

HERMISTON

# Meet your local dancing stars

By JADE MCDOWELL  
East Oregonian

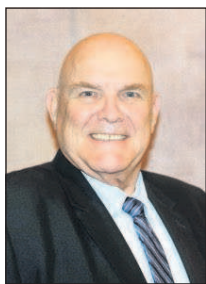
Six of Hermiston's "stars" will be getting their groove on in January at the fifth annual Dancing with the Hermiston Stars.

Bill Elfering, Clara Beas Fitzgerald, Eva Swain, Greg Smith, LuAnn Davison and Spike Piersol will be pairing up with professional dancers to compete for the mirror ball trophy and raise money for charity.

The event, put on by the Desert Arts Council and sponsored by the Hermiston Breakfast Kiwanis Club, will take place Jan. 14 at Hermiston High School at 7 p.m.

The first half of the evening's performance will feature the stars and their partners from the Utah Ballroom Dance Troupe competing before a panel of judges. Audience members can vote too, using their ticket stubs and cash donations to the charity of performers' choice. After intermission the dance troupe will perform a collection of ballroom dance routines.

Event coordinators Mary Corp and Karen Davis said in a news release that Hermiston Dancing with the Stars



Elfering



Beas Fitzgerald



Swain



Smith



Davison



Piersol

has become a favorite event in the Desert Arts Council's lineup that everyone looks forward to.

Performers for the 2017 season:

• **Bill Elfering** is a Umatilla County Commissioner from Hermiston. He graduated from high school in Vale and played on three state champion football teams there. Money raised by his performance will go to Pregnancy Care Services.

• **Clara Beas Fitzgerald**

is a Hermiston city councilor and serves on various volunteer boards, including the Hispanic Advisory Committee and Oregon Commission for Women. Her performance will raise money for the Umatilla Morrow Hispanic Scholarship Foundation.

• **Eva Swain** is a business owner who moved to Hermiston in 1976 with her husband Harley Swain to start a car dealership. Today Harley Swain Subaru is still

family-owned despite the death of her husband in 1978. She is raising money for the Hermiston Senior Center.

• **Greg Smith** represents District 57, including the greater Hermiston area, in the Oregon State Legislature. He has served in the House of Representatives since 2000. His performance will raise money for the Hermiston Warming Station.

• **LuAnn Davison** is a Hermiston business owner and community volunteer. She is the current president of the Altrusa Club and a State Farm Insurance agent. She is raising money for Campus Life.

• **Spike Piersol** is a retired Hermiston firefighter and EMT who stays busy with volunteer work and sometimes serves as one of Santa's elves. He is raising money and awareness for the First Responder Memorial in McKenzie Park.

Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$10 for children under 18. They can be purchased in advance online at [www.desertartscouncil.com](http://www.desertartscouncil.com) or at the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce or Hermiston Parks and Recreation office. For more information call 541-667-5018.

# DOJ never investigated three former Umatilla County employees

By PHIL WRIGHT  
East Oregonian

Three former Umatilla County human services employees are looking to re-claim their reputations.

The county in April 2015 fired Carolyn Mason and husband and wife Juan Valdez and Martha Laura Aviles-Valdez in the wake of the Greater Oregon Behavioral Health, Inc. investigation of the county's alcohol and drug treatment program. Mason was the head of county human services, and Valdez and Aviles-Valdez worked as supervisors. GOBHI's in-house attorney, Henry O'Keefe, confirmed at the time that investigators sent findings to the Oregon Department of Justice, which the *East Oregonian* reported.

Attorney Shemia Fagan, representing Valdez and Aviles-Valdez, last week sent the *EO* a copy of an email "in an effort to help clear their unjustly tarnished

reputations." The Feb. 10, 2016, email from Rodney Hopkinson, director of the justice department's Medicaid Fraud Unit, states the unit "has no investigation underway of Juan Valdez or Laura Aviles-Valdez" and knows of no other agencies investigating them.

Mason, Valdez and Aviles-Valdez also are suing the county in federal court for discrimination, retaliation and more. While Hopkinson's email does not mention Mason, the lawsuit also asserts there was no criminal investigation.

The legal case continues to trudge along. Court records show the sides have until May 31, 2017, to complete discovery — the gathering of information, records and documents pertinent to a case — and they have until June 30, 2017, to file motions asking the court to end part or all of the lawsuit. The first pre-trial hearing is Oct. 6, 2017.

BRIEFLY

## Broken waterline slows traffic

PENDLETON — Contractors working on a new access road to the Blue Mountain Community College softball field severed a waterline Friday, slowing traffic as Pendleton crews repaired the leak.

Bob Patterson, Pendleton's public works director, said contractors from Idaho did not heed the markings for the underground waterline while boring holes to create the road, breaking the line around 1 p.m.

Crews isolated the valve and worked to repair the break by replacing four to five inches of pipe. Repairs to the waterline were completed Friday by 8 p.m.

## Fire damages Echo home on Friday

ECHO — A fire burned through an attic at a home in Echo on Friday. Echo Fire Chief Delbert Gehrke said no one was harmed in the fire.

The Echo Rural Fire Protection District at 10:08 a.m. received an emergency call-out for fire in the home at 300 S. Dale St. and sent two engines. Nine minutes later, Echo fire asked other agencies to respond. Umatilla Fire District 1 out of Hermiston answered the call with a command vehicle and fire engine.

Gehrke said the blaze was in attic, which was partitioned and made the attack difficult. Fire crews fought for about two hours before extinguishing the flames.

Three people were in the rental home, Gehrke said, and all escaped uninjured. He also said the home sustained heavy smoke and water damage, though the structure is intact.

## Rodeo seeks donations to finish arena

HERMISTON — Two anonymous donors have agreed to match up to \$200,000 in donations to make sure the Farm-City Pro Rodeo has a completed arena this August.

The new arena is part of the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, which will house the rodeo and the Umatilla County Fair beginning in 2017. Bids for the rodeo arena came in above budget, so the board scaled back the project by removing arena lighting and some seating.

If donors match the \$200,000 to the nonprofit Friends of the Fair and Rodeo, the \$400,000 will cover the seating and lighting.

Contact Dennis Barnett at 541-567-5215 with questions or if you are interested in making a contribution.

HEPPNER

# City manager resigns to run local nonprofit

By JADE MCDOWELL  
East Oregonian

Heppner is looking for a new city manager after Kim Cutsforth announced her resignation to go to work for the Howard and Beth Bryant Foundation.

Cutsforth said her last day will tentatively be Feb. 13 but there is some flexibility depending on how quickly the city is able to find her replacement.

The Howard and Beth Bryant Foundation, based in Heppner, was established recently to help community organizations secure funding for projects like the outdoor fitness park that will be paid

for by a mix of grants and matching funds from the foundation. The Bryants were lifelong Heppner residents; Beth died in 2009 and Howard died in August.

Cutsforth said she looks forward to the opportunity to carry out the Bryants' vision of assisting community groups' efforts to make the city a better place.

"All of those organizations are run by boards that are volunteer and all of those people work full time or have family commitments," Cutsforth said. "There is lots of money out there, but it's a struggle to get it. We're going to step up and say 'We know you're a volunteer, so

we'll help with the admin.'"

The new job will keep Cutsforth in Heppner, and allow her to continue to work toward bringing new development projects to the community in a different capacity.

"I really enjoyed working with the city," she said. "We got a lot of projects completed."

During her four and a half years as city manager, Cutsforth said one of the projects she was most proud of helping with was the new fire hall, which voters supported through a bond.

She is also proud of the three major street projects the city put together, encom-

passing miles of new road plus two miles of new sidewalks and walking paths.

"It really changed the structure of the community," she said.

Cutsforth said those and other major projects took partnerships between many different people and organizations to make it happen, but everyone always came together.

"Those were difficult projects, but the community made it fairly easy," she said.

She said the city has already started advertising for a new city manager and hopes to fill the position quickly.

PENDLETON

# PGG sells fuel division to Mid Columbia Producers

By GEORGE PLAVERN  
East Oregonian

Pendleton Grain Growers announced Friday it has sold its fuel division to Mid Columbia Producers, another neighboring farmer-owned cooperative based in Moro.

The deal, effective immediately, comes just two weeks after PGG dealt its propane assets to Morrow County Grain Growers. Terms were not disclosed for either transaction.

PGG is in the process of dissolving after the co-op experienced massive finan-

cial losses in recent years. Tim Hawkins, chairman of the PGG Board of Directors, said the co-op was looking for a local buyer to take on fuel services that would continue to serve the region.

"As a fellow local co-op, we feel Mid Columbia Producers is the right partner for our customers and members," Hawkins said in a statement.

Jeff Kaser, Mid Columbia manager, said they look forward to servicing PGG fuel accounts. PGG fuel cards will continue to be honored by PGG and Mid

Columbia Producers through March 31. "We are thrilled to expand the fuel offerings we currently provide, both to our existing members and to potential customers throughout the communities we serve," Kaser said.

Friday's sale includes all of PGG's existing fuel inventory, trucks and operating assets. Mid Columbia is expected to retain all four PGG employees in the fuel division. As of Friday, PGG members can begin signing up to use Mid Columbia fuel cards beyond March 31.

Mid Columbia Producers

formed in 1988, and operates grain elevators in Morrow, Gilliam, Wasco and Sherman counties in Oregon, and Klickitat County in Washington.

PGG's grain division, including upcountry elevators and the McNary Terminal, also sold earlier this year to United Grain Corporation. It remains unclear how much equity will be returned to members after the co-op dissolution is finished.

Rick Jacobson, PGG general manager, was not available for comment Friday.

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# Thank You

In the spirit of the season, the Pendleton Downtown Association, in cooperation with the City of Pendleton, would like to express a special **THANK YOU** to all these individuals and businesses who donated to the 2016 "Shower of Flowers" hanging flower basket project on Pendleton's Main Street.

Key Sponsor: Master Printers	
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Jill Thorne	Susan Bower
Juniper House Assisted Living & Memory Care	Umatilla County Master Gardeners Association
Larry O'Rourke	

Special consideration to Steven Hart for his dedicated watering of the flower baskets.

The flower baskets on Main Street enhance our community with their beautiful, lively and colorful display. The project is dependent on donations and would not be possible without the generous contributions of these donors.

Preparations are underway for the 2017 "Shower of Flowers" hanging flower baskets. Your donation can be made to: Pendleton Downtown Association, PO Box 1643, Pendleton, OR 97801. Please make a notation on your check "Flower Baskets." Donations are tax deductible.

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