

**IRRIGON**

# Watermelon festival features generous slices of outdoor fun

By **TAMMY MALGESINI**  
East Oregonian

A homegrown festival that's going on its 34th year is ready to offer family-friendly fun to go along with lots of watermelons.

The Irrigon Watermelon Festival kicks off Saturday with a morning breakfast from 6:30-9:30 a.m. While there is a fee to eat, there is no charge to enter Irrigon Marina Park for activities that will run into the night.

A parade will wind through town beginning at 10 a.m. People are encouraged to register early, but may join the parade after registering Saturday morning between 8-9:45 a.m.

The main stage entertainment headliner is The Wasteland Kings, a La Grande rock 'n' roll band — otherwise, most of the other acts include people with local roots.

"We try to have as much local entertainment as we can," said Charlene Cooley, one of the event organizers.

Cooley is especially excited to have Wade Aylett on at noon and 5 p.m. The Oregon native who lives in Irrigon sings country music.

Another highlight, Cooley said, is the City Leader Seed Spitting Contest (3:30 p.m.). It pits area government officials who will compete mano-a-mano — showing off their spitting prowess with watermelon seeds.

Also, back this year is a lip sync contest. Popular during the early days of the festival, Cooley said it was brought back in 2017 after a 12-year hiatus.

"It went over really well," she said. "People really seemed to like it."

The festival also is known for its raffles —



**Brooke Toler and Nikki Phillips, Irrigon Junior-Senior High School students, serve up plates of melons during the 2016 Irrigon Watermelon Festival. This year's event is Saturday at Irrigon Marina Park.**

offering those in attendance several ways to walk away as winners. General raffle tickets are \$1 each or six for \$5. Some of the items up for grabs includes admission to Triple Play Family Fun Park, including Raptor Reef indoor waterpark; tickets to Silverwood Theme Park; Tri-City Dust Devils tickets; a Pendleton Round-Up ticket package; gift certificates and swag from local businesses, and more. Also, a 50-50 raffle offers half of the pot from sales of the 2018 event button, which are \$2. And, 300 tickets (\$10 each) will be sold for the Fisherman's Dream. Valued at \$1,200, the package provides a guided steelhead

trip for six people by Stahl's Guide Service and a custom steelhead rod by Castaway Custom Rods.

In addition to watermelon sold by the slice, a barbecued chicken dinner will be available for purchase. About two dozen vendors are confirmed and more are likely to come on board by the weekend, Cooley said. Also, the Oregon National Guard will land a helicopter of the baseball field and display some of their armored vehicles. And for the adventurous, they will offer a rock climbing wall.

Derrick Kestler is getting revved up for the event's car show. He invites people to join the parade and then dis-

play their vehicle at the park. The participation fee is \$15 with registration from 9 a.m. to noon. There are multiple categories, and trophy presentations will be made at 3 p.m. For questions, call Kestler at 541-571-0421.

The evening crescendos with a street dance.

"It's just a lot of fun," Cooley said. "We have a lot of entertainment for all ages."

For more information, call Cooley at 541-571-8541 or visit [www.facebook.com/irrigonwatermelonfestival](http://www.facebook.com/irrigonwatermelonfestival).

Contact Community Editor Tammy Malgesini at [tmalgesini@eastoregonian.com](mailto:tmalgesini@eastoregonian.com) or 541-564-4539

**PENDLETON**

# City hands fire chief search to outside organization

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
East Oregonian

The city of Pendleton is outsourcing its search for a new fire chief.

Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts said the city signed a contract with the Western Fire Chiefs Association to find a permanent replacement for former fire chief Mike Ciraulo, who abruptly retired in April.

Roberts said the association would start its search in August, but he didn't know when it would recommend a hire.

The contract comes with some assurance that the association will deliver a quality candidate.

Roberts said the city won't have to pay the association until it makes a fire chief hire and retains them for a year after the hiring date. If those markers aren't met, the association continues the search.

Although he oversees the fire department as the city's public safety director, Roberts said City Manager

Robb Corbett will have final authority over hiring a new fire chief. According to the police chief, Corbett will also make the decision about whether Roberts will continue to supervise the fire chief position going forward.

While Ciraulo has never publicly stated why he retired after more than two years as chief, Roberts' role in monitoring the fire chief position was a point of contention in his two-year evaluation document.

Following Ciraulo's retirement, residents and members of the firefighters union voiced their opposition to the move at a city council meeting.

Shawn Penninger, the assistant chief and fire marshal, is leading the fire department in the interim. He announced Tuesday night at the Pendleton city council meeting that the city has hired a temporary employee, with the title of assistant fire chief, to assist Penninger.

## Free Medicare workshops coming August

East Oregonian

Residents of Eastern Oregon will be able to learn the basics of Medicare for free in a series of local workshops in August. The class, hosted by the Oregon Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assistance program, will cover the basics of Medicare benefits, how to enroll, how much Medicare costs, types of financial help available, and where Medicare recipients can go for help.

The workshops are open to anyone, but are aimed at those interested in enrolling in Medicare, health care professionals who work with Medicare recipients, and those who work with retirees or disabled people.

To attend, call 503-947-7302 or email [shiba.oregon@oregon.gov](mailto:shiba.oregon@oregon.gov). Walk-ins will be allowed as space permits.

A list of local workshops and dates is below:

- Milton-Freewater Public Library, 8 SW 8th Ave., Milton-Freewater, Aug. 7, 1-3 p.m.
- Umatilla Public Library, 911 7th ST., Umatilla, Aug. 8, 1-3 p.m.
- St. Anthony Hospital, 2801 St. Anthony Way, Pendleton, Aug. 8, 6-8 p.m.
- Stanfield Public Library, 180 W. Coe Ave., Stanfield, Aug. 9, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.
- Good Shepherd Medical Center, 610 NW 11th St., Hermiston, Aug. 9, 6-8 p.m.

## Wilson Prairie Fire burns 120 acres in Morrow County

East Oregonian

Firefighters worked overnight to corner a wildland blaze in the southwest corner of Morrow County in the Off-Highway Vehicle Park.

The Wilson Prairie Fire was reported Monday on Oregon Department of Forestry land and spread to 120 acres and into the nearby Umatilla National Forest.

According to a release from ODF, the fire consumed acres of grass, brush and timber, but fire crews were able to contain it inside retardant lines cut by bulldozers in an overnight effort.

No closures or evacuations have been ordered, and the cause of the fire is still under investigation.

Fresh crews arrived Tuesday to relieve firefighters who worked overnight. Personnel include Oregon Department of Corrections and contracted crews, as well as three bulldozers, two water tenders, eight ODF fire engines and resources from the Heppner Ranger District in the Umatilla National Forest. Helicopters and air tankers are also available as needed.

On Tuesday the new crews began mopping up along the fireline and reinforcing the perimeter to make sure the fire remains contained.

Hot and dry conditions increase the potential for fire growth, and restrictions are in place for both ODF and Umatilla National Forest land.

# CDA director says depot transfer is close

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
East Oregonian

There's just one box left to check before the former Umatilla Chemical Depot can be transferred to local control.

How long it will take is still unknown.

At a Columbia Development Authority board meeting Tuesday morning, director Greg Smith told the board that all that was left was for the necessary par-

ties to wrap up the Section 106 process, which relates to agreement between the Army, state and tribal officials and the local development authority concerning the best strategy to manage habitat, historical and cultural concerns while also allowing for economic development on the former Army depot.

Smith said if the CDA and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation could come to an

agreement by the end of the month, other agencies should be ready to give their blessing and the land could be transferred by September.

"Which year?" is the running joke on the CDA board after years of delays on the transfer, but Smith said this time it really is close.

"Genuinely this is the last piece," he said. "Everything else in terms of the checklist for transferring real estate is done."

The tribes and the CDA

board have been negotiating over protection of wildlife habitat, areas of cultural significance to the tribes and a portion of the Oregon Trail that runs through the depot but have not yet been able to come to a final agreement.

Most of Tuesday's meeting was in closed-door executive session "to conduct deliberations with persons designated by the governing body to negotiate real property transactions."

## Pendleton police raise red flag about IRS money scam

PENDLETON — Pendleton police are warning residents not to fall for the IRS phone scam going around town.

Shelly Studebaker, community services officer for the Pendleton Police Department, said more than a dozen residents reported the scam. The calls show a New York number from someone claiming to be with the IRS and threatening to arrest people for not paying taxes. The scam asked people to buy gifts or cash cards to make the payments.

Studebaker said the calls seem to be going after older residents, and she is putting the word out at the senior center and other facilities to raise awareness.

Pendleton police in a written statement advised

residents not to answer the calls from unknown numbers and don't return any messages. The IRS will not call, email, text or use social media to contact you, according to Pendleton police, nor will the federal department threaten arrests or demand immediate payment. The IRS also does not accept payments in the form of gift or cash cards.

Pendleton police also advised locals to call the department at 541-276-4411 to report losing funds in a scam.

## Strings camp crescendos with free concert

PENDLETON — A concert featuring intermediate and advanced level chamber ensembles and beginner through advanced level orchestras will perform a concert in Pendleton.

Presented by the Oregon

East Symphony, the week-long Summer Strings Music Camp kicked off Monday. The public is invited to the free performance Friday at 5 p.m. at Peace Lutheran Church, 210 N.W. Ninth St., Pendleton.

Camp instructors include Zach Banks, a cellist and Oregon East Symphony educator; Austin Schlichting, a Bellingham, Washington-based violinist/composer; Emma Knight and Melinda Tovey, both violinists and local instructors; and cellist and Ethos music

instructor Sammy Elwell and his wife, Amy, also a cellist. The camp is directed by Loree McKenna. This year's camp is made possible in part due to a generous contribution by the Pendleton on Wheels Foundation.

For more information, contact OES executive director J.D. Kindle at [oesdirectorms@gmail.com](mailto:oesdirectorms@gmail.com).

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