

EOTEC

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Traffic will be another trouble spot. All fairgoers will enter and exit on the two-lane access road off of E. Airport Road. That's certain to be packed after the evening concerts, which can draw as many as 5,000. Roads won't be a problem in future years, Newman said. An additional entrance, Ott Road, is set to be paved this fall.

Newman is prepared for unexpected issues to arise, but said it won't be much of a change from previous fairs.

"Sewer, water, electrical — none of that met code," Newman said of the old grounds. A power outage sent Newman and the board scrambling during last year's concert.

The only things left undone will be minor details, he said.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Umatilla County Fair Princess JaNessa Prewitt, right, greets visitors to the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center at an open house earlier this year.

Weekend work parties formed to handle many of those details, like putting up shade covers, painting fences and laying sod.

"When you have a fair and rodeo that are on a growth trajectory, every year needs more volunteers. But this year brought new tasks," said board member Dan Dorran. The community of Umatilla County stepped up, and it hasn't gone unnoticed.

The fair board is "more than humbled by the volunteers we get and the effort they put in," Dorran said. "It's one of those things that brings tears to the eyes every year. There's no mechanism or platform that's adequate to thank them."

An additional work party, sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, was held July 29. All were invited to join, Dorran said.

EOTEC, which cost \$16 million to construct, is expected to generate \$132,000 in revenue from event bookings during the 2017-2018 fiscal year. Building an event center in Hermiston has been a decades-long dream and undertaking. Construction began in December 2014.

Since the opening of the main building in May 2016, EOTEC

has been used for weddings, parties and meetings, as well as bigger events such as a horse plowing competition and professional wrestling match.

The Umatilla County Fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo are each paying \$10,000 per year to lease EOTEC. The fair's lease agreement includes year-round storage space, an office and access to the board room for board meetings. The rodeo's lease includes naming rights for the arena.

Newman said that despite the promise of a better facility, some were hesitant about the move.

"There's a lot of memories down there," he explained.

Fair participants have always appreciated the ease of tradition, knowing where to go and what to expect. "But everyone who has come up (to see EOTEC) has said, 'Oh this is going to be so much nicer.'"

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