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# SPECIAL SECTION INSIDE: FALL SPORTS PREVIEW



# EAST OREGONIAN

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## PENDLETON



Pendleton School District Superintendent Chris Fritsch looks in on a sixth-grade math class while touring Sunridge Middle School on the first day of class Tuesday in Pendleton.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

## HERMISTON

### Community likes EOTEC best for HHS graduation

By JADE MCDOWELL  
East Oregonian

Community members have chosen the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center as their top choice for a high school graduation venue, but Hermiston School District is still weighing its options.

At a school board work session Monday, director of operations Brad Wayland presented the board with the results of a community survey as well as the pros, cons and price tag associated with each of four options for future graduations. The school board will likely put the decision to a vote at its next meeting.

“Whatever the choice is, we need to get that information out so that plans can be made,” board chair Karen Sherman said.

Here is an overview of the four options:

#### Hermiston High School gym

About 54 percent of community members said they are “very dissatisfied” with the district’s current practice of holding graduation in the Hermiston High School gym, which only holds 2,200 people including graduates and staff.

Hermiston’s growing student population has limited each student to five tickets

See GRADUATION/10A

# SUPER BUSY

## New superintendent spends first day of school on tours

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

When Wendy Phillips, a first grade teacher at McKay Creek Elementary School, asked her students if they were nervous for the first day of school, Chris Fritsch’s hand shot up.

While Fritsch isn’t a student, Tuesday marked his first day of school as the Pendleton School District superintendent.

McKay Creek was his first stop as a part of a day-long tour of every school in the district.

InterMountain Education Service District spokeswoman Michele Madril was snapping photos of students posing with a welcome banner before school started.

Madril pulled Fritsch into one of the photos, and before she took a few shots, he asked the kids if they were excited for the first day of school.

“Sort of!” one of the kids responded.

A longtime school administrator in Longview, Washington, Fritsch took the reins in July but used the first day to greet teachers and interact with students.

Driving from school to school



Science teacher Nichole Erwin shakes hands with Pendleton School District Superintendent Chris Fritsch during a tour of Sunridge Middle School on Tuesday in Pendleton.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

in his pick-up truck with New England Patriot floor mats (“It provides for a healthy conversation on Sundays,” Fritsch said of him and his wife, who is a Seahawks

fan), the man elementary teachers described to their students as “the boss of all the bosses” and “the big guy on campus” explained that it was important for him to have a

presence in the schools if he was going to be involved in district conversations with teachers and

See SCHOOL/10A

## UmCo supports plan to boost data centers

By PHIL WRIGHT  
East Oregonian

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners approved a plan to exempt data centers near the city of Umatilla from property taxes. County tax assessor Paul Chalmers said the move is about attracting business and development.

The exemptions would apply to Vadata Inc., which operates a server farm for Amazon. The company also has centers near Hermiston and in Morrow County.

Oregon’s strategic investment program provides tax exemptions for projects that cost at least \$25 million in rural areas. Per the agreement, the exemption goes into effect when the Vadata property reaches a real market value of \$25 million. Chalmers said the exemption lasts for 15 years, and the \$25 million value is subject to an annual increase of 3 percent per year.

When the exemption expires, Chalmers said, all developments on the site come onto the tax rolls in one fell swoop.

Vadata also will pay an annual community service fee that cannot exceed \$500,000 a year. The county and city would split the fee because Vadata’s project is on property of each local government. Chalmers said the city of Umatilla has yet to approve

See DATA/10A

## HERMISTON

### Early season spuds ship off to market

Acreage reduction means better prices for growers

By GEORGE PLAVEN  
East Oregonian

The spring weather may not have been ideal, but Tony Amstad is still pleasantly surprised with the size and quality of his early season potatoes.

While an abundance of rain and snow pushed back planting by about a week in March, Amstad said the delay doesn’t seem to be affecting his fresh

market crop. Harvest is now underway, and what he sees are spuds that are just the right shape, color and consistency for supermarket shelves.

“It’s going to be a decent year,” said Amstad, owner of Amstad Farms. “It started out bad and ended up good.”

Amstad Farms grows 2,250 acres of potatoes, mostly around Hermiston and Echo. On Tuesday, Amstad watched as crews sifted through a stream of Russets that were loaded up

See POTATOES/10A



Hillary Fernandez of Stanfield releases a gate on the back of a potato truck as Estella Dueñez of Hermiston sorts Russet potatoes as they move down a conveyor belt on Tuesday outside of Hermiston.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris



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