

## MEALS: 21 percent of Umatilla County residents are receiving SNAP benefits

Continued from 1A

students from Umatilla and Morrow counties gathered at Hermiston High School with bulk boxes of macaroni noodles, cheese powder and soybean protein to be packaged into individual meals roughly the size of a store-bought box of macaroni and cheese, and then placed into packs of 36 meals for easy transport.

The mood was energetic and upbeat. Students sang along to music pumping through the room, made up chants to announce each box's completion and competed with their neighbors to fill the most boxes.

Austin Mota, a sophomore at Pendleton High School, said things had been "pretty chill" packing boxes and he was glad he came.

"I really just like helping out in the community," he said. "I don't mind volunteering."

Mildred Moreno, a freshman from Hermiston High School, said she was glad the teams of students were mixed between multiple chapters so that everyone got to talk with students from other schools.

"The teamwork was fun," she said. "I got to know some people I didn't know from Echo."

According to Department of Human Services data from 2015, 21 percent of Umatilla County residents are receiving food stamps from the government through



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

**Hermiston juniors, from left, Lexy Myers, Lanita Halladay, Amanda Barron and Neena Rollins work in tandem to put together fortified macaroni and cheese packets on Saturday in Hermiston.**

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). Another report shows 1,250 families in Morrow County were receiving SNAP benefits in 2014.

Hermiston FFA chapter advisor Leah Smith said fighting hunger is a cause that FFA students can understand, given the number of students in area schools who often go hungry.

"People know," she said. "... Kids don't necessarily want to point out that maybe their friend doesn't have a lot. Who knows? Maybe some of this food will go to some of these kids. But they're all here working together."

The food was bound for CAPECO in Pendleton, which will distribute some directly to needy families and send the rest to other local food banks like the Agape House in

Hermiston.

CAPECO distributes about 1.2 million pounds of food a year, while the Agape House's emergency food box program assists about 900 people each month in getting through the last few days of the month and sends home a backpack full of food each weekend to about 150 students in the area. Stanfield's food bank serves 120 to 150 people a month.

After the last meal was packaged, the volunteer force turned their attention to wiping down tables, sweeping up noodles and breaking down boxes. Walker and Reed said they were thrilled to see the project finally come to pass after months of working on it.

"I'm excited," Reed said.

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

## HERMISTON: Budget includes money set aside for security upgrades to city hall

Continued from 1A

Avenue between Southwest 11th Street and Riverfront Park. As part of that project, the city is working to acquire Steelhead Park across West Highland Extension from Riverfront Park, so that the trail can loop under the bridge there instead of tempting pedestrians to cross Highland to get to Riverfront Park.

Whatever funds will be needed to acquire the property from the state would come out of the city's \$100,000 community enhancement reserve fund used for matching funds on grants for livability projects.

"We don't feel like the trail would be at all safe to get to Riverfront Park without it, so we wanted to make sure we had that money there," City Manager Byron Smith told the budget committee.

If a "recreational immunity" bill passes the Oregon House of Representatives before the end of the current legislative session, protecting city employees from liability for injuries in parks, the city will also resume designing a skate park across from the police station on First Place.

Other objectives for 2017-2018 listed in the parks budget include enhancing the trails around the Hermiston Butte and redeveloping Greenwood Park, a small neighborhood park off of Beech Street.

Two of the largest projects in the 2017-2018 budget fall under the utility fund. The city is buying \$1.2 million in new water meters that can be read remotely and allow all Hermiston water customers to track their usage patterns in detail online. The city is also installing new \$1.5 million solids-handling equipment at the recycled water treatment plant that will save \$700,000 per year on operational costs.

"Those two items rose to the top as far as projects needing to be addressed and will help us with longterm costs," Smith said.

The city will also save about \$85,000 per year by switching to using an outside contractor for utility bill mailings.

The 2017-2018 budget includes money set aside for security upgrades to city hall, and for a \$125,000 renovation of the basement of the old Carnegie Library across from city hall. That space has been offered to the chamber of commerce to make up for the chamber losing its office space at the conference center, but the chamber has not yet made a decision about accepting the offer. If the chamber declines to move into the Carnegie library, city staff say the office space can be used for other city employees getting crowded at city hall.

To handle increasing city facilities, including the addition of the Harkenrider Center and Hermiston Conference Center, the city is adding a full-time building maintenance employee. It is also shuffling around some positions

## Food truck rules lifted for First Thursday

The Hermiston City Council gave the Hermiston Downtown Association the green light on Monday to try bringing food trucks to July's First Thursday event.

The city passed an ordinance in 2013 regulating mobile food vendors, including requirements that they apply for a license with the city and only park in approved areas. But councilors said bringing food trucks downtown for First Thursday would fall under the exemptions for "special events" and they were willing to give permission for the trucks to sell from a public street for four hours that day.

"I love the idea," Mayor David Drotzmann said. "Anything we can do to stimulate interests in the First Thursday events."

First Thursdays are a coordinated effort by downtown merchants to offer special deals, entertainment, contests and other perks to draw people downtown on the first Thursday evening of each month.

On Wednesday downtown will get a lift from Simmons Insurance Agency's annual clean-up event. Main Street between Highway 395 and 3rd Street will be closed to vehicle traffic for part of the morning as volunteers work on weeding, flower planting and other activities starting at 8:30 p.m.

and increasing the hours for others, increasing the city's total FTE from 110.59 to 116.03. All city staff are getting a 2.5 percent cost of living increase.

The city's urban renewal district budget came in at \$1.6 million for 2017-2018, almost \$1 million of which will go toward turning Northeast Second Street between Main Street and Gladys Avenue into a pedestrian-friendly festival street that can be closed off for special events. The urban renewal agency also wants to work on designing and installing decorative wayfinding signs, a project which the city will also pitch in for out of its community enhancement fund since urban renewal dollars can only be spent inside the district, and some signs need to be outside the district pointing the way toward downtown.

Mark Morgan, Hermiston's assistant city manager, told the budget committee that the addition of the new Holiday Inn Express to the district is expected to increase the district's tax revenue from about \$30,000 during the current fiscal year to \$132,000 in 2017-2018.

The city's full proposed budget can be found online at [hermiston.or.us/finance/budget](http://hermiston.or.us/finance/budget).

## PENDLETON: Beard asked commissioners for \$20,000 for the new travel campaign

Continued from 1A

The Pendleton advertising agency Duke Joseph is crafting the campaign's videos to appeal to the Boomers.

Duke Joseph creative director Jeff Lorton told commissioners Boomers enjoy travel and "bumping into life." They are agri-tourists, he said, who want to meet the people who make the food they eat

and drink, the very experience Umatilla County has to offer.

"We need to reach out to them to encourage them to come here," he said.

Beard asked the commissioners to give \$20,000 from economic development funds for the new effort. He said \$15,000 would go into creating advertising to appeal to the target audience and the remaining \$5,000 for social

media to spread the message.

Commissioner Bill Elfering oversees economic development for the county. He told Beard he needs to go through the county's grant process for the funds.

Beard said he would have that in an email in short order.

Contact Phil Wright at [pwright@eastoregonian.com](mailto:pwright@eastoregonian.com) or 541-966-0833.

## Sun Terrace Hermiston



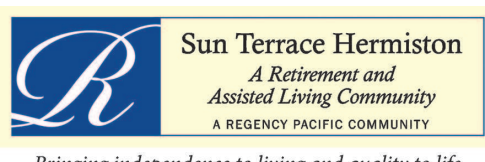
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