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EAST OREGONIAN

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

142nd Year, No. 95 WINNER OF THE 2017 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD One dollar

HERMISTON



A small excavator levels dirt while working on the festival street site Tuesday in Hermiston.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Upgrading downtown

Public and private projects push value up by \$8 million in first four years

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Hermiston's downtown district has added more than \$8 million in assessed value in just four years.

The blossoming of new and improved features has come in many forms, both public and private, and it's not done yet.

"There's lots of good news," city planner Clint Spencer said.

While large public projects like the festival street and Harkenrider Center — both under construction now — have been taking up most of the attention, Spencer said private businesses have also taken the initiative to complete projects on their own to enhance downtown.

A group of business owners meet regularly as the Hermiston Downtown District, whose mission is to "revitalize, enhance, and maintain the economic, social, aesthetic, and cultural environment of Hermiston's historic downtown area." On Monday they discussed beautification projects they



The Hermiston Downtown District is planning a "pocket park" in the courtyard in the 200 block of Main Street.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

have taken on, including flower baskets and a "pocket park" project they are planning for the large courtyard in the 200 block of Main Street.

Susie Bendixsen, office manager for Bendixsen Law, which looks out into the courtyard, said they would like to add planters and possibly a shade tree and wrought-iron benches similar to those in city parks.

"If somebody wants to go outside and eat a sandwich they'll have a place to do that," she said. "There's not a lot of places to sit downtown."

Bendixsen said business owners raised some money for the project last year with the help of RARE planner Emma Porricolo and will likely take turns watering the landscaping to save on irrigation costs.

Main Street is a brighter, more vital place than it was four years ago when the city council created the Hermiston Urban Renewal District to focus on downtown revitalization. During a presentation to the city council on Monday night, Spencer counted 27 total projects downtown since 2013 — 13

See DOWNTOWN/8A

With one week until deadline, many open races remain

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

When they receive it in the mail ahead of the May 15 election, thousands of Umatilla County residents could open up their ballot and not have much of a choice.

Although the Democratic nomination for Congressional District 2 is hotly contested and the Oregon State University Extension Service District will have a measure on the ballot, the filing period has been slow for local offices.

With a week left before the March 6 filing deadline, most seats only have one person running or no one running at all.

The offices up for election include state representative seats for district 57 and 58, three seats on the Circuit Court's Sixth District, two seats on the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners and half the seats on the city councils for the county's three largest cities: Hermiston, Pendleton and Milton-Freewater.

Legislature

Although he hasn't yet filed, the dean of the Oregon House of Representatives intends to run for a tenth term.

State Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, said he's been focused on the short legislative session in Salem, but he intends to file for re-election to his District 57 seat before the deadline.

"I better get on it," he said.

While he hasn't made his run official, Smith has continued to raise money for



Smith



Barreto

See BALLOT/8A

State will stop putting foster kids in hotels

By KRISTIAN FODEN-VENCIL
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon has agreed to stop temporarily housing foster children in hotel rooms, under an agreement to settle a 2016 lawsuit.

Two years ago, an investigation by OPB found that a lack of foster homes meant some kids were spending weeks in hotel rooms.

One child was housed for 80 days in a hotel.

Attorneys with Oregon's chapter of CASA filed suit. Tuesday's agreement settles that complaint.

The Oregon Department of Human Services has agreed to incrementally reduce the number of kids in hotels to no more than 24 per year by 2020. Additionally, children under the age of 11 cannot spend more than five nights in a hotel room.

If a child is housed in a hotel, the state must ensure he or she is transported to school.

The agreement also bans the state from temporarily lodging kids in welfare offices — except under limited circumstances.

The state has also agreed to hire an expert to uncover the root causes of emergency hotel placements and to find alternatives to the practice.

"State child welfare officials and children's advocates agreed that we all want to see children placed in stable and safe home-like settings that are close to their family and school," said Richard Vangelisti, a temporary guardian for two girls who were designated as plaintiffs in the suit.

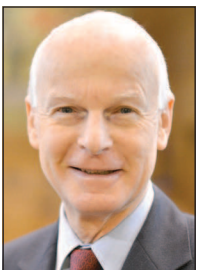
Richardson seeks staff to combat Russia meddling

By GORDON R. FRIEDMANN
The Oregonian/Oregonlive

Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson has asked the Legislature for \$166,000 to hire a staffer tasked with combating election hacking activities by the Russian government.

The request comes after the U.S. Department of Homeland Security analyzed Oregon's election security systems and found flaws, according to a state document outlining the budget request. Details of those flaws and how they should be corrected were given by federal officials to Richardson in a classified report in December, according to the document, signed by Leslie Cummings, the deputy secretary of state.

Richardson received an addi-



Richardson

tional classified briefing on Russian threats to state elections systems earlier in February. That briefing was given in Washington, D.C. by officials with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Federal Bureau of Investigation and Homeland Security. As secretary of state, Richardson is Oregon's top elections official.

Though details of Oregon's elections security flaws are secret, the secretary of state's office is firm that another staffer is needed to keep state elections

safe from enemy governments. The budget request document reads, "An additional IT security position is needed to expedite implementation of Homeland Security recommendations and protect Oregon elections from potential foreign interference."

Oregon officials have said the state was one of at least 21 that the Russian government targeted ahead of the 2016 presidential election. Richardson's agency has previously said the hacking attempts were not successful.

Digital firewalls protecting Oregon's elections systems stop an average of 24 million hacking attempts daily, according to the secretary of state's office. The agency has said those threats have come from Russia and other governments as well as individual actors.

