

Fireworks return to Pendleton



Fireworks lit up the sky Wednesday night in Pendleton.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Criss, Carrie and Jordan Jenkins set up their lawn chairs on a prime piece of lawn almost two hours before the Pendleton fireworks show began. The Jenkins were visiting from Meridian, Idaho.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney



GLARE: ODOT, FAA signed off on project

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the reflectivity of residential and commercial reflective surfaces. We are currently working with a third party consulting partner to further analyze the project's reflective light and take the appropriate mitigation measures if necessary. Cypress Creek is 100 percent committed to ensuring we follow any and all safety measures on our projects. It's our top priority."

McKay's comments

about photovoltaic panels are echoed by a 2014 study on solar panels commissioned by the U.S. Department of Energy.

The study states that it's "a common misconception" that solar panels are a safety risk or nuisance to air pilots and citizens.

While the study concedes that "certain situations" might produce glint or glare, photovoltaic panels are designed to reflect "as little as two percent of incoming sunlight."

Chrisman said the Federal Aviation Administration and the Oregon Department of Transportation signed off on the project when it started.

Through its subsidiary NorWest 9, Cypress Creek Renewables started building the 6-megawatt, 58-acre solar farm in May.

In development since 2014, the power generated by the solar farm will be sold to Pacific Power.

The Santa Monica, California-based company operates 70 solar arrays across

seven states, including Oregon, Idaho, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Indiana and Minnesota, according to the Cypress Creek website.

Not including the in-progress Pendleton facility, the company's Oregon arrays generate more than 78 megawatts across seven facilities in Bend, Nyssa, Ontario and Vale.

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SWEETNESS: Typical growing season this year

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Watermelons absorb heat during the day, which the plants metabolize into sugar for energy.

Once they cool off at night, the respiration process slows down and all that sugar gets stored in the fruit, hence their exceptionally sweet flavor.

Walchli said this year has been a mostly typical growing season, compared to last year when planting got off to a slow start.

"Last season, we had a colder start and this year we had a more favorable May and end of April," he said. "It's hard to predict. Melons are very reactive to the weather, more so than some of the other crops."

Scott Lukas, assistant professor of horticulture for Oregon State University, recently started a new

research program at OSU's Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center with a partial focus on watermelons. He said growers have reported few issues with disease pressure, and for the most part the vines have been growing well.

"This has been a good season so far," Lukas said. "I've heard the plants are looking good, and they are growing as they should."

Hired by HAREC in 2016, Lukas has spent the last couple of years studying treatments for soil-borne fusarium and verticillium wilt diseases in watermelons.

He plans to expand his program next year to include more irrigation trials using remote sensors to monitor soil moisture, and help farmers conserve water.

Precision agriculture and modern technology have led to increased yields which in turn has helped to expand markets for Hermiston watermelons throughout the region, said Chris McNamee, a sales representative for Botsford & Goodfellow.

Based in Clackamas with a field office in Hermiston, Botsford & Goodfellow handles all marketing for Hermiston watermelons. McNamee said watermelon sales have increased every year for the last five years, and the Hermiston brand has become firmly established in major metro areas including Portland and Seattle.

"They've supported us really well," McNamee said. "It's allowed us to grow, which is great."

In 2012, Florida, Georgia, California and Texas accounted for two-thirds

of all watermelon production across the country. Though Hermiston may account for just a blip on the national watermelon radar, McNamee said they are undeniably popular in the Northwest.

"They get the sugar right, and they get them picked at the right time," he said. "It stands out compared to the competition."

Jack Bellinger, with Bellinger Farms, said he has already cut about a dozen watermelons off the vine and is excited about this year's quality, which he attributes to a consistent growing season.

"People are getting excited to see them on their plates. And we are excited too," Bellinger said. "The quality this year I think is going to be really exceptional."

a brief shout-out, offering no sign of any immediate change in his job.

EPA Deputy Administrator Andrew Wheeler, a former coal lobbyist, will take the helm as acting administrator starting Monday.

Pruitt's resignation came days after two of his closest



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Rigo Garcia, owner of Tacos Garcia, serves customers at his food truck Thursday in Hermiston.

TRUCKS: Most closed due to onerous regulations

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In recent years food trucks have gained in popularity nationwide, and the city has decided to reconsider its mobile food vending ordinance, particularly in regards to the three-license limit. A survey about food trucks is available on the city's website until July 15.

Garcia said people may have pushed for an ordinance because there is a stereotype that food trucks are dirty and unsafe, but he buys high-quality ingredients and follows the same food-handling guidelines as restaurants.

"Some people think the taco trucks are dirty, but I'm very clean, personally," he said. "I cook fresh meat every day. I clean the grill every day. I love my customers."

Not everyone is unhappy with the current rules. Tacos Paricutin, often parked behind Cottage Flowers, is one of the trucks that chose to remain open after the 2013 regulations were put in place. Maricela Medrano, who was serving up tacos to customers on Thursday afternoon, said her parents have run the business for 24 years and didn't have an issue applying for a license and complying with city regulations.

They hadn't had to make many changes, and hadn't been interested in providing seating anyway.

"Everything's good," she said, shrugging.

Hermiston's current mobile food vendors are all taco trucks, but that wasn't always the case. Patrick Hunt, who operates the Southern Twain BBQ truck in Pendleton, said he would love to bring some more diversity back to Hermiston's food truck scene.

Hunt, who lives in Hermiston, said he applied for a license at city hall a couple of years ago but was told that all of the licenses were taken. So he started his business in Pendleton instead.

"I didn't really want to leave Hermiston, because that's where I'm at and people know me, but I was kind of forced to," he said.

Originally from North Carolina, Hunt brings his East Coast roots to his barbecue, and his brisket reflects time he spent in Texas. He moved to Oregon to work on wind turbines and began sharing his cooking with coworkers, which he eventually decided to turn into a career.

"I was raised to cook

BBQ as a celebratory thing," he said. "I like to see people happy. I'm not going to be a millionaire off a food truck, but you get people together and help them be happy."

Hunt said he would love to see Hermiston change its rules, and would be interested in starting a second location there.

"I don't think it would be right, just because Hermiston changed its rules, to take this food away from Pendleton. I'm not that kind of person," he said. "But I would be looking for a second unit."

He said he believes Hermiston should start a food truck "pod" where several trucks could park at once (something one of the city's survey questions asks about) or a regular "food truck night" that could bring in vendors from around the region. Walla Walla already has a food truck night, he said, and other nearby cities are considering food truck pods.

"I want to make sure Hermiston knows if they don't jump on the wagon, other towns will," he said.

When most of Hermiston's food trucks closed up shop or moved their business elsewhere in 2013, Tacos Xavi owners Gabriela Rodriguez and Luis Diaz were one of the few that did apply for a license.

Rodriguez said they had to make some adjustments to their truck and their business after the city adopted regulations, but they had decided it was worth it to do what they needed to continue operating in Hermiston.

"We live from that," she said of the business. "It's our income."

They have operated since 2010, first as a trailer on Main Street and then as a truck behind Payless Shoes. Diaz said they have grown during that time, adding two employees and expanding their offerings from three meats to eight. They also serve food at local events like Cinco de Mayo, Funfest and the Fourth of July celebration at Butte Park.

He said they had looked into setting up a sit-down restaurant, but their customers tend to be people who have 30 minutes for lunch and are looking to grab something quickly and be on their way. A food truck is more conducive to that.

"People want their food fast," he said.

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Food truck survey online

The city of Hermiston is considering changes to its mobile food vendor ordinance and is conducting a survey.

The survey is available in English and Spanish on the city's website at hermiston.or.us until July 15.

Residents can give feedback on the number of licenses for food vendors, the idea of a food truck pod, whether smaller food carts like hot dog stands should be allowed and whether the city should issue temporary licenses.

EPA: Former coal industry lobbyist Andrew Wheeler to be new agency head

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for Pruitt's resignation.

"Scott is a terrific guy," Trump said. "He came to me and said I have such great confidence in the administration I don't want to be a distraction. ... He'll go and do great things and have a

wonderful life, I hope."

In his resignation letter to Rump, obtained by The Associated Press, Pruitt expressed no regrets.

"It is extremely difficult for me to cease serving you in this role first because I count it a blessing to be serving you in any capac-

ity, but also, because of the transformative work that is occurring," Pruitt wrote.

Pruitt, a Republican, had appeared Wednesday at a White House picnic for Independence Day, wearing a red-checked shirt and loafers with gold trim. Trump gave him and other officials

est advisers spoke to House oversight committee new-

investigators and revealed embarrassing details in ethics scandals involving Pruitt.

Samantha Dravis, who recently resigned as Pruitt's policy chief, told investigators last week that Pruitt had made clear to her before and

after he became EPA administrator that he would like the attorney general's job, held then and now by Jeff Sessions.

Pruitt "had hinted at that (sic) some sort of conversation had taken place between he and the president," Dravis told investigators.