

New reporter joins Hermiston office

East Oregonian

Reporter Jayati Ramakrishnan joined the *Hermiston Herald* and *East Oregonian* on Monday as a reporter in the Hermiston office.

She will cover education and public safety for the two publications, as well as general assignment duties.

Ramakrishnan comes to Eastern Oregon after spending two years as a reporter at the biweekly *Curry Coastal Pilot* in Brookings, the southernmost town on the Oregon Coast. She has covered education, ports, city and county government and worked as a copy editing assistant. She also enjoyed writing feature stories and profiles of the town's residents.

After two years on the coast, Ramakrishnan wanted to broaden her experience and learn about the issues in a different part of the state.

She was drawn to Umatilla County for its proximity to the Columbia River and its plethora of hiking opportunities.

A lifelong Oregonian, Ramakrishnan was born in Portland and graduated from the University of Oregon in Eugene, studying journalism and psychology. She said she is eager to explore a new part of her home state, and get used to the extreme weather.

"I like the idea of getting to be a true Oregonian," she said. "I've experienced urban and coastal Oregon, but there's much more to see in this state. I'm looking forward to the new adventure."

Ramakrishnan fills the position most recently held by Alexa Lougee, who accepted a teaching position with Umatilla School District earlier this fall. Ramakrishnan can be reached by email at jramakrishnan@hermistonherald.com or by phone at 541-564-4534.



Ramakrishnan

BRIEFLY

Volunteers serve free Christmas meal

HERMISTON — In the spirit of giving, the public is invited to a free holiday meal on Christmas Day.

The last Community Fellowship Dinner of the season is Sunday from 12:30-3:30 p.m. at the Hermiston Senior Center, 435 W. Orchard Ave., located on the Umatilla County Fairgrounds. In addition to the on-site meal, delivery service and to-go meals can be packaged for pick-up.

The menu includes ham and all the fixings. There is a limited amount of turkey for those that can't eat ham. Also, there will be cookies and pies.

Volunteer shifts are still available during the meal. While the meals are free, financial donations to help with the Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners can be given to local churches, dropped in a donation basket at the meal or mailed to CFD, P.O. Box 1551, Hermiston, OR 97838.

For meal delivery service or a ride, call 541-303-5886. On Christmas Day, call the senior center at 541-567-3582 or 541-303-5886.

Wildhorse accepts grant applications

MISSION — There's still time to apply for the next grant cycle through the Wildhorse Foundation.

Established by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the foundation board considers grants that cover the areas of public health, public safety, education, the arts, historic preservation, gambling addiction services, salmon restoration, environmental protection and cultural activities. Grants are awarded quarterly.

The upcoming deadline is Sunday, Jan. 1. For more information or to apply for funding, visit www.thewildhorsefoundation.com.

Wintry roads a headache for drivers

Multiple highways closed Tuesday morning

By GEORGE PLAVERN
East Oregonian

A potpourri of winter driving hazards wreaked havoc on Eastern Oregon highways Tuesday morning, prompting a slew of road closures across the region.

Interstate 84 was closed in both directions between Pendleton and Baker City due to blowing snow, ice and flooding. About 8 inches of snow fell Monday night in Meacham, which later turned to rain and made for slippery conditions over the Blue Mountains.

The Oregon Department of Transportation shut down I-84 once from 8 a.m. to 2:20 p.m. due to weather, then closed the highway a second time from Pendleton to La Grande due to a crash. Spokesman Peter Murphy said ODOT crews worked throughout the day to drain water off the roadway, especially with below-freezing temperatures forecasted overnight.

"We'll be plowing and sanding, trying to make sure the highways stay clear," Murphy said. "Otherwise, you have water everywhere and it re-freezes."



Photo contributed by ODOT

Crews with the Oregon Department of Transportation are working to clear an avalanche blocking Highway 204 at milepost 30, near Elgin.

Snow drifts also forced the closure of Highway 334 in Umatilla County, and an avalanche left Highway 204 closed at milepost 30, near Elgin, for several hours until ODOT could clear the blockage. No injuries were reported.

Finally, Highway 395 was closed through early

afternoon between Ukiah and Long Creek due to heavy freezing rain at Ritter. With so many elements straining ODOT resources, Murphy said help did arrive in the form of four snowplows sent over from Hermiston, which were able to assist getting roads reopened.

"Obviously with conditions like this, it puts our equipment to the test," Murphy said.

Temperatures were expected to drop below freezing Tuesday night in the Columbia Basin, and down to single-digits in the mountains. Wednesday should be colder, with highs of 35 degrees in Hermiston and 37 degrees in Pendleton, though there shouldn't be any additional precipitation until Thursday afternoon, according to the National Weather Service.

Murphy said ODOT will continue to plow and sand the roads to make sure they stay clear heading into the holiday travel season.

"We'll have everybody standing by," he said.

Murphy recommends drivers give themselves plenty of time when heading out on trips, or avoid traveling altogether if they can, until conditions improve. Families should also have water, blankets and supplies handy in case they become stuck in the middle of a closure.

For the latest information on closures and travel conditions, visit www.tripcheck.com.

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

HERMISTON

EOTEC met \$2 million fundraising goal in 2016

Still taking donations

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

If anyone is looking to squeeze in one more tax write-off before the end of 2016, the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center fundraising committee is happy to help.

Committee chair Dennis Barnett said the committee did meet its goal of raising \$2 million for the new fair and rodeo grounds outside of Hermiston, but since bids came in higher than anticipated there are still plenty of needs that could be met with more donations.

"I will take money any time," he said.

Barnett said the committee raised "a little over" \$2 million through 2016, and recently two anonymous donors announced they will match up to \$200,000 of new donations to EOTEC through the nonprofit Friends of the Fair and Rodeo. The project needs an extra \$400,000 to add lighting to the rodeo arena and restore the seats that

were cut when bids for the project came in over budget.

Barnett also said that there were a few \$25,000 grants that the committee applied for that will be awarded in the first part of 2017, so there might be some more money coming in through that.

Several of the largest donations made in 2016 came from corporations, Barnett said, but there was also an individual who donated \$100,000. Many of the year's donations were in \$25,000 increments from businesses and private citizens.

"It was really a cross section," he said.

One thing most of EOTEC's donors have in common is geography. Barnett estimated 98 percent of them were from the west end of Umatilla County. He said it was disappointing that there wasn't more support from the other end of the county for a project that will benefit 4-H and FFA kids from all over the county, not just Hermiston.

Barnett said somewhere between a third and half of the dollars donated will be financed through Banner

Bank, allowing donors to make multiple payments instead of handing over all the cash up front. Barnett said the community should feel proud of the generosity showed this year toward EOTEC.

"Any time you can raise \$2 million in five months, that's pretty amazing," he said.

For more information call Dennis Barnett at 541-567-5215.

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

Party features gift exchange

HERMISTON — A gift exchange is planned during the Hermiston Elks White Elephant Christmas Party.

Those who attend should bring a wrapped gift. Upon arrival, be sure to get a ticket for the gift exchange.

The party is tonight at 7 p.m. at the lodge, 480 E. Main St., Hermiston. Dinner will be available beforehand at 5:30 p.m.

For more information, call 541-567-6923.

Town of Echo offers holiday gift ideas

ECHO — Gifts for history buffs or those who like to promote the town of Echo are available for a 10 percent discount through Saturday.

The city of Echo has duffel bags, aprons and Echo Pictorial Cards. In addition, publications include "Echo Story Vol. 1 & 2," photocopies of Bennie Tolar's "Echo's from the Past," "The Fort Henrietta Days Cookbook" and Echo Cultural Inventory."

For more information, call 541-376-8411 or stop by 20 Bonanza St., Echo.

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