

Hermiston leads Umatilla County in population growth

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

It's not the official slogan anymore, but you can still grow here in Hermiston. Portland State University released the first draft of its annual population estimates this week, measuring both county and city numbers statewide.

Umatilla County's numbers have continued to climb — with Hermiston leading the way — while Morrow County's have dropped overall.

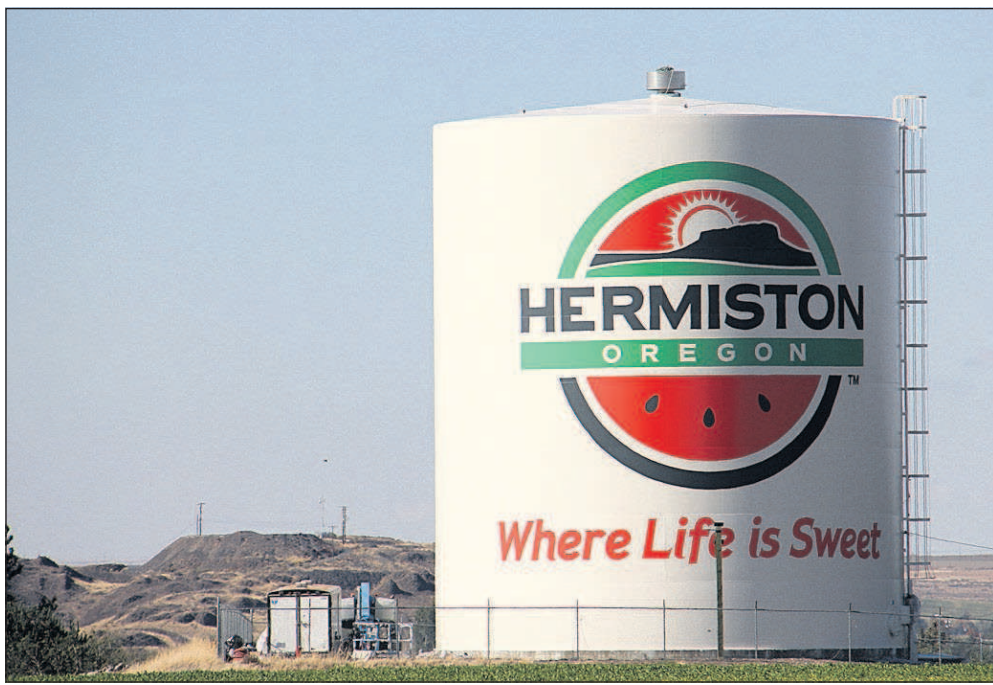
Umatilla County
This year, the county's population is projected at 80,500. That's a jump of nearly 8,000 from 2010's estimate of 72,720. In 2000, Umatilla County's population was estimated at 70,548.

Planning Director Bob Waldher said the county has seen a lot of economic development and growth, including several new projects that can not be discussed yet.

"People come here for a variety of reasons," he said. "Some cities have really low growth and for some, the growth has been staggering."

Hermiston has seen the largest and most rapid growth in Eastern Oregon, going from 13,260 in 2000 to 16,380 in 2010 and 17,985 this year.

Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said he was a little surprised by the increase from last year — a growth of



The water tower overlooks Hermiston, which has been the fastest-growing city in Umatilla County since 2000.

about 255 people.

"I thought we were kind of holding steady along the same number of building starts, so it's a little more accelerated than I expected," he said.

Morgan noted that it is difficult to pinpoint any one reason for population growth, but some included increasing property values in the Tri-Cities.

"I think as the (cost) difference continues to widen between Hermiston and the Tri-Cities, we're picking up more of those people," he said.

He said another reason for growth was likely a steady

increase in employment across sectors.

"It's difficult to point to one employment generator, but I think what we've seen is an increase in employment from existing employers as we get further away from the recession," Morgan said. "Probably the single largest employer to point to continues to be data centers. They continue to add a substantial number of employees every year."

Pendleton has seen a fluctuation of roughly 1,000 people over the past 17 years, settling in at around 16,890 this year.

Other Umatilla County

towns have seen small growth. Milton-Freewater has gone from 6,495 in 2000 to 7,070 this year. Umatilla has seen a jump of about 2,000 people in the last 17 years, from 5,035 to 7,245.

Stanfield has seen some change, going from 1,990 people in the year 2000 to 2,315 in 2010 and back down to 2,145 this year.

Morrow County

Morrow County's population has seen less change over the last several years than its neighbor to the east. The most recent numbers estimate Morrow County's population at 11,890. The projection is lower than the

county's 2010 population, 12,595. The county's population in 2000 was 10,995.

Morrow County's fastest-growing city, Boardman, has not had a population boom. Despite the establishment of several large, job-creating companies at the Port of Morrow, Boardman's population has seen growth of fewer than 1,000 people in 17 years — from 2,910 in 2000 to 3,400 in 2010, and up to 3,555 in 2017.

Karen Wolff, Morrow County's Human Resources director, said the low numbers in Boardman and throughout Morrow County were likely due to a housing crunch in the area.

She said the county continues to make the issue a focus.

"Housing is a critical need," she said. "We're trying to look at ways to bring in housing, and attract people to stay."

She said building more homes closer to the Port of Morrow is crucial.

"We're trying to get housing to (get people) to stay in Morrow County, as opposed to the Port of Morrow being west Umatilla County's largest employer," she said.

Statewide

Oregon's population is growing at a strong clip, driven by people coming from out of state.

The state added 64,750 people between July 1, 2016, and July 1, 2017, following a similar gain the year before,

pushing Oregon's population to more than 4.1 million.

People migrating to Oregon accounted for 88 percent of the jump. The other 12 percent was due to more births than deaths, what's known as a natural increase.

Because of an aging population and declining birth rates, the natural increase now contributes less to Oregon's population growth than at any time since the 1930s, PSU researcher Charles Rynerson said Friday.

But people from out of state are flocking to the Portland area and central Oregon.

Portland gained more residents than any other city, with an estimated 639,100 people now living within its limits. The tri-county Portland metropolitan area saw the largest gains in population from 2016 to 2017.

Multnomah and Washington counties each added more than 12,000 residents, and Clackamas County added just over 8,000.

Deschutes County in central Oregon had the largest increase by percentage — 3.6 percent. Its largest city, Bend, added 3,265 residents to reach a population of 86,765.

Elsewhere in Oregon, Eugene (167,255) remained slightly ahead of Salem (163,480) in the race to be Oregon's second-largest city. Gresham is still Oregon's fourth-largest city, followed by Hillsboro, which just surpassed 100,000 people.

Man who jumped from I-84 overpass was real estate broker

By SHANE DIXON KAVANAUGH
The Oregonian/OregonLive

A Portland man struck and killed by a car after he jumped from an Interstate 84 overpass in Morrow County was an ambitious young real estate broker who also struggled with bouts of mental illness, his family and co-workers said.

Alex Michael Herrera, 28, had fled a minor fender-bender last week near Boardman moments before his death, said Oregon State Police. The car that struck Herrera kept driving and remains unidentified, said Lt. Cari Boyd, a state police spokeswoman.

Authorities are investigating the fatality as a suspected hit-and-run, Boyd

said, though it remains unclear whether the impact from the fall or the car caused Herrera's death.

"He was a good-hearted human being with a sensitivity for those less fortunate," Herrera's mother, Adrianna Kenney, said in an email. "He had a capacity for solving problems like I have never seen."

But her son also suffered from mental health problems most of his life, said Kenney, a dentist in Southern California. "That was his daily struggle," she said.

Herrera made local headlines in 2013 when authorities said he tried to open the door on an Alaskan Airlines flight traveling to Portland. He told police at the time he was bipolar and had been hearing voices for days.

After he was sentenced to three years of probation, Herrera became a licensed real estate broker and sold homes in the metro area. In March, he joined MORE Realty, where colleagues quickly found him to be a positive, upbeat addition.

"Alex was engaging and funny," said Paul Knighton. "He was outgoing and bubbly."

But over the summer, Knighton said his new colleague began to act noticeably different. Herrera slowly grew detached from co-workers. He rarely returned phone calls.

Eventually, Herrera fell off the grid altogether, Knighton said.

"The last couple of weeks we were very worried about him," Knighton said.

On Nov. 9, state troopers responded to reports of a minor collision between Herrera's gold Ford Ranger and a white commercial vehicle on the off-ramp near milepost 158 — three hours east of Portland — about 3:05 a.m., police said.

After the accident, Herrera hopped out of his car and sprinted away, the other driver told authorities.

Investigators believe Herrera then ran toward the nearby overpass, scaled the fence and jumped. An eastbound car hit him, police said. Troopers found Herrera's lifeless body about 130 feet from the overpass.

Police believe the vehicle that struck Herrera may have had dark gray metallic paint. Anyone with information is asked to call 541-276-2121.

BRIEFLY

Wolf poached in Wallowa County, OSP seeks help finding shooter

ENTERPRISE — Oregon State Police are asking for help finding a poacher who shot and killed a wolf in Wallowa County.

According to a press release, the body of the collared wolf — dubbed OR23 — was found Wednesday in the Chesnimnus unit in the Cold Springs area east of Joseph. Police said the animal likely was shot Sunday or Monday.

OSP is asking for help

finding the shooter or anyone involved in the killing. Anyone with information is asked to call Sgt. Chris Hawkins at 541-963-7175, ext. 4670, or leave an anonymous tip at 1-800-452-7888.

Poaching of fish and wildlife, including wolves, is a problem in Oregon, according to Capt. Jeff Samuels in a press release. The division employs 120 officers in Oregon.

"We are upset and frustrated by the unlawful wolf killings in Oregon," said Doug Cottam, ODFW Wildlife Division administrator, in the release.

"Poaching of any wildlife is wrong and harmful to their conservation."

Tree initiative plan(t)s party

PENDLETON — In recognition of reaching the Plant 1,000 Trees initiative goals, Pendleton Parks & Recreation invites the public to a celebration.

The gathering is Monday from 6-8 p.m. in the Vert Club Room, 345 S.W. Fourth St., Pendleton. In addition to cake, guest speakers will talk about the project. Also, displays will feature the recreation department,

the Tree Commission, the Memorial Trees program and local organizations invested in planting trees in Pendleton.

For more information or to RSVP, call 541-276-8100 or visit www.eventbrite.com.

PUBLIC SAFETY LOG

THURSDAY

5:48 a.m. - Boardman fire and the Morrow County Sheriff's Office responded to eastbound Interstate 84 near Boardman for a semitrailer with an axle on fire.

8:38 a.m. - A caller to Hermiston police asked for information on the laws about the legal age to smoke marijuana.

9:22 a.m. - The driver of a Peterbilt semi eastbound on Interstate 84 near milepost 234 tried to miss vehicles stopped on the icy road due to an earlier crash. The semi driver swerved toward the median, and the trailer jackknifed and swiped the side of another semi stopped in the slow lane.

Oregon State Police reported all vehicles drove from the scene.

10:55 a.m. - Better park right in the Umatilla neighborhood of Dark Canyon and Bridgeport avenues. A city police officer wrote tickets there on six vehicles for prohibited parking, cited another for parking the wrong way and gave warnings to two others.

1:38 p.m. - A Umatilla resident at Country Club Manor Apartments, 605 Umatilla Ave., reported her "ex" took her car without her permission and refuses to return it.

2:35 p.m. - Cats and birds prompted a Hermiston resident to call police. She said she feeds birds at her home on Yucca Avenue, and the neighbors have four cats that sometime come into her yard and kill the birds. She asked if she could shoot the cats if they are on her property.

3:57 p.m. - A 911 caller reported a road rage incident at East Punkin Center Road and Highway 395, Hermiston.

4:48 p.m. - A driver in Heppner asked the Morrow County Sheriff's Office to send someone to talk to three third-graders who were unattended and ran through traffic.

FRIDAY

6:49 a.m. - One vehicle lost control at East Crockett Road and Highway 11, Milton-Freewater, and collided with a silver Pontiac Grand Prix.

ARRESTS, CITATIONS

Thursday

Milton-Freewater police arrested Stephanie Marie Costa, 22, of Milton-Freewater, for second-degree assault related to domestic violence.

Friday

Pendleton police arrested Brooklin Paige Melson, 21, of Hermiston, for heroin possession, methamphetamine possession and hindering prosecution.

INTRODUCING

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The East Oregonian will not publish on

Thanksgiving Day

due to the postal holiday.

Look for your Holiday Edition on Wednesday, Nov. 22

- Home for the Holidays special section
- A guide to the upcoming Farm Fair
- Wednesday and Thursday comics, features, puzzles and TV listings
- **BLACK FRIDAY INSERTS:**
Big 5 Sporting Goods
Big Lots
Bi-Mart
D&B Supply
Harbor Freight Tools
Home Depot
Rite Aid
Sears
U.S. Cellular
Walgreens
Walmart