

HERMISTON

SMART volunteers help young readers

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

It only takes one book to get hooked. That's what SMART coaches are hoping to teach kids about reading at an early age.

Joshua Nokes, a volunteer in Becky Sanchez' Head Start class of three- to five-year-olds at Hermiston's Victory Square center, sits down with a student and starts reading her a book about colors. She listens as he reads, enjoying his expressive rendition of the story.

SMART, which stands for "Start Making a Reader Today," is a statewide program that organizes volunteers to come into classrooms and read one-on-one with students. The goal is to encourage kids to enjoy reading and strengthen their literacy skills at an early age. Throughout the state, students between pre-kindergarten and third grade participate in SMART.

Locally, SMART is run through the Head Start programs. There are three locations — two in Hermiston and one in Pendleton.

Julie Sanders, director of the Umatilla-Morrow Head Start program in Hermiston, said the program is essential to encouraging literacy at an early age — which is often a predictor of academic achievement in later years.

"A good foundation in literacy is essential to success everywhere else," she said.

Sanchez, who has taught with Umatilla-Morrow Head Start for nine years, said she notices the difference in her young readers from the time they start reading with volunteers to the end of the year.

"A lot of people worry that they don't read well," Sanchez said of people hesitant to volunteer. She insisted it's more important to demonstrate a love of reading.

"They just need to see that literacy is very important in their life," she said.

Currently, Sanchez has about four



Staff photo by Jayati Ramakrishnan

SMART volunteer Joshua Nokes reads with a Head Start student at Hermiston's Victory Square on Thursday.

volunteers that come to the class weekly and spend about 15 minutes reading one-on-one with each student. Twice a month, children also get to choose a free book to take home with them.

"When we give the kids books, we put their name on a sticker on the book, and tell them, 'Nobody can read it without asking you because it's your book,'" said Jorge Colon, a coordinator for the SMART program at Victory Square. "A lot of kids don't have books, so it's special to them."

Colon said he'd love to see the program extend to elementary schools in Hermiston.

"From a selfish parent standpoint, my children have so many more books now," he said with a laugh.

The program has also been beneficial for volunteers.

"We had a volunteer last year who was dyslexic," Colon said. "I noticed

his confidence and strength as a reader improved."

The statewide SMART program recently received the Walt Morey Young Readers Literacy Legacy, an award presented to a person or group that has contributed to literacy efforts for Oregon kids.

The program is in need of volunteers, Sanchez said, and would benefit from both English and Spanish-speakers.

"It's really easy to get cleared, but it's difficult to get people to be here," Colon said, looking around at the four regular volunteers reading with students. "This is our really dedicated group."

Colon said anyone can sign up to volunteer for the SMART program at getSMARToregon.org.

Contact Jayati Ramakrishnan at 541-564-4534 or jramakrishnan@eastoregonian.com

Flu season on the decline

One child died of flu-related illness in Umatilla County

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

Flu hit Oregon hard and fast this year, but the virus appears to have peaked.

The numbers seem to be down," said Tracy Wart, infection control prevention nurse at St. Anthony Hospital. "It started to decrease a little bit last week at St. Anthony."

One Umatilla County child died at the end of December after respiratory failure and a flu-like infection, said Umatilla County Public Health director Jim Setzer. He said the virus is now waning in the area, but still could do additional damage.

"We're on the downside, but it's still happening," Setzer said.

He said the county still has plenty of vaccine left for those who wish to lower their risk.

Pam Schulz, infection control prevention nurse at Good Shepherd Medical Center, said she hasn't noticed a huge change yet.

"We seem to be kind of hanging in there," Schulz said. "We're maybe down a nubbin."

Flu Bites, Oregon's public health flu tracker,

shows a gentle downturn statewide. For the week ending Jan. 28, emergency department visits for influenza-related illness is 3.1 percent, down from 4.1 two weeks earlier. The number of outbreaks of three or more people dropped from 24 to 15 in the past two weeks.

So far this season, 8,511 people have tested positive in Oregon for influenza. The vast majority of the specimens (88.6 percent) were determined to be influenza A, though some influenza B was found as well. About 1,200 individuals were hospitalized in the Portland metro area (Flu Bites tracks hospitalizations only in Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties). In contrast, 443 people were hospitalized with flu the previous year.

Nationwide, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports flu activity in every state. The flu seems to have peaked earlier in Oregon than for many other states. Hospitalizations and the percentage of clinic visits for flu-like illness continue to rise nationally. Flu has kill 15 children so far this season.

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.

Council to consider assisting in vet memorial projects

PENDLETON — At a meeting Tuesday, the Pendleton City Council will discuss dueling visions for a veterans memorial.

In November, Korean War vet Ken Garrett wrote to the city council to propose dedicating a bridge at Southeast Court Place to veterans and victims of war.

City manager Robb Corbett ran the idea past Veterans of Foreign Wars "Let 'er Buck" Post 922, which came up with a different tribute.

VFW Post 922 commander Gary Ward wrote in a response to Corbett that Garrett's idea was presented to members and drew no support.

Instead, the VFW would like to rename the section of Court Place that runs in front of the VFW hall to Veterans Way and erect a statue honoring veterans at the fountain near the intersection of Highway 11 and Southeast Court Avenue.

In a report to the city council, Corbett recommended that the council consider directing the arts committee to work with the VFW to create the memorial.

Corbett said the street renaming and Garrett's idea will remain on the table.

The council has a packed agenda with several noteworthy items, including discussion on purchasing

a \$370,609 combo truck, amending uses in the central mixed use zone and declaring the 19 lots the city owns at Sunridge Estates surplus, a procedural move that allows the city sell them.

PSD considers calendar changes to make up days

The Pendleton School Board will consider permanent changes to the 2016-2017 school calendar in the wake of missing a week's worth of instructional hours due to snow days.

Pendleton School District superintendent Andy Kovach has recommended the school board extend the school year by five days for grades K-11 and three days for seniors, but the district also solicited input from the public through an online survey, which included other options like applying for a waiver from the Oregon Department of Education and eliminating teachers' professional development time through the end of the school year.

The school board will meet at the Pendleton Early Learning Center, 455 S.W. 13th St., on Tuesday at 3:30 p.m.

CASA opens new branch

The Court-Appointed Special Advocates programs from Gilliam and Wheeler counties have combined to form the

Frontier CASA program, serving children from both counties, and the organization is searching for a permanent executive director.

CASA pairs children in foster care with volunteers who can advocate for those kids.

Interim director Tracey Blood said the two organizations, which previously operated under each county's juvenile department, decided to combine and operate as a non-profit. Doing so will allow them to receive grants and donations for the program.

CASA has 22 programs around Oregon, and almost 1,000 throughout the United States. Prospective volunteers are required to undergo background checks, as well as 40 hours of training prior to working with children.

There are currently 15 children in Gilliam and Wheeler counties in foster care that need a court-appointed special advocate.

BRIEFLY

To volunteer, contact Blood at 541-575-5574.

IMESD hosts student tech expo

PENDLETON — The InterMountain Education Service District is offering students across Eastern Oregon another chance to do some hands-on learning about technology.

The IMESD will host the Technology Expo at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande March 9 for students in eighth through 12th grade who attend one of the IMESD's 18 member districts.

According to a press release, activities will include 3-D animation, 3-D printing, taking apart and diagnosing computer component issues, website development, computer programming and app development.

The expo will also offer meetings with career advisors and representatives from regional companies with jobs in technology.



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Transportation from each district to the EOU campus will be provided by the IMESD and the expo will run from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Students can register for the expo at <http://step.imesd.org>.

BMCC board appoints Van Kirk

PENDLETON — Heidi Van Kirk is the newest member of the Blue Mountain Community College Board of Education.

At its monthly meeting on Wednesday in Hermiston, the board appointed Van Kirk to take over the Zone 3 position left vacant when Ed

Taber resigned in December. The Pendleton attorney will serve in the position through June 30 when she would need to file for regular/permanent term in the May 2017 election.

Van Kirk practices in Umatilla and Morrow counties and has been a small business owner for the past 15 years. She also served as the director of the Guardian Care Center in Pendleton, which assists the community and surrounding areas in responding to child abuse.

Zone 3 covers precincts South/East Pendleton, Pilot Rock, Ukiah and Echo in Umatilla County.

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Enjoy Coffee with the City



This Monday and every first Monday you can enjoy a free cup of hot coffee and a one-on-one discussion with Pendleton's city manager Robb and a few of his key staff in a conversational setting.

Drop in any time between 8 and 10 am. Feb. 6

AT HAMLEY CAFE
30 SE COURT

Coffee with the City