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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Posting up at EOTEC

Clemente Castillo with Fence Tite Rite out of Hermiston uses a Bobcat with a drill attachment to drill a posthole as Jacob Harmon and Cory Adams stand by while installing a fence on Friday at the EOTEC grounds in Hermiston.



EO file photo

The Oregon Department of Transportation will experiment with using rock salt on a portion of Interstate 84 this winter between Boardman and the Idaho border.

ODOT says salt now on the table

Hopes to keep I-84 between Boardman, Idaho open in perilous winter weather

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Interstate closures could disrupt fewer holiday plans in the future as the Oregon Department of Transportation experiments with using rock salt on Interstate 84 between Boardman and the Idaho border during icy weather.

"Salt becomes a tool during those times that have a really deleterious effect, if you will, on travel plans," ODOT spokesman Peter Murphy said.

Murphy did not have a total of how many hours Interstate 84 was closed this winter, but the *East Oregonian* posted on Facebook about closures along the route between Baker City and Boardman on 16 different days during December and January, including a closure two days before Christmas and two different incidents in January that stretched over multiple days.

The department got permission from the legislature a few years ago to conduct a small pilot program near the California border, and has been researching best practices in other states. House Bill 2017, the transportation package passed this summer, allows for ODOT to expand the practice between the Idaho border and Boardman, stopping short of the Columbia Gorge, as it develops policies for more widespread use.

Murphy said ODOT is constructing special environmentally conscious storage sheds for the project, including ones near Pendleton, Irrigon and Mission. The sheds will be large enough for trucks to back into, with sealed flooring shaped to keep salty runoff from escaping and seeping into the ground. There will also be a special set-up for washing the trucks used to transport and spread the salt that will collect the salty water for storage in ponds.

The salt will be dispersed using a special nozzle attached to ODOT's sanders. The state will continue to use plows, gravel,

See SALT/11A

Road rules changed to prepare for fair

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Drivers better slow down on Airport Road, Hermiston, on the way to next week's Umatilla County Fair. And don't plan on parking along the road to avoid paying for parking, either.

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners on Wednesday approved a 25 mph limit to Airport Road between South Highway 395 and South Ott Road, which leads to the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, the new home for the fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo. The commissioners also approved no-parking zones for both shoulders of the road. The restrictions are for the duration of the fair, Aug. 8-12.

Umatilla County Undersheriff Jim Littlefield and county public works director Tom Fellows said the changes are about increasing public safety due to the new location of the fair.

Airport Road lacks a posted limit, but Fellows explained that does not mean drivers can zip along at Oregon's default limit of 55 mph. Rather, he stressed, motorists much follow Oregon's basic rule and drive for the conditions of the road.

Fellows said the county is improving those conditions. Work crews on

See FAIR/11A



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The Umatilla County Commissioners approved a 25 mph temporary speed limit for Airport Road for the week of the Umatilla County Fair.

Here comes fair week

SATURDAY: The Umatilla County Fair Parade begins at 6:30 p.m. at Hermiston High School.
MONDAY: EOTEC will hold a ribbon cutting and grand opening at 5:30 p.m.
TUESDAY: Fair gates open at 9 a.m. at EOTEC, 1705 E. Airport Road, Hermiston.

A slice of friendship

Watermelon event bonds Hermiston, Portland

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

Amid some light trash-talking and heavy pressure, Hermiston Mayor David Drotzmann faced off against Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler in the annual watermelon seed-spitting contest at Portland's Pioneer Courthouse Square on Friday morning.

"I understand Mayor Wheeler has never done this before, so we'll give him a practice round so he doesn't get embarrassed by us professional seed-spitters," Drotzmann said, to laughs from the crowd.

Wheeler appreciated the handicap.

"Normally, when doing something this important I'd have practiced," he said, "But I've never spit a watermelon seed. You'd better win," Wheeler told his Hermiston counterpart, "Or you're not going to have a job in Hermiston."

Drotzmann then launched a seed past Wheeler's, but the contest had a twist: both men were beaten by Wheeler's director of strategic partnerships, Jennifer Arguinzoni, who stepped in at the last minute to participate.

Each mayor also spoke briefly about the event to a crowd of Portlanders that had gathered to receive the free watermelons they have come to anticipate each summer.

"These are the best watermelons

See WATERMELONS/11A



Staff photo by Jayati Ramakrishnan

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler jokes about his watermelon seed-spitting skills before a contest with Mayor David Drotzmann of Hermiston on Friday at Pioneer Courthouse Square in Portland.

