

UMATILLA

City council to get fresh perspective

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Umatilla's city council will be getting a younger perspective through a new Youth Advisory Council.

The council, which functions as an eight-student club at Umatilla High School, meets each Tuesday to discuss suggestions for improving the city to pass on to the city council and city staff. They also plan to attend city council meetings.

Cameron Sipe, a high school senior who serves as the council's president, said they hope the council will consider asking for their perspective when weighing controversial decisions. She said in their first couple of meetings they have been talking about what type of community they will want to move to in 10 years when they are starting careers and families.

"What can we do to make Umatilla that place?" she said.

Maria Moreno, a junior, said one thing the advisory council wants to focus on first

Staff photo by Jade McDowell
Cameron Sipe, Maria Moreno and Anthony Ibarra are three of the members of the Youth Advisory Council in Umatilla.

is park improvements. They've narrowed in on the small park across from city hall, which doesn't have anything but grass and benches.

"There's a blank wall behind it that's a really gross color, and we're really hoping to get a mural on there," she said.

The students checked and found out the school district owns the building with the

blank wall, so they think there is a good chance they will be able to get permission to sponsor a mural.

They have also talked about finding a way to have more activities for youth in town, and about what they can do to help revitalize downtown to attract more businesses.

To help in their discussions, they have signed up to shadow

various department heads at the city.

"I think to really make a change in our town, we have to understand it," Sipe said.

Moreno added that shadowing city staff could provide a "reality check" for what is actually possible to accomplish.

Anthony Ibarra, a sophomore, said he was excited to help offer "a fresh eye" to the city.

"It's a pretty neat chance that we have," he said.

The Youth Advisory Council was the brainchild of retired city manager Bob Ward, who attends two of the council's meetings a month to help mentor the students.

He introduced the youth to the city council earlier in the month and told them it was something he had wanted to put together for a long time to help provide another perspective and youthful energy to the city.

"They are curious, enthusiastic and engaged," he said.

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

Cantu to take plea in murder case

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Murder defendant George Rodriguez Cantu opted to take a plea deal less than two weeks before his trial was scheduled to begin in Pendleton.

Cantu, 24, of Walla Walla, appeared via video from jail for a hearing Thursday at the Umatilla County Courthouse. His attorney, Robert Klahn of Pendleton, told the court a settlement had been reached.

Neither Klahn nor Umatilla County District Attorney Dan Primus revealed the terms of the deal.

Circuit Judge Christopher Brauer set the plea hearing for 9:30 a.m. Friday. He also asked Primus to call the jail so Klahn could have after-hours access to Cantu.

Cantu has pleaded not guilty to charges of murder, unlawful use of a weapon against another, unlawful discharge of a weapon and unlawful possession of a firearm. Murder carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 25 years.

The charges stem from the July 2015 drive-by shooting death of Guadalupe Jose Diaz in Milton-Freewater. Cantu has been in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, since March 2, 2016.

Court documents show prosecutors were ready to bring gang members and shooting eyewitnesses to testify at the two-week jury trial.

Planning for life after high school

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

Special education students from Hermiston, Boardman, Irrigon and Umatilla high schools gathered at the Hermiston Conference Center Thursday to learn about life beyond high school.

The students heard from Good Shepherd Hospital's education, environmental and food services departments, as well as Blue Mountain Community College about how to find jobs, advocate for themselves and make connections with people in the community.

Jackie Whitesell, a learning specialist for the Hermiston School District, said this is the first year the four schools have come together to pool their resources for special education students.

"It's to help students learn about options available to them," Whitesell said. "Since we're a small area, we've banded together — four different high schools — to offer different educational outings."

In addition to Thursday's career day, students this year have visited the SAGE Center in Boardman to learn about agriculture and food preservation jobs and McNary Dam in Umatilla to learn about engineering-related jobs.

"The goal is to have students go out of high school with a job in mind, and be able to get that job," Whitesell said.

The students are all part of the special education programs at their schools. The program can include students with developmental, intellectual and special learning disabilities, as well as health and motor impairments, Whitesell said.

During Thursday's four-hour session, students rotated between five different discussion groups, each focusing on a different resource in the area: representatives from Good Shepherd Hospital's Environment, Education, Food Services and Human Resources Departments, and Blue Mountain Community College. At each session, students discussed with speakers different job opportunities within those areas, what they entail, and how to make a good impression when interviewing, as well as things like stress management and what to expect in a typical day at work.

"We're going to talk about some weird jobs," Bobbie Sue Arias of BMCC told a group of students. "How many of you knew that 'bike messenger' was a job?"

Arias asked students what some other similar jobs might be, eliciting responses from students such as "mailman" and "UPS driver."

Nazario Rivera and Drew Brannon from Good Shepherd Hospital's Education Department talked to the students about CPR instruction and Certified Nursing Assistants.

"We discuss what kinds of skills they might need, training," Rivera said. "Any careers that might be within our realm."

Timur Gaston, a special education teacher at Irrigon Junior/Senior High School, said the events this year have been beneficial for her students.

"They're realizing there are other opportunities," she said. "In our small community, the kids see jobs like teachers, postal workers, gas station attendants farm workers — but they don't always know what else is out there. That's why these events are important."

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UMATILLA

Staff photo by Jade McDowell
Third graders Alexia Martinez, left, and Ricky Brown, dressed up as 100-year-olds for the 100th day of school at McNary Heights Elementary School.

Students imagine life at 100 years old

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Some students at McNary Heights Elementary School looked like they belonged more in a nursing home than a school on Thursday.

The school encouraged students to dress up like they were 100 years old to celebrate finally reaching the 100th day of school after multiple snow days pushed the milestone out.

"I just came up with the idea for something that would not take up too much time, but add a little spirit to the day," vice principal Nicole Coyle said.

Elementary school students donned paper beards, ties, cardigans and shawls to celebrate.

Third grader Ricky Brown borrowed a wooden cane with a turtle carved into the top from his "oma and opa" (that's German for grandma and grandpa, he says)

to complete his outfit. He said being 100 years old would be hard because "you can't get out of the house much, and do bowling and stuff kids can do."

Fourth grader Kaylonni Schaefer wasn't a big fan of the idea of getting old either. She said she would probably have to wear glasses, and kids might make fun of her for being old.

She said she picked out her own outfit.

"I picked out this dress and these tights and then I picked this sweater because I thought of a crazy old cat lady," she said, showing off her black button-up cardigan.

The boys in her class, who had made paper beards and "life alert" badges for themselves, said they would hate not being able to play sports or run if they were actually 100, but they had fun dressing up.

The school will be celebrating more dress-up days next week, in honor of Read Across America.

BRIEFLY

Late night with J.D. Kindle

PENDLETON — Country & western, freak folk and late night lounge music is featured this weekend at Virgil's at Cimmiyotti's.

James Dean Kindle will perform a solo event Saturday beginning at 9 p.m. The restaurant is located at 137 S. Main St., Pendleton. There is no cover charge.

PSD hires consultant for superintendent search

PENDLETON — The Pendleton School District announced Thursday that the school board has hired a consultant to assist its superintendent search.

The district hired Greg McKenzie, an executive recruiter with Windows to Leadership LLC who was hired to help with the district's 2016 search.

That search led to the hiring of superintendent Andy Kovach, who recently announced his resignation, effective July 1.

After bringing in the final candidates for a meet-and-greet in Pendleton, the board plans to announce the hire of a new superintendent in early May.

Athena schools awarded \$5K grant

Due to its efforts at self-improvement, the Athena-Weston School District received a \$5,000 grant for local student scholarships from the Oregon School Boards Association.

According to a Thursday press release, the district qualified for the grant by completing a five-step process that included a board project, superintendent and board self-evaluations, participation in the "Promise of Oregon" campaign and individual board development.

"As a board, we were very excited for an opportunity to come together with our administrative team and have an honest and open dialogue about how we can craft our strategic vision and priorities to do what's best for kids," Athena-Weston School Board chair Scott Wilson said in a statement. "The OSBA Scholarship is just icing on the cake and will go towards helping some of our graduating seniors in their next steps in education."

SAIF presents free, half-day agricultural safety seminars

HERMISTON — SAIF Corporation, Oregon's nonprofit workers' compensation insurance company, has rescheduled a pair of free agricultural safety seminars in Hermiston.

The half-day seminars, which were canceled in January due to snow and ice, will be Monday, March 6 (in English) and Tuesday, March 7 (in Spanish) at the Hermiston Conference Center. Though the series is designed primarily for agricultural workers, anyone is welcome to attend.

Topics will include welding, pesticide and farm shop safety, as well as tips on workplace training. The seminars will run from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. both days and lunch is provided.

Seating is limited, so early registration is recommended by calling 1-800-285-8525 or visiting www.saif.com/agseminar. More information is also available on the SAIF website.

HERMISTON

Free tax help at library keeps volunteers busy

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

People lined up in the cold outside Hermiston Library an hour and a half before the building opened Thursday morning, waiting to get help on something that daunts many Americans every year: taxes.

The AARP Tax Aide program assists people from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., every Tuesday and Thursday until April 10, and anyone can use the free service.

"It runs about 30 people per day," said volunteer Everett Crouch.

Around 11:30 a.m., six

of the seven tax preparers were busy with clients, and about 20 more were waiting outside.

Don and Gloria Lane had been waiting for help with their taxes since 7:30 a.m. They said they have used the service every year for the past 20 or so.

"It's just the most convenient way," Gloria said.

The Lanes said they have found the service very useful, and their only complaint is that although it is funded by payments from AARP members, anyone can use the service for free, regardless of age. Gloria said she'd like to see a priority system of some

kind for AARP members, comprised of people 55 and older.

Fred Allen, who has worked as a tax preparer for the last three years, said most of the training takes place online, at the IRS website.

"We study on our own, starting in October," he said. Then, the preparers get together for a couple of weeks of training and review.

Each return is completed by one preparer, and then reviewed by another person.

"Every return gets a quality review — two sets of eyes to make sure we didn't miss anything," he said.

Allen said he does not

have a background in finance or accounting, and received all the necessary training when he started volunteering.

"I was in the Army," he said. "I joined mostly because I was bored and had too much time on my hands — plus my tax returns were a little complicated, and I wanted to learn how to do my own."

The service is for personal taxes and does not extend to business taxes. To receive help with your taxes, people need to bring photo identification, the Social Security cards of all the people for whom they are filing and all necessary documents.

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Chrissy Woollard has joined John Cimmiyotti as a new Financial Advisor for Raymond James Financial Services in the Pendleton office. Chrissy has been with Raymond James for 9 years and currently she holds a series 7 & 66 and Life, Health, Variable insurance licenses. Chrissy graduated from the University of Wyoming with a BS in Science and a minor in Business. Chrissy is a native of Pendleton and a Pendleton High School graduate. Chrissy enjoys helping individuals, families and businesses to attain their financial goals. **Chrissy can be contacted by calling the local office at 541-276-9184.**

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