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142nd Year, No. 162 WINNER OF THE 2017 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD \$1.50

CLASS OF 2018

THE PATH TO SUCCESS



Marvin Hozi poses with two of the three academic achievement stoles the valedictorian will wear at the Hermiston High School graduation ceremony.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Baghdad-born student reaches top of the class

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

When Marvin Hozi walks across the stage to receive his diploma, he knows exactly where his next steps will lead.

Hozi, born in Iraq, is one of 10 Hermiston High School valedictorians this year. And he has already staked the next two stops in his academic career.

The future computer science major has plans to attend George Fox University in Newberg, then pursue a master's degree at Stanford. But before rising to the top of Hermiston's Class of 2018, Hozi endured challenges many students can't imagine.

"I lived in Baghdad (Iraq) from birth to 2006," he said. When he was six, his family fled from the violence and war in his home country to Jordan, and about a year later came to the United States as refugees. From New York they moved to California and then to Oregon.

Some of his relatives on his mother's side still live in Iraq, but Hozi said he has not returned since leaving, due to violence still plaguing the region.

"I do want to go back and visit, once things improve," he said.

Valedictorians:

Learn why Hermiston has ten and Pendleton has zero. **Page 10A**

When he started fifth grade in Hermiston, no one in his family spoke English. In an effort to support his family, Hozi began learning.

"I started by listening to music, watching movies, listening to how people talk," he said.

He still speaks Arabic at home with his parents — his father owns a jewelry business and his mother does embroidery work.

The hard work he put in as a student in Hermiston paid off when Hozi started applying to colleges — but it led to a dilemma as well. No matter where he decided to attend, Hozi thought he would have to turn down a full scholarship.

He applied to George Fox University and decided while he was at it, he would try his luck and apply to prestigious Stanford University, too.

"I got the news about George Fox first," he said. And with an offer to attend the school on a full scholarship, it initially seemed like it would be an easy choice. But he soon learned that he had not only been accepted to Stanford, but had secured

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Using drugs and on the verge of dropping out, Pendleton student turns it around to graduate

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

By the end of her freshman year at Pendleton High School, Mikeighla Velasquez had only attended 30 days of school and was dealing with some serious drug abuse problems.

By her own admission, Mikeighla never thought she would make it to graduation.

She won't be walking across the Round-Up infield grass to receive her diploma on Saturday, not because she came up short, but because she graduated Wednesday as a member of Hawthorne Alternative High

School's Class of 2018.

It's a dramatic change for the girl who arrived as an overwhelmed freshman at Pendleton's flagship high school, stressed out by the enormity of campus and its population.

Her personal life wasn't any easier either, as she found herself smoking marijuana and using methamphetamine in her down time.

"I didn't necessarily care about school," she said.

Mikeighla's troubles culminated when her mom had to appear in court to account for her daughter's truancy issues, which spurred Mikeighla to

See VELASQUEZ/10A



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Mikeighla Velasquez will graduate from Hawthorne Alternative High School.

HERMISTON

Foundation for giving

New nonprofit fund offers way to donate sustainably

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

For Hermiston residents who want to give back to their community, there is no shortage of options.

Rather than adding to that list, the Greater Hermiston Community Foundation is creating a sustainable fund it hopes will benefit the region for years to come.

The newly created foundation's goal is to harness some of the area's well-known generosity into an endowment fund that will allow donors' gifts

to give perpetually through interest earned on the fund's investments.

"This community is dedicated to making itself better and if we can help with that we will succeed in our mission," board member Nate Rivera said.

Dennis Barnett, of accounting firm Barnett & Moro, said he came to Hermiston just after college with nothing but a degree and "a few shekels in my pocket." All of the career success and wealth he has gained since then has been thanks to the community, he said, and he wants to give some of it back. In his line of work he frequently speaks with people

See GENEROSITY/10A



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Bricks at the Hermiston Public Library display the names of donors.

