



Photo courtesy Nate Rivera
Hermiston Mayor David Drotzmann lines up for his turn in a watermelon seed spitting contest Friday, Aug. 4, at Pioneer Courthouse Square in Portland. Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, at right, watches.



Staff photo by Jayati Ramakrishnan
Hermiston Mayor David Drotzmann hands out the first melon at the watermelon giveaway Friday in Portland.

WATERMELONS: Event started in 1991 by former mayor Frank Harkenrider

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in the world and there's no reason to get melons shipped from anywhere else," Wheeler said.

Wheeler also spoke about other facets of Eastern Oregon's largest city.

"Hermiston is a thriving city," he said. "While we think of watermelons, there's lots of good employment opportunities. They're working very hard under this mayor on economic prosperity. It's good to take a fun day like this and remember that we are one state."

Drotzmann, too, said he was glad to be showcasing Hermiston's most famous crop on the west side of the state.

"Normally when we're here, we're a hundred deep," he said. "We've got a lot of good produce to give away."

Debbie Pedro, president of the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce, estimated they were giving away nine bins of melons, each of which contained between 20 and 30 melons.

Drotzmann added that partnering with Portland was important for both cities.

"It's interesting because Portland is larger than us by about 650,000. So we think they have different issues — but when we sit down with them, the issues we have are very similar. We're thinking about economic development, public safety, housing, water. How do we, as a state, continue to be prosperous?"

After the brief remarks, Drotzmann, Hermiston city councilors Lori Davis, Rod Hardin and Jackie Meyers started handing out melons. They were joined by Hermiston Energy Services superintendent Nate Rivera and Debbie Pedro, Josh Burns, Shirley Parsons, Ian Coyle and Cindy Meyers from the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce.

Though the crowd wasn't as thick as some councilors recalled in past years, there was a steady stream of people throughout the giveaway. Burns stood at the corner of Pioneer Courthouse Square, advertising the presence of free melons to Portlanders walking past, which brought in several waves of eager customers.

Some, though, came prepared.

Kathy Leichter and Brenda McSweeney were the first ones in line, waiting with a small cart with wheels.

"We've come before," McSweeney said. "Maybe 10 or more times."

McSweeney said she



Staff photo by Jayati Ramakrishnan
Hermiston city councilors, chamber members and Mayor David Drotzmann pose with Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler before the watermelon giveaway in Portland on Friday.



Staff photo by Jayati Ramakrishnan
Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler spits a watermelon seed in his first ever watermelon seed-spitting contest at the Hermiston watermelon giveaway on Friday.

buys Hermiston melons when she can, and that her family loves the fruit.

"They're nice and sweet," Leichter said.

Wheeler was scheduled to meet Drotzmann, Hardin and Meyers for dinner on Thursday night, but canceled about an hour before due to a Portland City Council meeting that ran long.

"We take public comment, and it included use of force issues," Wheeler explained of his absence. "Unfortunately, I was not able to go to dinner."

Though this was Wheeler's first watermelon giveaway event as mayor, many of the Hermiston councilors and representatives have been coming for years.

"Over the years, we would have people up in their offices, looking down on the square and waiting for us to get out here," Pedro said. "We'll recognize people who've been coming for years."

Pedro said it's important

to keep building a partnership with Portland.

"It's very important to share the concerns we have in rural areas and they get to let us know what's going on here," she said. "When it comes to economic development, it's really exciting to have friends across the state."

The event, which was started in 1991 by former Hermiston Mayor Frank Harkenrider and former Portland Mayor Bud Clark, petered out in the late 2000s, and was revived three years ago by Drotzmann and then-Portland Mayor Charlie Hales.

Drotzmann remembered Harkenrider, who passed away late last month, in his opening remark at the events.

"He never knew an enemy," Drotzmann said. "He served on our city council for over 50 years, and he was the pioneer of this event."

Hardin remembered some of the earlier events, and the

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— **Debbie Pedro**, president of the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce

two flamboyant founders of the watermelon giveaway.

"Bud was kind of a controversial mayor," he said. "I think they (Harkenrider and Clark) were a perfect fit. One from a small city, one from a big city. But both, you never knew what was going to come out of their mouths."

He recalled one particular gathering, a few years ago.

"Bud Clark rode his bicycle to the event, and he showed up with a watermelon (bicycle) helmet," Hardin said. "That was the last one they were at together."

Hardin said the event is a good way to remind people in Portland of the role the east side of the state plays in their daily lives.

"It's mainly to remind them, most of your food comes from our direction," he said.

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FAIR: Illegal parkers could face fines, towing

Continued from 1A

Wednesday watered and smoothed the gravel on Ott Road to prepare it for a dust abatement application, and the county is going to clear away some brush and weeds along Airport Road to give better visibility.

Airport Road will be the only access to and from the new fairgrounds from Highway 395, and Littlefield said it is too narrow for parking on either side. Drivers who do could be in some trouble.

Illegal stopping, standing or parking is a class D traffic violation under Oregon law, according to a statement Thursday from the sheriff's office.

"Violators can receive a minimum fine of \$110 and their vehicle can be towed away without prior notification," according to the statement. "Please avoid being a violator by refraining from parking in the No Parking Zone or by blocking a private driveway."

Littlefield said the agency will make efforts to contact drivers that park illegally to give them the opportunity to move their vehicles. The sheriff's office doesn't want to rely on towing cars unless

it has to, he said.

Fellows and Littlefield advised fair goers to pay extra attention when driving to and from the fair. The new venue will not be familiar to everyone, so a bit of extra precaution could go a long way to prevent any problems.

Parking at the fairgrounds will cost \$5 for each entry, but Mid Columbia Bus Company will run free shuttles on Friday and Saturday from 2-10 p.m.

The shuttles will stop at the Hermiston Conference Center, city hall, the Wal-Mart parking lot near McDonald's and Hermiston High School en route to the Eastern Oregon Trade & Event Center.

Law enforcement also will have a presence at the fair just as in years past. Littlefield said other agencies, such as the Walla Walla County Sheriff's Office, provide extra police power to keep on eye out. Having officers on site, he said, has proved an effective approach for curtailing any problems early.

He said it comes down to having police on site and not needing them versus needing them when they are not there.



Contributed photo by ODOT
This salt shed in Jordan Valley is being replicated by ODOT at eastern Oregon locations, including Pendleton and Irrigon.

SALT: Is not effective when it gets too cold out

Continued from 1A

magnesium chloride de-icer and other tools but will plan to use salt in certain hard-to-clear areas in the mountains when other methods aren't cutting it.

"It's not going to be the first resort, or even necessarily the second or third," Murphy said.

He said the salt won't necessarily prevent all Cabbage Hill closures, but should make closures shorter. One of the problems along Interstate 84 in Eastern Oregon is the lack of truck parking in areas like Baker City, which pushes the closures farther and father west as there becomes nowhere for trucks to pull off safely even if the road is clear enough to drive on.

Although most states use rock salt on their roads, including all of Oregon's neighbors, Oregon has long avoided the practice due to its corrosive effect on asphalt, bridges and vehicles, as well as concerns

about runoff polluting nearby soil and streams. But rock salt is also particularly effective in quickly melting through a layer of snow and ice, which helps prevent the kind of crashes and closures that plagued Interstate 84 all winter.

Murphy said salt isn't a cure-all, and in certain conditions when it gets too cold it isn't effective at all. Use of salt on problem areas will be left up to the discretion of ODOT's district managers.

Cities and counties also have to grapple with questions of how best to clear snowy roads during the winter. Ron Sivey, Hermiston's street superintendent, said that the city does not use rock salt because getting set up to store and use it is too expensive for the city. The city uses a liquid de-icer on the roads, and "will continue to use that," he said.

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