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Homeless in Pendleton

Locals share stories of life on the street and lack of resources in Eastern Oregon



Linda Kuppenbender checks her messages on a tablet while sitting in her car at Community Park on Wednesday evening in Pendleton. Kuppenbender, who is homeless, will stay in town until after dark before driving out of the city limits to find a place to park her car and bed down for the evening. Staff photo by E.J. Harris

By BRITTANY NORTON and ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

Linda Kuppenbender fills her sketchbook with a mix of the realistic and fantastic, a space where women in various poses give way to dragons and other mythical beasts.

Outside her sketchbook, Kuppenbender's existence is firmly grounded in reality. It's early July and she's sitting at a table underneath the Stillman Park shelter, which provides shade and outlets to charge her phone. Her tan station wagon is parked nearby, which is where she has slept most nights since she says she was forced out of her apartment in March 2017 due to black mold issues.

She's a member of Pendleton's growing homeless community.

Kuppenbender has parked the car in several spots in and around town, but she said she has been cited for sleeping in her car overnight and can't afford another fine.

She relies on Social Security for

money, and when she can afford it, Kuppenbender said she will put some gas in her car and move to a new location.

While Social Security might cover some necessities, it has proven insufficient in helping her find permanent housing.

Kuppenbender said all the apartments she has looked at are \$500 a month and higher — and in poor condition.

She rejects some of the other hallmarks of local homelessness: She refuses to panhandle and she doesn't like staying at the warming station because of the proximity to people with substance abuse issues.

"I try to live like a lady, but it's hard being a lady out here," she said.

Kuppenbender said she wants people in Pendleton to know that homeless people aren't worthy of their contempt, and that everyone's ancestors were homeless at some point in time.

See HOMELESS/10A

Homeless services stretching to keep up with increased need

By BRITTANY NORTON and ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

There were 511 homeless people in Umatilla County on January 31, 2018, according to the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon. About 290 of them were living in Pendleton.

Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts said that population is increasing, though he couldn't provide his own quantifiable number.

Transients frequently panhandle near the Pendleton Wal-Mart, but many try to stay out of sight, whether it's in a tent along the Umatilla River, in an RV on a secluded street, or a nook in a public park.

Just this summer, Roberts said Stillman Park on Byers Avenue has become a hub for homeless people looking for a place to spend the day. It has shade and benches, bathrooms and a place to charge cell phones and electronics.

Police cruisers can often be spotted patrolling the parking lot across from Stillman, but Roberts said that law enforcement presence is supposed to act more as a deterrent than a response.

He said he could send officers to a place like the Salvation Army and would likely find several homeless people wanted on warrants, but he doesn't want to take that approach.

See SERVICES/10A

Oregon voters to decide on state funding for abortions

By ANDREW SELSKY
Associated Press

SALEM — Oregon voters will decide in November whether one of America's most progressive states should keep funding abortions.

Opponents of the funding gathered just enough signatures to put the issue on the ballot, the secretary of state's office said Friday.

"I'm thrilled," said Marilyn Shannon, one of the chief petitioners. "We've been trying to do

this since 2012."

The retired schoolteacher and former Republican state senator said she opposes abortion.

Gov. Kate Brown, a Democratic, last year signed a bill expanding coverage on abortions and other reproductive services to thousands of Oregonians, regardless of income, citizenship status or gender identity.

The measure going before Oregon voters says the state "shall not spend public funds for any abor-

tion, except when medically necessary or as may be required by federal law."

Similar measures failed in 1978, with 52 percent voting against the move, and in 1986, when 55 percent of voters were opposed.

Emily McLain, executive director of Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon, said the new measure isn't aligned with the values of Oregonians.

"One of the biggest

See FUNDING/9A

HERMISTON

Indoor pool plan dips toe in water

Center is high on residents' wish list

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

The city of Hermiston is getting serious about an indoor pool.

A 2016 survey showed an indoor aquatic center was the top "livability" priority for Hermiston residents, and the city is in the midst of a feasibility study to determine what it would take to get there.

City Manager Byron Smith said he expected staff would have something to present to the city council in October.

See POOL/9A

