



Photo by Antonio Sierra
Lisa Day of Hermiston, right, walks with her family in Roy Raley Park as a part of the Pendleton Out of the Darkness event.

SUICIDE: Locals walk through pain for awareness, prevention

Continued from 1A

Among Brooke’s necklaces was a purple one, to commemorate Minkler, her uncle. Minkler resided in Alaska, and during one of his trips down to the continental Northwest to visit his family, Brooke and her mom took him to Spirit Lake in Idaho, a day she remembered filled with swimming and racing. But Minkler also struggled with depression, and in 2013, he took his own life. Brooke said it was great to have so many people that knew what she was going through at the walk, but it was also a reflection of the growing number of people who are dealing with the problem. “Each year, this group gets larger and larger,” she said. Amanda Walsborn, the walk chair and a Umatilla County health supervisor, said more than 100 people registered online and more joined as walk-ups. Walsborn said 16 people in Umatilla County died from suicide in 2016, the most recent year the county has data from. With suicide trending upward locally, Walsborn expects that number to rise when 2017’s data is released in January or February. The Out of the Darkness walk has been happening in Pendleton for several years, but this was the first time

Walsborn organized it. She said the goal of the walk was not only to raise awareness about suicide and mental illness, but also to connect people with local services. Representatives from Lifeways, Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Inc., Umatilla County Veteran Services, Good Shepherd Health Care System, and the Oregon Family Support Network were all on hand to answer questions and concerns. Also present was the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, a non-profit dedicated to suicide prevention research. Oregon’s representative on the foundation board, volunteer Kristy Makowichuk traveled from Portland to address the crowd and hand out information. Suicide is a statewide issue as well. According to data compiled by the foundation, Oregon ranks 16th in the nation in terms of suicide, with one person dying by their own hands every 11 hours on average. “Your presence here is breaking the silence around suicide and mental health,” she told participants. It took time for Brooke and her family work through the emotional toll of Minkler’s death. Brooke’s mother, Jonie Mills, said Minkler was literally her baby brother — she changed his diapers when he was a kid — and

she spent the days after his death questioning whether she could have saved him if she had reached out in the right way. Sometimes people outside the family would tell her that Minkler had made a selfish choice, a sentiment Mills said goes against “the language of healing” she wants to promote. Brooke and her family weren’t the only ones who walked on Saturday. Many families walked in large groups to support their loved ones. Decked out in matching black shirts that read “Team Trevor” on them, Lisa Day and her family stuck out. Trevor Barney was technically a distant relative to Day and her family, but she said he felt like a brother to them. “He was just a big teddy bear,” the Hermiston resident said. A Utah resident, Day said Barney loved the Oregon Coast. Over the course of the entire walk, Day carried a sign with a picture of Barney at Fort Stevens State Park on the north coast. Barney killed himself in 2015, and when she recently saw a flier for the walk at Good Shepherd and felt inspired to go in honor of Barney’s memory. Although Barney’s death was an emotional blow to the family, Day said she’s used it as an impetus to check in on her own kids’ mental health more often.

STEELHEAD: Numbers are down

Continued from 1A

Fish management programs with ODFW and the Confederates Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation tag juvenile salmon going out of the Umatilla River system, then detect those tags when the fish return. “That gives us the ability to predict how many are returning to the area,” Duke said, and the predictions show the number of fish near

historic lows. Poor ocean conditions are likely responsible for the decrease. “So when they get to the ocean, there’s just not enough food,” Duke said. He added, “And if they hit when there’s not enough, then that makes them food.” The state will close steelhead fishing on the Walla Walla River effective Dec. 1. The season reopens April 30, 2019 for both riv-

ers. Duck said ending steelhead fishing and reducing the limit on salmon ensures enough fish remain for hatchery programs. He also said the department hopes next year’s returns are back to normal, but that is going to depend on ocean conditions. For more information on regulations and fishing opportunities in northeast Oregon, visit <https://myodfw.com>.

HALL: M-F city officials secure grant to help reopen uninhabited third floor

Continued from 1A

“The numerous recitals, productions and readings that were held throughout the years were a constant source of entertainment and enlightenment for the citizens,” the register states. “Many performances were held in the auditorium, often free of charge, and as a requirement of graduation every student needed to perform in the auditorium.” Today, the room sits empty, a fact that Craig Rouse said is an accomplishment in it of itself. By the 1970s, the city had abandoned the auditorium and used the space for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning ducts in addition to storage. The city’s parks and recreation supervisor with experience in construction and carpentry, Rouse and other city workers removed the junk and ducts and filled in the floorboards where the ducts were plugged in. Cleared of its various detritus, it’s an easy walk in the long room from the stage to the bleachers in the back. Hall said the city wants to convert it into city council chambers, which would move public meetings from the public library next door. Rouse said the city’s efforts at an interior renovation started in earnest two years ago, when Eastern Oregon was hit with a heavy winter. Forced indoors, Rouse said workers from the parks and building departments got to work chipping away the paint and refinishing the wainscoting and stairs to resemble the building’s historical character. Crews also eventually removed storage material and installed insulation in the attic, where they found a pair of women’s stockings and underwear, which



The city of Milton bought the building that now houses their city hall in 1929. Staff photo by E.J. Harris

remain there. A lot of stories in this old girl,” Rouse said, referring to city hall. A vision of things to come, city workers completely restored a meeting room, with Rouse refinishing and reinstalling an original cabinet that had been thrown into storage. While the meeting room is the closest thing to a finished product on the third floor, the city’s plans call for it to be altered once again. Brian Steadman, the public works superintendent, said the room’s southern wall will be replaced with an entrance to an exterior elevator that will ferry members of the public to city hall’s second and third floors. Steadman said the city drew up plans for an elevator in 2012, but the cost of building the elevator plus the mandatory exterior staircase that must accompany it drove the cost outside the city’s price range at the time. Further complicating matters was city hall’s place on the National Register of Historic Places, which required city staff to consult with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. The office told the city that the elevator shaft had to be located away from the main entrance so that the building’s historic façade could be preserved. Reopening the third floor

to the public will require the city stay compliant with the Americans with Disability Act, necessitating the elevator. Hall said many of Milton-Freewater’s older residents like to pay their utility bills in person, and if they have trouble navigating stairs, they can walk up a ramp into the rear entrance and take a chair lift up to the second floor where the utility offices are located. But the lift’s rail is steep, and users have been known to get stuck between floors when its batteries die or have trouble dismounting from the chair. While the city is open to meeting bill payers at the rear entrance, Hall said many of them don’t want to hassle staff. Although the elevator could offer an immediate improvement to city hall’s accessibility, welcoming the public back into the auditorium for a city council meeting will require quite a bit more money. Steadman’s ballpark estimate is just under \$1 million to add new lighting, upgrade the room’s electrical system, install a modern audio system and HVAC, construct accompanying disabled-accessible bathrooms and other improvements. Hall said her staff is on the hunt for new grants to open up the rest of city hall for good.

With special guest speaker, Joe Piscatella, author of 16 best-selling books, host of three PBS television specials, a “guest expert” on WebMD, and a member of the NIH Expert Panel on Cardiac Rehabilitation.

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