity." Then there was a "communication/confrontation" among family members before someone reported Allen as the suspect in January 2015.

Darrin Richman retired around then as Pilot Rock police chief, and the

small town struggled to find a replacement. Pilot Rock then struck a deal to pay Pendleton for police services. In November, Lehnert discovered a memorandum from the district attorney's office requesting a follow-up investigation on the sex abuse case.

Lehnert called deputy prosecutor Monty Ludington, who sent that memo.

"At that time the decision was made to start the investigation from the beginning," Roberts said.

Lehnert completed the investigation, and a grand jury considered the evidence and indicted Allen, which led to a warrant and his arrest Sunday.

Allen remains in the Umatilla County Jail in lieu of \$150,000 bail.

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