



EAST OREGONIAN

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WINNER OF THE 2017 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

One dollar

HERMISTON



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Hermiston Parks and Recreation Director Larry Fetter says his department will be taking inventory and reevaluating the capabilities of the Hermiston Community Center.

PENDLETON

Downtown association asks for permanent funding

Council to form committee to look at funding sources

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

One year ago, the Pendleton Downtown Association left the Pendleton City Council chambers with one year of salary for their executive director and a stern warning to spend that year looking for alternative sources of funding.

On Tuesday, Molly Turner, the association's executive director, returned to the council and asked that the city help fund her position permanently.

Not including city staff members, about 25 people packed the council annex room to support the association for a council workshop, a monthly meeting that usually attracts two or three members of the public.

In front of the council once again, Turner made her pitch.

Under Turner's stewardship, she said the association's membership rose to 90 members and is expanding its executive board from seven members to nine.

The association has also spent the past year creating and sustaining events like the Pendleton Holiday Stroll and Pendleton Comes Alive. More events are planned for 2018, including a pub crawl and a three-on-three basketball tournament.

Turner also highlighted the initiatives the association has either implemented or is in the process of developing, like a downtown tree replacement program, a shopper's survey and a secret shopper program.

Through grants the association has obtained for projects like the Rivoli Theater restoration or fencing near the railroad tracks, Turner calculated that the association has generated \$5.74 for each dollar the city has spent on her salary.

While the association has looked toward other sources of funding, Turner said grants that cover operational costs are hard to come by.

"We're constantly seeking new and alternative grant source for funding, but there just aren't many out there," she said.

Turner proposed the city contribute \$55,000 annually to the downtown association's operations for the next two years, then giving \$40,000 for every year after that. She added that the city's funding would eventually be supplemented by an estimated \$35,000 from other sources, including membership dues, corporate sponsorships and fundraising events.

Turner said other downtown organizations receive funding from their local government, including groups in

See PENDLETON/8A

New focus on 'community'

Council changes name, policies at former conference center

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

The Hermiston Conference Center will now be known as the Hermiston Community Center after the city council approved a series of changes in policy and pricing at the building.

The city of Hermiston's parks and recreation department took over management of the center from the Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce on Jan. 1.

During Monday's city

council meeting parks and recreation director Larry Fetter said the goal of the policies adopted by the city is to "retain the original intent of the community center as a gathering space and home for diverse cultural and recreational programming." The city hopes now that the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center plus the new Maxwell Siding Event Center can take over some of the weddings and quinceañeras previously

See COMMUNITY/8A



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Participants in an agricultural safety seminar file out of the Hermiston Conference Center.

Councilors blast EOTEC for lack of planning

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

The Hermiston City Council vented frustration with the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center on Monday after hearing the center needs \$1.2 million and that the board has not yet adopted an official vision or long-term plan.

"Something has got to change," Mayor David Drotzmann said. "These knee-jerk reactions and decisions don't solve problems,

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— Mayor David Drotzmann

they create them."

The EOTEC board hired the venue-management company VenuWorks to operate the project starting Jan. 1, and one of the first things the company did was put together a list of everything they

needed to run EOTEC. The list ran the gamut from lawnmowers to storage sheds to completion of the RV park. The cost of fulfilling those needs was estimated at \$1.2 million.

Byron Smith, who is the

EOTEC board chair as well as the Hermiston city manager, said VenuWorks' original estimate that EOTEC could break even by 2020 is only true if the city and Umatilla County purchase the equipment (instead of adding rental costs to the operations budget), and if the RV park is completed so that it could become a source of revenue.

At a previous meeting, the

See EOTEC/8A

Megafires a growing concern for Climate Change Coalition



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Pendleton Fire Chief Mike Ciraulo speaks Saturday about how fire seasons are getting longer and more intense at Blue Mountain Community College.

Jeff Blackwood receives climate champion award

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

Jeff Blackwood sat back and listened, his brown eyes trained on the keynote speaker at the annual meeting (the first annual meeting) of the Eastern Oregon Climate Change Coalition.

Blackwood would soon be announced as the group's choice as 2018 Climate Champion, given to an Eastern Oregonian who raises local public awareness about climate change.

But Blackwood didn't know that yet. In front of the Blue Mountain Community College meeting room, Pendleton Fire Chief Mike Ciraulo talked about mammoth wildfires resulting from years

of intense fire suppression coupled with climate change. Ciraulo, who came to Oregon from California, has fought fire for 35 years. The job is getting harder.

"I've seen change," he said.

California has always had plenty of fire on the landscape. Ciraulo spoke of the frustration of working to save neighborhoods nestled into brushy and forested areas. He remembered packing up fire equipment afterwards and knowing they would someday return.

"We knew we would be back in 20 years," he said. "They will rebuild and it'll burn again."

Fast-forward to today and the rise of the megafires — infernos that exceed 100,000 acres. Hotter temperatures mean busier fire seasons.

Firefighters from all around the nation,

See CLIMATE/8A

