

**HERMISTON**

# City spreads the love with cleanup day

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
East Oregonian

There was less garbage and more love in Hermiston Saturday after volunteers came out in force to support the biggest I Love My City event yet.

Community members washed cars, picked up litter, collected old tires and helped wherever else they were needed Saturday to spruce up the city and show their neighbors they cared.

"I volunteered and said 'put me anywhere,'" said Nikki Griffin.

Saturday morning she was manning the plastics trailer at the city's free recycling event, helping unload broken slides and other large items people were trying to get rid of.

Over at miscellaneous trailer, which held an old Jacuzzi and several pieces of broken furniture, high school students Justin Shasteen and Anani Medina said they were having fun tossing items up into the trailer.

"It makes you feel good you're helping someone who would normally do this by themselves," Shasteen said.

The I Love My City campaign began last fall, when members of Hermiston Assembly of God felt they needed to do more to help heal the community from tragedies that had recently struck. The congregations of New Hope Community Church and the Templo de Fe Esparanza Y Amor joined in for Saturday's event, which also drew other members of the community who simply wanted to serve.

The churches hope to do some sort of I Love My City event in Hermiston every 90 days. The goal of each event is, as one organizer told volunteers at the start of the morning, to "bless your community" and show people they are loved.

Alberta Wilkerson of New Hope Community



Volunteers for the I Love My City event unload scrap metal in the UEC parking lot as part of the city's free recycling event. More photos online at eastoregonian.com.



Volunteers for the I Love My City event clean up downtown Hermiston on Saturday.

Church said she volunteered because she has lived in Hermiston for 42 years and wants to give back.

"I just like our city and want to take care of it," she said.

Wilkerson was bent over in the blowing dust along the railroad tracks that run through town on Saturday, pulling pieces of garbage out of the dirt and adding them

to her plastic bag. She said there was broken glass and wire everywhere along the tracks.

"I even found an old license plate," she said.

Farther downtown, just off of Main Street, Gail Sargent was one of the swarm of volunteers pulling weeds from cracks in the sidewalks. Others nearby were sweeping bark dust back into

planters and collecting piles of dead leaves from along the curbs.

Sargent said she believed everyone living in a community has a responsibility to get out and help improve it.

"What we're hoping is that we'll get everyone involved, to get out and do something to make their city great," she said.

Many parents brought their children along to the event, particularly at the free car washes is several locations around town. At Les Schwab Tires, Jennifer Sword was scrubbing dirt off vehicles with her children Emmylou, 4, and Tucker, 9.

"I hope they learn to help others, and to show that Jesus loves everyone," she said.

After Saturday's event, volunteers attended a joint worship service at 10 a.m. Sunday at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center.

Contact Jade McDowell at [jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com](mailto:jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com) or 541-564-4536.

**HERMISTON**

# Council postpones discussion about Conference Center

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**  
East Oregonian

Hermiston residents will have to wait to find out the city's plans for the Hermiston Conference Center, as the decision for what to do with the building in 2018 was postponed at Monday night's city council meeting.

Although the meeting originally called for a discussion about whether to allow the Parks and Recreation Department to operate the conference center, no debate was had because three council members and Mayor David Drotzmann were absent.

Nevertheless some citizens spoke about the future of the building.

Liz Marvin, a counselor at Hermiston High School, said she hopes people will realize the city has use for the conference center and the newly-built Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center.

"I hope it's not construed as an 'either/or,'" Marvin said. "I think we have use for both. I don't want it to be a divided camp."

The Hermiston Conference Center has been located downtown at 415 S. Hwy. 395 since 1994, when community members began looking for a building to hold events, meetings and other activities. The Hermiston Chamber of Commerce helped raise more than \$600,000 in donations to remodel the building, which they currently operate. Last month, chamber staff were notified that the city did not plan to renew their contract for running the conference center in 2018.

Last week, assistant city manager Mark Morgan said plans to have the city's parks and recreation department take over operations for the center would be discussed at a future council meeting. The plan, he said, was to continue using the building as a conference center, but have it run by city staff instead of through a contract with the chamber of commerce.

Morgan also said the city was renovating the basement of the Carnegie Library at 215 East Gladys Avenue, and that starting Jan. 1, 2018, that space would be available to the chamber.

Earlier this month, the chamber released a prepared statement reminding people that there would still be a Greater Hermiston Chamber of Commerce, and it is separate from city government and the conference center.

"Many folks associate the chamber and conference center as one and the same, and we have enjoyed working with all the groups who have utilized the conference center over the years," the statement said. "Our chamber members will continue to be our main focus. In the meantime the chamber will continue to manage the conference center with assistance from the city."

Other news:  
• At Monday's meeting, the council discussed the success of the I Love My City and recycling events this weekend, and reminded people that there will be a Hazardous Waste Materials recycling event April 22 at EOTEC.

• The city also approved a request from Morgan to apply for grant funding for the Federal Aviation Administration to complete some projects in Hermiston Airport's long-range development plan. Projects include resurfacing the runway, rehabilitating the taxiway and adding water and sewer abilities to serve EOTEC, which borders the airport. The grant application will cost \$3,300, Morgan said.

• Council President Doug Primmer encouraged people to attend the memorial of Staff Sgt. Austin Bieren, a Umatilla resident who died March 28 in Syria. The service will be Saturday, April 15 at Umatilla High School at 1 p.m.

Contact Jayati Ramakrishnan at 541-564-4534 or [jramakrishnan@eastoregonian.com](mailto:jramakrishnan@eastoregonian.com)

**PENDLETON**

# School board chair claims dancing title

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
East Oregonian

Facing competition with faster-paced routines, Debbie McBee waltzed away with a clean sweep at the Dancing With Your Pendleton Stars.

At the charity event at the Vert Auditorium Saturday, McBee, the chair of the Pendleton School Board, was recognized for raising the most money, receiving the highest score from the panel of judges and garnering the most votes from the audience.

In its third year, Dancing with your Pendleton Stars aims to recreate the experience of the televised celebrity dance competition "Dancing With the Stars" at a local level.

Like its Hollywood counterpart, Dancing With Your Pendleton Stars pairs local community members with professional dancers, in this case, members of the Utah Ballroom Dance Company.

Each competitor raises money for the local charity of their choice in the weeks leading up to the event and all ticket proceeds go to the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon.

McBee danced for the nonprofit she founded, the Children's Museum of Eastern Oregon, performing a waltz to "Moon River" from the 1961 film "Breakfast at Tiffany's."

Danny Bane, the founder of Lost & Found Youth Outreach, danced for United Way of Umatilla County, swaying his hips during a swing performance set to Elvis Presley's "Jailhouse Rock."

Bedecked in a fedora and suit, Scott Fairley, a Pendleton city councilor and Eastern Oregon coordinator for the governor's office of regional solutions, played the role of Inspector Clouseau in a foxtrot performance set to the "Pink Panther" theme. His



Debbie McBee, center left in the blue dress, is presented with the grand prize for winning Dancing With Your Pendleton Stars at the Vert Auditorium Saturday. In her hands is an earlier prize she won for raising the most money for charity.

performance raised money for Pioneer Relief Nursery. Donning an even more

elaborate costume, Pendleton fire chief Mike Ciraulo twirled his way through his

Viennese waltz performance as Captain Jack Sparrow in the name of Pendleton Pregnancy Care Services, with a "Pirates of the Caribbean" theme.

For the benefit of Young Life of Eastern Oregon, Donna Biggerstaff, an executive assistant for the city of Pendleton, underwent multiple lifts during a mambo set to "I've Had the Time of My Life."

Rounding out the field was Pendleton High School culinary arts teacher Kristin Swaggart, who tangoed to the James Bond theme for the Pendleton Warming Station.

Contact Antonio Sierra at [asierra@eastoregonian.com](mailto:asierra@eastoregonian.com) or 541-966-0836.

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