

HERMISTON



Kendyl Inners, center, passes the last of 420 food boxes down an assembly line at the Hermiston Conference Center Tuesday night. Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Christmas Express ready to feed hundreds of families

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Canned corn and boxes of stuffing were practically flying into boxes at the city of Hermiston's annual office holiday party on Tuesday.

Staff, elected officials and their families lined up along a conveyor belt set up in the Hermiston Conference Center, working together assembly line-style to fill 420 boxes with food for needy families in the community. The food, along with toys for families with young children, will be distributed via Hermiston's Christmas Express program.

"Henry Ford's got nothing on these guys," said Ric Sherman as he watched.

Sherman said he has been helping coordinate the food drive for Christmas Express for 37 years, but this year was the first time he had actually watched the food be packed into boxes. He said the program, administered by the Hermiston Police Department, is a shining example of Hermiston generosity.

"This is Hermiston's finest hour," he said.

Police Chief Jason Edmiston said the department had purchased \$4,000 worth of turkeys and \$6,200 in other food items, to be added to the 13,925 food items collected by Hermiston schools and the fresh produce donated by three local farms. The food was loaded into boxes and then shrink-wrapped onto



City of Hermiston staff, elected officials and their families assemble 420 food boxes assembly line-style during their annual holiday party at the Hermiston Conference Center Tuesday night. Staff photo by Jade McDowell

pallets within 45 minutes. Extra food that didn't go into the boxes for about 420 specially chosen families will be donated to the Agape House to be used where the nonprofit sees the most need.

Christmas Express started 48 years ago when a local businessman had some toys he wanted to donate and asked then-police chief Bob Shannon whether he knew of anyone in town who needed them. From that grew a program that now serves hundreds of

struggling families in Hermiston each year, nominated by churches and other local agencies to receive food and presents for Christmas.

Edmiston said he was born and raised in Hermiston but didn't understand the depth of the community's generosity until he became involved with Christmas Express in 2004.

"There wasn't a person I couldn't call and say 'I need this' and it would be there," he said.

Milton-Freewater man to take deal in murder case

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Milton-Freewater murder defendant Conor Michael Dayton has a deal with the Umatilla County District Attorney's Office.

Dayton, 24, appeared in circuit court Wednesday morning in Pendleton via video from the county jail. His attorney, Herman Bylenga of Pendleton, stood at his side and announced to the court the sides reached an agreement. No one gave details of the deal.

The state accused Dayton of killing Marcos Gutierrez Rodriguez under a Milton-Freewater bridge in May and burning the body to cover up the crime. Dayton has previously pleaded not guilty to murder and abuse of the corpse.

Circuit Judge Christopher Brauer asked Dayton if he understood there was a "negotiated disposition" in the case and Dayton responded, "Yes, sir."

Brauer set Jan. 18 at 10 a.m. for Dayton's change of plea.

The court checked the status of two more homicide cases. Evan John Freel,

18, has pleaded not guilty to murder and first-degree criminal mistreatment in the June 2015 death of his 5-month-old son, Dominic. Defense attorney Kara Davis said she is waiting for a new psychological evaluation of Freel, which should come in the next two weeks.

And Angela Fix, 41, of Pilot Rock, can participate in her defense. The state accused Fix of setting the fire in July that killed Larry Castro, 77, at his Pilot Rock home. She has pleaded not guilty to first-degree arson and second-degree manslaughter.

Davis told Brauer that Fix does not have "an aid and assist issue." She said a miscommunication with Pendleton psychologist Terry Templeman led to his finding that Fix could not engage with the case when she actually can.

Davis said she could not provide more details due to client confidentiality.

Fix appeared via video from the jail and agreed to sign a waiver to a speedy trial. Brauer set Jan. 17 for the next updates on Freel and Fix.



Dayton

PENDLETON

Sanitary service to stop taking plastics for recycling

East Oregonian

Pendleton Sanitary Service is no longer taking mixed plastics for recycling.

Mike McHenry, president, announced Wednesday that the containers for plastics #1-7 would be removed from collection sites at Fallen Field and the transfer station by Jan. 1.

Many sanitary services have stopped taking plastic in recent months after China announced it would no longer be importing 24 types of solid waste for recycling, including mixed plastics.

"This is a national and international issue, but the effects are very local," according to a news release from Pendleton Sanitary Service. "There are no markets to absorb

what China has refused to accept."

Empty butter containers, milk jugs and other plastics will no longer be taken at the transfer station, but individual-sized water bottles and pop bottles can still be redeemed for a 10 cent deposit at grocery stores and redemption centers.

Despite the problems with finding a new market for plastics, Pendleton Sanitary Service urges people to continue recycling other materials that are approved while tossing out items that are not so they do not contaminate the recyclables.

For more information on what can be accepted for recycling, visit pendletonsanitaryservice.com or call the transfer station at 541-276-1271.

BRIEFLY

High school opens new parking lot January 2

HERMISTON — Anyone who has been frustrated by trying to find a parking spot around Hermiston High School can rejoice in a new parking lot opening behind the school on Jan. 2.

The lot, which can be accessed via Orchard Avenue, was built on part of the former Umatilla County fairgrounds to help relieve congestion in the school's other parking lots and Highland Avenue.

Students will have access from the lot into the school via the doors by the weight room, which will be unlocked on the same



A new parking lot behind Hermiston High School opens Jan. 2. Contributed photo by Hermiston School District

schedule as the purple gym. All buses will continue to enter the school grounds from North First Street.

The first 200 students to use the weight room entrance from the new parking lot on Jan. 2 will be greeted with a free hot chocolate.

Mail theft hits near Hermiston

HERMISTON — The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office reported at least 40 Hermiston-area residents are the victims of recent mail theft.

The case began Dec. 5, according to the sheriff's office, when deputy Calvin Meade responded to a call regarding a report of mail all over the ground in the area of North Ott and East Loop roads, Hermiston.

"The mail included several envelopes that had been opened, including holiday cards with empty contents and checks," the sheriff's office reported.

Three Hermiston-area callers on Dec. 15 reported finding mail in the area of Sagebrush Road, Baggett Lane, Alpine Drive and Klaus Road, which connect to form a square east of Hermiston. They also found mail in other areas east of the town, including on East Punkin

Center and Tabor roads, East Theater Lane between Northeast 10th Street and Townsend Road, and Sagebrush and North Townsend roads.

Again, according to the sheriff's office, "the envelopes containing items of value were opened and the contents removed."

Meade determined at least 40 people were victims of mail theft. The sheriff's office notified each as well as the postmaster in Hermiston. The post office will

redeliver the mail to the victims, according to the sheriff's office.

The sheriff's office warned residents to be on the lookout for suspicious persons in the areas east of Hermiston and asked anyone with information regarding the mail theft to call the agency at 541-966-3651.

Briefs are compiled from staff and wire reports, and press releases. Email press releases to news@eastoregonian.com

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