

IRRIGON

Watermelon fest brings community together

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

Families from around the region gathered in the sunshine Saturday for the annual Irrigon Watermelon Festival, which featured a record number of vendors, games and — oh yes — truckloads of famous Hermiston watermelons, donated by Walchli and Bellinger farms.

The day began with breakfast at 6:30 a.m., followed by a parade down North Main Avenue to Irrigon Marina Park. Melon-themed games included a seed spitting contest and watermelon bowling, while vendors dished up slices of melons by the plateful.

Donna Eppenbach, a longtime community volunteer with her husband, Don, said Irrigon used to be the melon mecca of Eastern Oregon, with numerous fruit stands lined up and down Highway 730. The event, now in its 33rd year, has become the town's signature



Staff photo by George Plaver
Brooke Toler, left, and Nikki Phillips, both sophomores at Irrigon Junior-Senior High School, serve up plates of watermelon at Saturday's annual Irrigon Watermelon Festival.

celebration and a reminder of the area's agricultural heritage.

"In fact, a lot of Hermiston melons are still grown here," Eppenbach said. "All of us grew up working in those stands, or in the fields."

Other activities included free boat rides on the Columbia River courtesy of the Morrow County Sheriff's Office Marine Patrol, and a dunk tank where kids could soak their coaches and school principals. Live

entertainment played on stage throughout the afternoon, and the smell of rich barbecue wafted across the park.

The Irrigon Watermelon Festival is sponsored by the Morrow County Unified Recreation District. Cindy Turner, this year's event secretary, said all proceeds stay in the community.

"For myself, I just enjoy seeing all the people," Turner said. "It seems like summer gets so busy, but the watermelon festival brings everybody together."

Phyllis Danielson, who owns Stokes Landing Bed & Breakfast near the marina, said she had a full house of out-of-town guests.

"This our one big event, where we all get together and play," Danielson said.

For the first time this year, out-of-town food vendors arrived with everything from snacks to crafts.

Contact George Plaver at gplaver@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

BOARDMAN

Carty Generating Station in service

Gas-fired plant meets deadline

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

Though workers are still putting the finishing touches on the Portland General Electric's new Carty Generating Station near Boardman, the natural gas-fired power plant is officially in commercial service as of Friday.

PGE announced the development in a filing with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, meeting its startup deadline of July 31 set by the Oregon Public Utility Commission. Construction on the plant began in 2014.

A rate increase took effect Monday to cover the initial estimated cost of the project — \$514 million — as previously approved by the PUC in its 2016 Rate Case Order for Carty. However, the actual cost will range somewhere between \$640-\$660 million after the original contractor, Abeinsa, allegedly performed shoddy work and failed to pay some employees.

PGE fired Abeinsa and assumed construction of Carty in December, and is now suing two surety companies to recoup a \$145.6 million performance bond on the work. More than 50 subcontractors

have also filed liens against the property.

The utility says it will provide additional information on its strategy moving forward in another SEC filing due Wednesday, as well as its quarterly earnings conference call also scheduled for Wednesday. Unless the bond is recovered, PGE has said it intends to ask for another rate increase to recoup the full cost for Carty.

Carty has been built in the shadow of the Boardman Coal Plant and works on a combined cycle system, with one turbine running off the combustion of natural gas and the other running off steam. The power is carried first to the Grassland Substation about a mile away from the site, and from there fed onto the Bonneville Power Administration transmission system in Gilliam County.

The Carty Generating Station was identified in PGE's 2009 long-range energy plan to fill a customer demand growing at a rate of 1-1.5 percent every year, according to spokesman Steve Corson. PGE serves roughly 840,000 customers primarily in the Portland metro area and Salem.

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ECHO

Wheat & Barley Pub closing down Aug. 20

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

A staple business of downtown Echo is closing its doors Aug. 20.

Brad and Shelby Dodson are closing the Wheat & Barley Pub to fulfill a dream of selling most of their possessions and roaming the United States in an RV.

"We've been making excuses for years, and we've decided we're just going to go," Shelby said.

The pub — with its local craft beers and wines, meats smoked in-house, fresh local produce and a rotating menu more typical of Portland than a small Eastern Oregon

town — has garnered rave reviews over the past few years, including five-star Yelp reviews describing it as a "real Eastern Oregon jewel" and a "little gem of an upscale pub."

Three years since the Dodsons took over, Shelby said business is still good and the eatery isn't closing over "anything like that." But the couple wants to travel.

She said they don't have any specific itinerary, they just want to see "what's out there."

"We have a map of the U.S. and a pen, that's it," she said.

She said the couple have

made great friends during their time in Echo and will miss their loyal customers. The red brick building on Main Street is up for sale (as are most of the Dodsons' possessions) but they would also be willing to rent to a tenant who would run some sort of upscale eatery or other business that would draw people to Echo's Main Street.

"We're looking for potential renters interested in doing something similar," Shelby said. "We built this place up and it would break my heart to see it empty."

The Dodsons are hosting a "Grand Closing" celebration over their last two days

open, inviting people for one last meal or round of drinks at the pub over live music. The celebration will take place Aug. 19-20 from 5 p.m. to midnight at 201 W. Main Street in Echo.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

BRIEFLY

Man suffers serious injuries in motorcycle crash

UMATILLA — A single-vehicle motorcycle wreck on Highway 730 east of Sand Station sent one adult male to the hospital Sunday afternoon with serious injuries.

Umatilla Fire Chief Steve Potts could not immediately identify the rider, who was traveling westbound when he was ejected over the guardrail and down an embankment. Potts said the man was conscious as he was flown away in an air ambulance.

"He certainly had serious injuries," Potts said.

The cause of the crash is unknown. No other injuries were reported.

Health Insurance 101 available in Hermiston, M-F

State officials will be hosting "Health Insurance 101" town halls in Eastern Oregon this month.

The informational sessions will include presentations from the Oregon Health Insurance Marketplace and Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assis-

tance on topics including the basics of health insurance, insurance rules, insurance options in Eastern Oregon, Affordable Care Act myths and a question and answer period.

The town halls will be Aug. 15 from 6-8 p.m. in La Grande at Northeast Oregon Public Transit (2204 E. Penn Ave.), Aug. 16 from 6-8 p.m. at the Milton-Freewater Public Library (8 S.W. Eighth Ave.) and Aug. 17 from 6-8 p.m. at Good Shepherd Medical Center (610 N.W. 11th St. Room CC2).

Pre-registration is recommended to make sure there are enough seats and handouts. Email info.marketplace@oregon.gov or call 855-268-3767 (toll-free).

M-F schools lead free

MILTON-FREEWATER — According to Superintendent Rob Clark, all schools in the Milton-Freewater School District recently underwent testing for lead in drinking water. The results of those tests came back as negative at every source for every school.

Briefs are compiled from staff and wire reports, and press releases. Email press releases to news@eastoregonian.com

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