

# EAST OREGONIAN

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**HERMISTON**

## New substation could curb outages

Costs \$985,000, would raise rates

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
East Oregonian

Hermiston Energy Services is recommending a rate increase and bond refinance to pay for projects that should decrease the number of power failures in Hermiston.

HES superintendent Nate Rivera told city council Monday night that the city's electric utility was in need of several upgrades, including a new substation and smart meters.

After two power outages so far this month, city coun-



Two Hermiston Energy Service electrical meters measure energy usage at a downtown Hermiston business. Staff photo by Gary L. West

cilors were inclined to agree. "I think people are willing to pay for (fewer) outages," John Kirwan said.

The first major project would be a new substation called Hermiston East, which

would cover territory east of Highway 395 that is currently covered by the Butte and Feedville substations. The project would include a new transformer and new feeders, taking the load off of some

of Hermiston's overworked feeders that are at more than 90 percent capacity during peak load times.

Rivera said the new substation would reduce the number of power outages and their length — if one substation was down, residents could be switched to another while crews worked to fix the problem.

"This would minimize the size of the outage and get people back up faster," he said.

The project would cost an estimated \$985,000 and be completed during the 2016-2017 fiscal year. Rivera also recommended other maintenance projects, including pole replacements,

a switch to LED street lights, sectionalizing the system to reduce the spread of outages and a more proactive tree trimming program.

"Typically the outages we see are wind and tree related, so the more aggressive we can be about that the better," Rivera said.

He also recommended the adoption of smart meters that would tell HES when the power is out.

Currently, the utility depends on customers to report when their lights go out, and then depends on a visual check of the neighborhood to assess how far the blackout extends.

"We're still driving around with our head out the

window," Rivera said.

A smart meter system would alert HES as soon as the power goes out and give a map of the outage, allowing crews to more quickly pinpoint the problem and begin working to fix it. It would also save on operational costs for meter reading and allow HES to give customers a more detailed account of how their power use fluctuates throughout the day.

The estimated cost would be between \$1.5 million and \$1.75 million.

On Monday Rivera presented the reliability numbers for HES, noting

See **ENERGY/8A**

## Wounded black bear attacks hunter

Pendleton man survives

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
East Oregonian

A Pendleton hunter was attacked by a black bear Sunday evening in the Starkey Unit near La Grande.

Shane Thomas was hunting by himself at Tony Vey Meadows about six miles up Forest Road 5160, said Sgt. Nick Pallis with the Union County Sheriff's Office. Thomas told officers he had shot the bear with his rifle and had walked into a thicket to retrieve the animal.

Except the bear wasn't dead. It attacked Thomas, who was unable to reach for his pistol and forced to fight back by kicking and yelling. Thomas was able to get away and drive himself back to the highway despite puncture wounds to his legs and backside, Pallis said.

Thomas texted his mother about what happened, and she called 9-1-1. Pallis said he paged Search and Rescue, though before they could respond his deputy actually passed Thomas on Highway 244. Thomas followed medics back to Grande Ronde Hospital in La Grande, where Pallis said

See **BEAR/8A**



Etta Conner gives a Pendleton blanket to Dwight Eisenhower during one of the president's visits to the Northwest. Contributed photo

## Beloved horsewoman rides to the sky

Etta Conner raced horses at Round-Up, competed in Miss Indian America

By **KATHY ANEY**  
East Oregonian

Among mourners saying goodbye to Etta Conner on Monday was a horse in full regalia.

The riderless bay stood silently at Olney Cemetery as Conner's body was interred. Family and friends said reluctant goodbyes to the beloved Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation elder. Conner, who died Friday, May 20 at 82, was buried near her parents, three brothers and a sister.

Those who knew the mother of nine say she lived up to her Indian name, Wyassus, which means "dance." The big-hearted woman had an omnipresent smile and seemed to have fingers and toes in a multitude of community activities. Though she battled stomach cancer in her final months, the longtime Happy Canyon volunteer took part in the 2015 Happy Canyon Night Show.

As a young woman, she raced around the Pendleton Round-Up oval in the competition for Indian women.



**Etta L. Conner**  
April 9, 1934-May 20, 2016

"She was a good horsewoman," said Cayuse Chief Jesse Jones, who is a cousin of Conner.

"She was someone who looked up to her big brothers," said Conner's daughter, Camilla El Shoura. "She wanted to be like them. She wanted to ride like them."

Conner's nephew, Brian Conner, held the riderless horse, Hero, in place during the interment. Hero

belongs to Conner's niece, Bobbie Conner, who stood nearby. Later, Conner said the tribute honored her aunt's prowess as a horsewoman and spoke to the void she left behind.

"It's recognition of the missing," Conner said. "It's not just the loss of my aunt, but to all the women on horseback who have gone before."

Riding horses was only one of Conner's passions through the years. The high-energy Conner also excelled in baton twirling as a majorette at Pendleton High School.

"She was one of the best of the best," said Bobbie. "After high school, she went to Sheridan, Wyoming, and competed in the Miss Indian America Pageant. Her talent was baton."

Conner twirled her way to first runner-up wearing a headband, fringed skirt, beaded vest and moccasins.

A black-and-white photo at the Pendleton Post Office shows Conner presenting a Pendleton blanket to then-President Dwight Eisenhower during a stop in Pendleton.

See **CONNER/8A**

## Palmer responds to one suit, sued again

By **SEAN HART**  
EO Media Group

The same day Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer's attorneys responded to allegations he deleted a public record, a lawsuit was filed asking a judge to force him to release other records.

On May 20 Palmer's attorneys, Benjamin Boyd and D. Zachary Hostetter, released a statement responding to a complaint filed with the Oregon police licensing agency by John Day Police Chief Richard Palmer



In addition to stating Palmer supported the occupiers of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and endangered the public, Gray accused Palmer of "tampering with public records" by deleting an electronic record of a 2012 incident that involved Gray.

Palmer's attorneys said in the statement the sheriff followed state law: "Although the electronic copy of the incident report was deleted, Sheriff Palmer retained hard copies of the initial report and final report in the records of Grant County Sheriff's Office, where these public records have always been available for inspection and copying by the public, representatives of the press, the Department of Justice, and the (police licensing agency), as required by Oregon's public records laws."

The statement did not respond to the rest of Gray's complaint or other complaints filed with the licensing agency by at least seven others.

The police licensing agency forwarded those complaints to the Oregon Department of Justice for further investigation in February. A DOJ investigation into an unspecified complaint is ongoing.

Also on Friday, the *The Oregonian* and reporter Les Zaitz filed a complaint against Grant County Sheriff's Office, Palmer and civil deputy Sally

See **SHERIFF/8A**

