

Christmas tradition grows

Spruce that traveled the county ends up in downtown Hermiston

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

A tree that has lived all over Eastern Oregon is on to its next — and final — great adventure as a Christmas tree in downtown Hermiston.

The 32-foot spruce was “raised from a sapling” by Larry Davidson of Hermiston.

“We go back several years,” he said.

Davidson was a game warden for the Oregon State Police when he first found the tree, then a tiny sapling, in the Blue Mountains. He brought it home and planted it in his yard in Milton-Freewater. When he and his wife Marjorie moved to Pendleton a few years later he dug up the small tree and brought it with them.

Four years later the tree, then about four feet tall, moved with the Davidsons again, this time to Hermiston.

“We were going to stay eight years, it’s been 34 years,” Davidson said. “Hermiston has become our home.”

The spruce tree, meanwhile, grew twice as tall as the house. It encroached on the fence, needed trimming and grew far too tall for the Davidsons to continue decorating for the holidays. It was time for the tree to go, Davidson decided, and what better send-off than to donate it to the city for staff to deck in lights and display downtown?

“We just decided it’s time to let someone else see it and use it,” he said. “It’s time to let go.”

Last week city staff and volunteers from Umatilla Electric Cooperative brought a boom truck and bucket truck to the Davidsons’ property just east of town and picked the tree up. It wasn’t easy — once on UEC’s flatbed the branches on the downward-facing side began to snap while others dragged on the ground.

After propping the top of the tree up with a make-shift support system and carefully tying up as many branches as possible, the team of UEC and city workers helped the tree slowly make its way to Second Street just outside city hall, where several feet of lower branches were removed and the trunk was lowered into a freshly-opened hole in the middle of the street.

The half-block of Second Street will be the site of Hermiston’s Winter Festival, a month-long holiday celebration from Dec. 1 to Dec. 23 that includes live entertainment and light shows each Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 6-8 p.m. As the entertainment calendar fills up, residents can check out the Hermiston Winter Festival Facebook page for updates.

It all begins Thursday, Dec. 1 with a celebration that starts at 5:30 p.m. and includes music, food vendors, pictures with Santa and a short tree-lighting ceremony at 6 p.m. That night is also Main Street’s First Thursday for the month of December, so attendees will be encouraged to wander farther downtown and check out the special deals and samples being offered that night.

Parks and Recreation director Larry Fetter said the Winter Festival will be bigger and better than its inaugural year in 2015.

“We learned a lot last year when we introduced the program and so we’re taking it up a notch this year,” he said.

Fetter said residents like Cindy Thompson have stepped up to help add more lights and pizzazz to the display.

“We had quite a bit of discussion about how to better present the tree,” he said. “People appreciated it last year, but a lot of people were interested in doing it up more.”

Thompson has been working with Main Street coordinator Emma Porriculo on pulling together entertainment and vendors.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Umatilla Electric Cooperative foreman Tony Palzinski, left, and Hermiston Parks and Recreation director Larry Fetter discuss the placement of a 32-foot tall Christmas tree on Second Street in Hermiston.



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Porriculo said there were other events in the works to promote Hermiston businesses during the holiday season, such as a scavenger hunt through downtown after Pancakes with Santa from 8:30-10:30 a.m. on Dec. 17 at the Hermiston Conference Center.

“We want to promote people going downtown and shopping,” she said.

To get the rest of downtown involved in the holiday spirit, merchants are also being encouraged to participate in a window-decorating contest that will be judged on Dec. 15.

Call 541-667-5018 for more information about participating in the festival or the window-decorating contest.

Umatilla Electric Cooperative employees help move a Christmas tree from the home of Larry and Marjorie Davidson.

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Umatilla Electric Cooperative lineman Bobby Findley uses a chainsaw to trim the base of a 32-foot tall spruce tree before placing it in Second Street in Hermiston.

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