



# EAST OREGONIAN

FRIDAY, APRIL 28, 2017

141st Year, No. 139

WINNER OF THE 2016 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

One dollar

## Your Weekend



- Saturday, Walla Walla Kennel Club Dog Show
- Doolittle Raider Gala at Pendleton airport
- LiveWire radio records live at Hamley's saloon

For times and places see Coming Events, 6A

### Weekend Weather

Fri	Sat	Sun
58/36	64/49	62/39

### Watch a game



Pendleton vs. Hermiston baseball and softball doubleheader Friday, 3 p.m., Hermiston

## PENDLETON

# School district to cut 10 positions

### Layoffs could be spared if state increases funding

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

After months of internal planning and deliberations, there was little to say about the Pendleton School District's first significant

round of layoffs in six years. In a meeting that lasted about 20 minutes Thursday, the Pendleton School Board unanimously authorized the layoff of 10 employees, including teachers, administrators and classified

positions. Human resources director Brad Bixler broke down the layoffs by position — one district director, one district coordinator, one elementary assistant principal, one secondary math teacher,

**More inside**  
Superintendent candidates to meet public next week. 3A

one business teacher, one secretary, three assistants/paraprofessionals and one facilities assistant.

Bixler said these layoffs would pair with the 7.5 positions that would go unfilled after retirements and resignations.

"Much of this process was built on the fabric of keeping our classrooms in the best shape as possible," he said.

See CUTS/12A



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Vehicles rush through the intersection of Highway 395 and Elm Avenue in Hermiston. Recently, a cyclist died at this intersection after colliding with a semi truck.

## Gov. Brown moves to step up state's debt collection

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — In an effort to address the "overhead costs" of state government, Gov. Kate Brown announced plans Thursday to direct state agencies to step up their debt collection efforts.

As of June 30, 2016, the state was owed about \$3.3 billion for things such as unpaid fees, fines, and taxes, according to a December analysis by the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Office.

Brown, a former secretary of state who oversaw audits of the state's revenue department, says about \$600 million to \$800 million is owed to the state's general fund. About 95 percent of that amount, she said Thursday, is related to unpaid taxes.

Through the executive order, Brown plans to direct state agencies to determine if a contractor has debt with the state before issuing or See DEBT/12A

# Where there's traffic ...

## Problem areas in West Umatilla County lead to higher crash rates

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN  
East Oregonian

It's easy to blame traffic accidents on poor driving and electronic distractions, but some spots in Umatilla County have proven dangerous time and time again — and not just because of poor drivers.

Several agencies keep track of the most problematic spots for traffic, including the Oregon Department of Transportation.

"Our system, the Safety Priority Index System (SPIS) identifies hotspots for crashes or incidents, and prioritizes them," said ODOT's Tom Strandberg. "It takes into account

average daily traffic volume, what kinds of crashes, the severity."

Compiling data over a period of three years, Strandberg said, the system identifies the areas that are the highest priority for road improvement projects.

A few of the hotspots in west Umatilla County, he said, are the Highway 395 intersections with Punkin Center Road, Theater Lane and Elm, and the Highway 207 intersections with Highland Avenue and Punkin Center.

The identification of those problem spots has led to work at some of those areas in recent years. At Punkin Center Road in 2014, a

flashing yellow light was installed and some sidewalk work was done, likely prompted by SPIS data.

In 2015 at Elm and Highway 395, the turning radii were improved, and temporary traffic separators were installed, to prevent cross-traffic turning movements into business entrances. Those turns had caused accidents in the past. In 2016, ODOT also resurfaced Highway 395 between Southwest 6th Street and Highway 730, including more than 80 ADA ramp upgrades and pedestrian crossing upgrades.

There are also plans to install traffic signals at Highway 207 and Elm Avenue, and at 207 and Orchard

Avenue later this summer.

Hermiston police chief Jason Edmiston has dealt with the dangerous intersections in town at both a professional and personal level.

"Obviously, Highway 395 is where we get our largest number of complaints," he said. Often, he said, people report problems with semi trucks on that road, either with speeding or being in the wrong lane.

Many semi trucks, he said, will drive in the left lane even though there's a state law prohibiting them from doing so.

See INTERSECTION/12A

## HERMISTON

# Cans, bottles flow at drop center after deposit doubles statewide

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN  
East Oregonian

On April 1, Oregonians got a new incentive to recycle cans and bottles when the state's bottle deposit increased from a nickel to a dime.

People at the Hermiston Bottle Drop are taking advantage of it, and the state has seen double the returns since the increase.

"I was going to come in yesterday, but there was a line," said John Sobotta, who brought a cart full of plastic and glass bottles. "I had to come back."

The bottle drop, at 740 W. Hermiston Ave., was consistently busy Thursday afternoon, with most of the self-serve machines occupied.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Patrons use the recycling kiosks at the Bottle Drop recycling center on Tuesday in Hermiston.

Before the deposit was increased, the Oregon Liquor Control Commission evaluated redemption data for the entire state for the past two years to determine whether the number of containers returned for refund was less

than 80 percent of the total number sold in the state. If it was less than 80 percent, the state would have to increase the redemption rate per bottle from five to 10 cents.

See DEPOSIT/12A

## PENDLETON

# Large-scale pot grow gets the green light

By PHIL WRIGHT  
East Oregonian

GhostTown Organix will become Pendleton's first recreational marijuana grow operation.

The Pendleton Planning Commission voted Thursday evening 6-1 in favor of the conditional use permit to allow the facility at 2515 N.E. Riverside Place, home years ago to the Prairie Market grocery store.

Commissioners posed several questions en route to the approval, primarily about waste and on-site security quarters. GhostTown Organix owner Sheri Ramirez of Boise was on hand to answer.

"We basically are just a grow facility," she said, that could sell to

retailers and wholesalers and would not handle processing. While the building is 17,647 square feet, Ramirez said GhostTown plans to use 5,000 square feet for its hydroponic operation.

"Eventually, we'd like to grow into a larger grow facility," she told the commission.

The business would employ three people, including security, who would live on site, she said, but no one younger than 21 can be in the operation per Oregon rules. The conditional use permit limits the size of the security quarters to 1,200 square feet.

"We do need it for security reasons," Ramirez said. "We have a lot of See GROW/12A



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