



Musical alumni
return for concert
in Hermiston/3C



Snow falls
on Oregon
ski hills/4C



Cider like
a pro this
Christmas/4C

IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO MAKE A VILLAGE



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Richard Flaiz, from left, Dusty Nolan and Larry Hanson work on constructing the Journey to Bethlehem set on Tuesday at the Hermiston Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Volunteers create the sights, sounds and smells of Bethlehem

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Entering Journey to Bethlehem feels like stepping into the past. Visitors to the live, interactive tour are surrounded by children holding clucking chickens and shopkeepers mending fish nets as hunks of meat roast over open flames.

“We try to get the whole sensory thing going — the sights, the sounds, the smells — so that it takes them back in time,” said costume coordinator Jo Ann Rincker.

Persuading the five senses that they are in an ancient Middle Eastern village on the night of Jesus Christ’s birth is a daunting challenge that takes weeks of preparation. Volunteers from churches around the region converge on the acreage behind the Hermiston Seventh-day Adventist Church each winter to raise a marketplace, government buildings, leper’s camp and the all-important stable where baby Jesus makes an appearance.

The work culminates in a three-day-long production that guides a stream of about 2,000 visitors through the story of Jesus’ birth.

Rincker said the actors are outside from about 4:30 to 9 p.m. each night, so they are grateful that each year a few more tents and tarps are replaced by wooden structures.

“We’ve had snow, we’ve had wind, we’ve had rain,” Rincker said. “Rain is the worst.”

Campfires and torches provide the light and warmth as people travel through the village. The flickering light and smell of smoke creates a sense of authenticity, but also the occasional small mishap — more than one of the costumes Rincker has created bears the scorch-mark evidence of an actor backing up a little too close to a fire.

The set’s other source of unpredictability tends to come from the live animals, which include sheep, goats, chickens