

MILTON-FREEWATER

New name, same fun and games

Revamped festival emphasizes music

By WILL DENNER
East Oregonian

The name may have changed, but Milton-Free-water’s annual summer celebration remains largely the same.

Previously known as the Muddy Frogwater Festival, a new name — Milton-Free-water Rocks! — debuted at this year’s event held annually at Yantis Park. The layout of the event, centered around craft and commercial booths, music, wine tasting, art and games for kids, is nearly identical to past years, though Milton-Freewater Chamber of Commerce board member Andrew Brown said they wanted to emphasize music this year. The biggest challenge for people at Yantis Park Friday was remembering the new name.

“I’ve been calling it the old name all year,” John Borchart said. “It’ll take a little while to sink in.”

Borchart’s Child Evangelism Program booth, offering free face painting for kids, has been part of the festival since his family moved to Milton-Freewater 15 years ago.

Elsewhere, kids competed in three-legged races, water balloon tosses and a Frisbee-throwing contest. Adults tasted local beer and wine offerings, though this year’s new event “Sip and Paint,” where people paint while drinking an adult beverage, was ultimately canceled. Friends of Milton-Freewater Public Library also hosted its annual book sale, with all proceeds going toward library projects.

Between all aspects of the festival, people of all ages can find something that interests them at Milton-Freewater Rocks! “Everyone looks forward



Kids race each other on bouncy balls at Yantis Park in Milton-Freewater Friday.



Jim Webb (right) paints a Seattle Seahawks logo on E.J. Lowry’s arm at the Child Evangelism Program booth.

to it,” said Terrol F. Winsor, one of the people overseeing Friday’s book sale. “We pray it doesn’t get too hot, but it usually gets too hot.”

Those looking to get a break from the upper-80s heat found the indoor Harvest of Art Show at nearby Central Middle School. The show has been part of the festival since 1999, showcasing and judging the work of nearby amateur artists. Judges award first, second and third place ribbons to artists in three categories: painting,

photography and three-dimensional work such as jewelry and sculptures.

Fran Walker’s photo titled, “Poppy and Friend” won first place in photography. The photo depicts a bee gathering pollen from a blue poppy flower. Walker, who resides in Milton-Free-water, and her sister spent most of May traveling around the Pacific Northwest to visit and photograph gardens. She shot this particular photo at Weyerhaeuser Garden just south of Seattle. “Lots of little things you

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— Terrol F. Winsor, one of the people overseeing Friday’s book sale

remember when you look at the flower — where you were and who was with you,” Walker said.

Milton-Freewater Rocks! continues Saturday from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday’s events include an afternoon quilt show, pretty baby contest and the annual salmon bake. The BBQ competition starts Sunday at noon, before the festival concludes with the Firemen’s Water Fight at 3 p.m. For more information, visit www.mfchamber.com.

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Irrigation district responds to lawsuit

Motion to dismiss based on jurisdiction

By GEORGE PLAVERN
East Oregonian

The Westland Irrigation District has responded to a lawsuit filed by long-time patrons who argue they’ve been cheated out of water for years to benefit large farms with junior water rights.

Attorneys for the district are trying to get the case dismissed from federal court over lack of jurisdiction. A motion was filed Friday which states the plaintiffs did not exhaust their legal remedies by bringing their claims to the state first.

Seven Umatilla County farmers are suing Westland, including: ELH LLC, owned by Patrick and Dixie Echeverria; Oregon Hereford Ranch LLC, owned by Doug and Don Bennett; Paul Gelissen; Frank Mueller; Maurice and Lucy Ziemer; Craig and Cynthia Parks; and Richard and Kristine Carpenter. Together, they farm more than 1,650 acres with senior water rights to the Umatilla River and McKay Reservoir

According to the lawsuit, the plaintiffs are victims of a massive water misappropriation scheme concocted by Westland to benefit L&L Farms, Eagle Ranch and Amstad Farms, three operations with more than 5,000 acres. Water was illegally taken and redistributed to the larger farms, which hold junior water rights, for at least a decade, the plaintiffs claim.

Westland allegedly engaged in four main tactics to misappropriate water. First, the district entered into flood water delivery contracts which allowed the larger farms to

take more water out of the Umatilla River than they’re entitled. Plaintiffs also argue that Westland failed to properly monitor water usage, ignored priority dates for water rights and diverted water from McKay Reservoir through so-called “limited water” delivery contracts.

As a result, the plaintiffs say they’ve been unable to double-crop their fields, which has cut into their bottom line. They are seeking \$2.9 million in damages,

Westland, however, argues in its motion that the plaintiffs erred in filing in federal court.

“Because plaintiffs have not utilized the procedures Oregon provides for obtaining just compensation, plaintiffs cannot overcome the exhaustion requirement,” the motion reads. “As a result, the court lacks subject matter jurisdiction over plaintiffs’ federal takings claim and this claim should be dismissed.”

In addition, the district argues it is immune from some of the claims.

“As provided by Oregon statutes, the Westland board of directors has the authority and responsibility to take all actions, and make all decisions, at issue in this case,” the motion reads.

The district says it is working to put together more information to distribute to other patrons about the lawsuit, and the process moving forward.

The plaintiffs also have filed a separate lawsuit against the Oregon Water Resources Department for failing to protect their senior water rights. That case is proceeding in Umatilla County Circuit Court.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

PENDLETON

SeaPort to continue making flights until DOT reaches final decision

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

The Pendleton City Council may have chosen Boutique Air to run its Essential Air Service program, but SeaPort Airlines will continue to provide flights through 2016 until further notice.

While Boutique is the city’s choice for commercial air service, the final decision ultimately lies with the U.S. Department of Transportation, which issues the EAS subsidy.

A DOT spokeswoman, Caitlin Harvey, wrote in an email that Pendleton hasn’t submitted its official recommendation yet, but the deadline is Wednesday.

“I would expect an order announcing the carrier selection four (to) six weeks from that date,” she wrote. “It could be sooner or later,

depending on work volume and approvals.”

Pendleton may have to wait until fall to hear back from the DOT, but SeaPort marketing director Claire James said the current airline will continue to offer round-trip flights from Pendleton to Portland through the end of its contract. DOT or Boutique could, however, decide to start the transition as soon as the bid is approved.

James said any tickets purchased for dates after SeaPort stops service to Pendleton will be refunded.

While expressing excitement over the council’s decision, Boutique project manager Greg Roberts declined to comment on the transition until the DOT announced the selection.

Airport Manager Steve Chrisman said in previous

public meetings that Boutique’s planes will fly into a private hangar rather than Portland International Airport, bypassing Transportation Security Administration screenings.

The city is also awaiting a DOT decision on the objection it filed to the department’s tentative ruling to strip the EAS subsidy from Pendleton for failing to keep its per passenger subsidy rate under \$200.

Chrisman has stated that he’s confident that either the objection or a waiver will be successful and Pendleton will retain its subsidized commercial air service.

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Lease agreements on agenda Monday for Hermiston council

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Lease agreements with the school district and fire district are on the agenda for Hermiston’s city council Monday.

The council will be asked to consider an agreement for the newly formed Umatilla County Fire District 1 to continue renting the Bob Shannon Safety Center at 330 S. First St.

Hermiston Fire & Emergency Services was previously leasing the building for \$1 per year, but since a ballot measure dissolved that district in May to create the new combined district, a new agreement must be signed.

Oregon’s cap on property taxes means that the new district’s increased tax rate results in approximately \$130,000 less per year for the city of Hermiston’s general fund. To help offset that, the

lease before the council on Monday would charge the fire district \$75,000 the first year, \$50,000 the next two years and \$25,000 the fourth year.

On Monday the council also will consider a lease agreement with Hermiston School District for 1.19 acres of property on Ridgeway Avenue near the Hermiston Public Library. The property is the planned site for the new Hermiston senior center, dubbed the Harkenrider Center, which is expected to be finished Aug. 31, 2017.

The lease is for \$1 per year for 50 years.

After an executive session to discuss the city manager’s yearly performance review, the council will reconvene to “consider and possibly adopt amendments to the city manager’s contract.”

The council meeting will be Monday at 7 p.m. in city hall, 180 N.E. Second St.

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