

EAST OREGONIAN

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142nd Year, No. 135

WINNER OF THE 2017 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

One dollar



Weston-McEwen senior Christina Swafford poses in the dress she won, along with a \$2,000 scholarship and 100 prom dresses, from the Portland charity Abby's Closet. Abby's Closet collects and redistributes used formal dresses to high school students in need.

Christina's closet

Weston-McEwen student helps distribute 100 prom dresses

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

The dreams of dozens of teenage girls were in a trailer on the edge of an Athena wheat field.

In the waning days of March, Weston-McEwen High School senior Christina Swafford and her parents traveled to Portland and packed 100 prom dresses into the back of their Honda Pilot. When they arrived home in Athena, they installed clothing racks and paneled flooring into a storage trailer, converting it into a walk-in closet that included a makeshift dressing room.

"We put it to way better use than storing ATVs," Christina said.

The trailer is mostly empty on Wednesday: Christina gave out 30 dresses to her peers at Weston-McEwen and followed it up with deliveries to Hermiston, Pilot Rock, Ione and Pendleton.

Although this was the first time Christina had distributed prom dresses on such a scale, it was not her first experience lending out formal wear to other students.

Ever since she learned how expensive formal dresses could be during her eighth grade graduation, Christina and her mother began collecting dresses to lend out to local students who had trouble affording them.

The pair scoured thrift shops and clearance racks at department stores, adding them to Christina's old dresses to assemble a small



Christina Swafford converted her family's utility trailer into a mobile dress shop.

collection that was rented out to about 10 girls each year.

Christina continued her side project into her senior year as she started looking into scholarships to help pay for college.

That's when she found out about Abby's Closet, a Portland nonprofit that donates thousands of secondhand and surplus prom dresses each year in addition to awarding an annual scholarship.

When she informed Abby's Closet about her own project in her application, the organization not only awarded her the \$2,000 scholarship, but gave her 100 dresses from

See CHRISTINA/3A

Father
rescues
child,
drowns

East Oregonian

UMATILLA — A father died after saving his son from drowning in the Columbia River.

Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan reported a family was fishing Wednesday evening near the Umatilla Marina on the Columbia River when the young boy slipped into the water. The father jumped in to rescue his son.

Umatilla Police Chief Darla Huxel said the father saved his son, but later drowned. Rowan said the man died after several minutes of CPR.

Emergency responders took the boy to Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston, for treatment of symptoms of hypothermia. Huxel said the wife and mother was present and went to the hospital with her son, who was alive.

Authorities did not have the boy's medical condition or release the identities of the family.

Huxel said while the drowning occurred within the jurisdiction of Umatilla police, the sheriff's marine deputy would also investigate the death.

Lawmakers
test their
geography

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

Civic leaders and educators asked visiting lawmakers Wednesday to remember the eastern side of the state as they consider how to help students.

"One trend I've seen in my state work is that geography matters," said Umatilla School District Superintendent Heidi Sipe. "The only way to ensure that rural students with all the talent and none of the access can succeed is to ensure partnerships."

The 14 members of the Joint Interim Committee on Student Success visited Hermiston High School as part of the listening tour they hope will help them shape education in the years to come.

The legislators were in the

See EDUCATION/6A

MAY ELECTION

Campaign money in,
money out in local races

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Umatilla County commissioner candidate John Shafer has bucked the trend of local politicians relying on themselves or family to support their campaigns.

Shafer, the mayor of Athena, is seeking the Position 2 seat on the county board of commissioners. Commissioner Larry Givens has raised \$14,442 to keep the seat, according to the Oregon Secretary of State's online database of campaign finances, with more than \$9,400 in loans from the ranch he and his wife own.

But retired firefighter Charles Danforth of Milton-Freewater has donated \$7,000 cash so far to Shafer's

Hear the candidates

The candidates for Umatilla County commissioner and District Court judge have another opportunity to convince voters.

All five commissioner candidates will appear for a forum Monday, 6:30-8:30 p.m., at the American Legion Building, 500 W. Broadway Ave., Milton-Freewater.

And the two judge candidates will make their case at a bar association forum Thursday at 5:30 p.m.

effort, plus another \$8,262 in-kind for radio advertisements. Danforth's mother-in-law, Ann Jolly of Milton-Freewater, continues to hold the No. 2 spot in Shafer's campaign with her \$2,000 contribution.

Shafer has raised about \$20,800



Umatilla County Commissioner candidate John Shafer has raised \$6,000 more in campaign contributions than his opponent, incumbent Larry Givens.

in all, including \$419 in cash and in-kind from himself and his immediate family.

Danforth said his support for Shafer is not about having his personal commissioner on the board should Shafer win. Rather,

Danforth said, Shafer is honest and well-qualified for the job of county commissioner. He also said he has nothing personal against Givens, but three terms for a total of 12 years on the board is enough.

See CAMPAIGN/3A