

HERMISTON

Cinco de Mayo grows, moves to Butte Park

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Hermiston's Cinco de Mayo celebration will be bigger than ever this year after the committee that runs the event decided to add a second day.

"Our vision is for it to be the largest Cinco de Mayo celebration in Eastern Oregon," committee chair Clara Beas Fitzgerald said.

This is Beas Fitzgerald's first year being in charge of the event, which will run May 6-7 in Butte Park. The celebration will include a parade, a speech by Portland's consul general of Mexico, a carnival, food, entertainment, competitions, a youth dance, an adult dance and fireworks.

Planning for the celebration has hit a few snags as it has gone along, including a recent city council decision — which Beas Fitzgerald, who is on the council, called "disappointing" — to not allow a beer garden in the park during the event. She said the revenue from the beer garden would have helped cover the cost of the bands and provided seed money for next year's event. Instead, they will have to step up their search for sponsorships.

The event has featured a beer garden in the past when it took place on Second Street outside city hall, but there is a city ordinance against alcohol in city parks.

"We've outgrown Second (Street) and with breaking ground on the senior center, it just isn't feasible," she said. Construction on the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center grounds also ruled that location out.



Members of mariachi band Los Temerarios sing and play down Second Street during the 2016 Cinco de Mayo parade through downtown Hermiston.

EO file photo

The upside of moving to Butte Park is that there is room for additional carnival rides and vendors, plus a place to set up a fireworks show.

Beas Fitzgerald said Saturday's parade and entertainment will feature all sorts of traditional entertainers, including mariachi bands, horseback groups and dancers. The parade will begin at 1 p.m. at the parking lot for the Oxbow trail and travel east on Elm Avenue. Beas Fitzgerald said they are encouraging community members to show

up with decorated children's bikes and costumed pets and join in the parade.

Later that night, a youth dance with a DJ will include a competition to win a car, followed by a fireworks show. Sunday night will feature a "big-name band" that Beas Fitzgerald said she can't announce yet.

"We want residents of the community to have a reason to come both days," she said.

In the days leading up to the event, organizers are holding a competition for Cinco de Mayo

queen. Five young women have posted videos about themselves to the Hermiston Cinco de Mayo Facebook page, and the three that get the most likes by 8 p.m. on April 15 will be this year's Cinco de Mayo queen and two princesses.

Beas Fitzgerald said in years past a committee has chosen contestants via essays and interviews, but this year to simplify things "we're just going to let the public take over."

The young women will participate in the Cinco de Mayo celebration, the annual Martin Luther King

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— Clara Beas Fitzgerald, committee chair

Jr. Peace Walk in January and serve as volunteers at future city events. Beas Fitzgerald said they will likely make appearances at events like the Umatilla County Fair too.

"I want them to have experience meeting with other young ladies like the Umatilla County Fair Court, and from the Pendleton Round-Up," she said.

After previous organizer Eddie de la Cruz moved, Beas Fitzgerald said it has been intimidating stepping up as chair of the Cinco de Mayo committee, which last year gained 501(c)3 nonprofit status. But she said fellow organizers Mark Gomolski, Alex Hobbs, Isela Osario and others have provided invaluable time and effort to pull it off.

"I'm getting really nervous," she said. "It's the first time for me leading this. But I know everything falls into place as long as there's people, food and music."

She said the committee hopes to create something that helps foster pride in heritage for young Latinos, but is also a fun, family-friendly event for people of all cultures.

"We want them to feel included, that there's no borders," she said.

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HERMISTON

Barns begin to rise at EOTEC

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Construction on barns at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center has gone vertical.

Now that the snow is gone and the groundwork laid, contractors are working to raise the three large barns, adding their silhouettes to those of the event center and rodeo arena on the EOTEC grounds.

"It's starting to look like a fairgrounds out there," board member Larry Givens remarked during the EOTEC board's Friday morning meeting.

John Eckhardt of Knerr Construction said work on the barns is going well so far. He expects paving for the commons area where vendors will set up shop to be completed next week. They are also working on the donor wall, restrooms and landscaping.

Eckhardt said securing enough water to irrigate that landscaping, in addition to all of the other water that will be needed at EOTEC for fair week, continues to be a challenge. The third well that was dug did not pan out, and well number four is



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Work has begun on the barns at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center.

producing only 50 gallons per minute. He said there were other options available besides wells, however, that EOTEC chair and Hermiston city manager Byron Smith continues to work on.

Board member Dan Dorran said he and Umatilla County Fair board chair Gay Newman looked at the pens and panels being ordered for the barns and they are very pleased with the design.

"I've seen hog panels across the U.S. ... and these

are pretty slick," Dorran said.

On the rodeo arena side, Carl Hendon of Hendon Construction said the concrete arena itself is "substantially complete" and they are working to add things like ADA ramps and the gold buckle area. Fabrica-

tion of the bleachers is about 90 percent complete, he said.

"We're on, if not ahead, of the schedule we're shooting for," he said.

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Expansion of self-serve gas pumping headed to Senate

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

stations. The other is New Jersey.

SALEM — A bill to expand the hours of self-serve gas stations in rural counties in Eastern Oregon is headed to the Senate, after the House of Representatives unanimously passed it Thursday, March 30.

The bill allows 24-hour self service at stations in certain counties. Those stations would still be required to have attendants between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m., however.

The legislation by Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, expands on a law passed in 2015 that allowed self-service between the hours of 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. in 18 counties with a population of less than 40,000. The idea was to protect travelers from being stranded in remote places.

Oregon is one of only two states that prohibit customers from pumping their own gas at fueling

In Eastern Oregon, some locally owned gas stations have been at risk of closure due to the expense of hiring fueling attendants to pump customers' gas, Bentz said.

"We are trying to preserve these stations out in the middle of nowhere so that we have fuel available," Bentz said earlier this month.

The proposed change affects 15 counties in Eastern Oregon: Malheur, Union, Wasco, Hood River, Jefferson, Crook, Baker, Morrow, Lake, Grant, Harney, Wallowa, Gilliam, Sherman and Wheeler.

The original proposal included Clatsop, Curry and Tillamook counties. However, opposition to expanding self-service hours prompted proponents to carve out those coastal counties. Opponents feared the change would threaten the jobs of those who pump fuel for a living.

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Drop in any time between 8 and 10 am. Apr. 3

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