



**MOUNTED BAND
GETS OFFER FROM
ROUND-UP**
REGION/3A



**500,000 PEOPLE
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SOUTH FLORIDA**
NATION/6A

EAST OREGONIAN

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2017

141st Year, No. 234 WINNER OF THE 2017 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD One dollar

Your Weekend



- **Dress-Up Parade**
- **Saturday in Pendleton**
- **Pendleton Round-Up**
- **Kick-Off Concert**
- **Artist reception at Arts Portal Gallery**

For times and places see **Coming Events, 5A**

Catch a movie

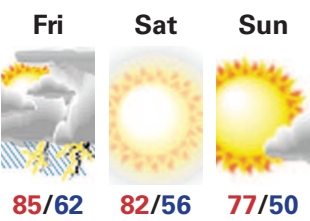


Brooke Palmer/Warner Bros. Pictures

Based on a Stephen King novel, children team up to battle an evil clown in "It."

For showtime, **Page 5A**

Weekend Weather



Watch a game



Lewiston vs. Hermiston

Friday, 7 p.m., at Hermiston

Why this fire season is among the worst

By **DAN ELLIOTT**
Associated Press

DENVER — Acrid yellow smoke clogs the skies of major Western U.S. cities, a human-caused fire in the Columbia River Gorge rains ash on Portland and a century-old backcountry chalet burns to the ground in Montana's Glacier National Park.

Wildfires are chewing across dried-out Western forests and grassland, putting 2017 on track to be among the worst fire seasons in a decade.

See **SEASON/2A**

Out with the old smoke ...

Change in weather coming Friday

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

A change in the weather means northeast Oregon could soon be saying goodbye to wildfire smoke from Montana and hello to

smoke from the Columbia River Gorge.

Dennis Hull, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Pendleton, said the latest haze that has lingered over the area since Monday was

pushed in by easterly winds carrying smoke from the multitude of fires burning in the mountains of southwest Montana.

Since then, a high pressure system has created an inversion that has trapped all that smoke in place, similar to the dense fog that normally rolls in from

November to January.

"High pressure is just keeping that air from moving," Hull said. "It just kind of keeps a lid on the atmosphere."

Hull said a low pressure system off the Pacific coast is expected to move in Friday, which should help to diminish the smoke and haze.

But the system is also expected to usher in westerly winds that could blow in additional smoke from the raging Eagle Creek fire south of Cascade Locks.

"The wild card is how much the wildfires in the Gorge will push smoke

See **SMOKE/12A**



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Omar Medina has been hired as Hermiston High School's first ever graduation coordinator.

Hermiston alum to serve as first ever high school graduation coach

Last year's graduation rate was 87.6 percent

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
East Oregonian

As the Hermiston School District works to improve its graduation rates, it will intensify its focus on students still a few years from receiving a diploma.

"We tend to be reactive, especially with kids struggling," said Hermiston High School Principal Tom Spoo. "The goal here is to try and be proactive."

One step in that direction is the creation of a graduation coordinator position, funded by money coming into the school from Measure 98, and

hiring 2004 Hermiston graduate Omar Medina for the job.

Medina said the specifics of his role at the high school, which started at the beginning of this school year, are still being determined. He has spent his first few weeks studying Measure 98 and working with the counselors to get recommendations for students to work with.

Measure 98 was approved by voters in 2016 and provides funding to increase graduation rates by expanding high school programs in three areas: career and technical education, college-level education opportunities, and dropout-prevention

"I hope to do consistent check-ins, and get to know what's going on with the students."

— **Omar Medina**, Hermiston High School graduation coordinator

strategies. State funds are allotted to school districts based on the school's average daily membership (weighted), or enrollment. For the 2017-2018 school year, school districts were required to submit written requests to the Oregon Department of Education detailing how they would allocate

See **MEDINA/12A**

One hurdle remains, depot transfer set for Dec. 1

Military still has to sign on the dotted line; business opportunities lost in long-delayed process

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

After years of delays on transferring the former Umatilla Chemical Depot to local control, Columbia Development Authority director Greg Smith believes the project could be just a few months away from the finish line.

"We've set a hard deadline of December 1," he said before adding, "The joke is, 'What year?'"

Locals have reason to be skeptical that the depot is less than three months away from being opened up to private economic development that could mean millions of dollars of investment and hundreds of jobs for the area. They've been promised "soon" for several years. Smith said when he was hired on in July 2015, he was told the transfer was about 90 days away. That was

after a previous timeline had set a transfer date at the beginning of 2015.

In the time since, Smith said the area has lost out on many large projects. He's had tell companies interested in the land — for data centers, rail car storage, factories, solar panels, mining or other operations — that he has no idea when they would be able to buy or lease the property.

"They're gone. They're not coming back," he said.

Other companies will likely be interested. Smith called the flat area where the chemical weapons incinerator used to stand some of the best industrial land in the state. But the delays in projects means delays in job openings that development on the depot could produce.

"Folks in Hermiston, they're not going to

See **DEPOT/12A**



Staff photo E.J. Harris

Congressman Greg Walden, center, gestures while asking a question while on a tour of the Umatilla Army Depot with the Columbia Development Authority in May 2016.

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