

EAST OREGONIAN

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2018

143rd Year, No. 40

WINNER OF THE 2018 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

One dollar

HERMISTON

Pedro to step down at Chamber

Has been director since 2001

JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Debbie Pedro is stepping down as president and CEO of the Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce.

In an email to chamber members Tuesday afternoon, she wrote that there are "other opportunities professionally and personally I am looking forward to sharing with you soon." Her last day with the chamber is Dec. 21.

After sending out the email, Pedro told the *East Oregonian* she was touched by the response to the announcement.

"My phone has been ringing off the hook, I can't keep up with my text messages, I'm getting emails galore," she said. "It's so sweet."

While she couldn't share where she is going yet, she said it was an opportunity she was excited about and one that would allow her to continue with partnerships she has formed over the years in the region.

While the board searches for a new chief executive officer, board chairman Paul Keeler and marketing/communications man-

ager Kelly Schwirse will oversee chamber operations. The chamber board was notified in November of Pedro's decision to leave.

"Debbie has been an invaluable, motivated leader for our organization and Hermiston," Keeler said in a statement. "Her ability to advocate for business, build partnerships and drive the organization forward serves as a model for those who follow. While we are sorry to see her go, we are so very fortunate to have benefited from Debbie's leadership, and we wish her every success in her new position."

Pedro has led the Hermiston chamber since January 2001. She

has overseen a variety of changes and new endeavors during that time, including a recent move of the chamber's offices from the Hermiston Community Center to the Cornerstone Plaza. In February, the chamber was awarded \$1 million in the state legislature's capital construction bill for new offices and a visitor center, which are still in development.

Pedro said she looks forward to the chamber's continued progress, particularly the new building, and the chamber has many exciting ventures coming up in 2019.

"It's exciting times for the chamber," she said.



EO file photo

Debbie Pedro speaks after being named the Woman of the Year during the Hermiston Distinguished Citizens Awards Banquet in 2016 in Hermiston.

Elfering suggests county manager, election overhaul

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Umatilla County Commissioner Bill Elfering wants the next iteration of county government to adopt a manager to oversee operations and the budget.

Elfering on Nov. 28 told the county's Charter Review Committee to consider a "weak" county executive with a "strong" board of commissioners. He also recommended the committee scratch the requirement to elect commissioners only in the general election.

The committee is the public body with the task of evaluating the county's foundational document and passing up possible revisions to the county board of commissioners later in 2019. The committee started the work in the spring, and Elfering is first of the county's three commissioners to address the group. County counsel Doug Olsen said Commissioner George Murdock, chair of the county board, addressed the committee Tuesday, and out-going Commissioner Larry Givens could meet with the committee in January.

Elfering, who does not plan to run in 2020, said a county manager would be in charge of the day-to-day operations, the budget, legal council, labor negotiations and the like. And the board of commissioners would retain their liaison roles with department heads and maintain their open-door policy. Elfering said not having a gatekeeper to limit access to commissioners has been central to improving the morale among county employees.

In a memo to the committee, Elfering explained the liaison system has a short circuit. County department heads figured out they can go to their

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Midco draws complaints



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A Mid Columbia Bus Co. vehicle makes a turn off of Northwest 10th Street on to Carden Avenue on its way to the high school on Monday in Pendleton.

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

Darryn Ruth's complaints about the school bus service used by the Pendleton School District starts at the bus stop, but it doesn't end there.

Every morning, Ruth said he takes his young granddaughter to the school bus stop at Southwest Frazer Avenue and Fourth Street, in the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce parking lot.

The stop is near the tank where recreational vehicles can deposit their sewage. Concerned about the health risks, he sought a meeting with the proper authorities to discuss the bus

stop and other complaints.

Despite meeting with officials from the school district and its contractor, Mid Columbia Bus Co., Ruth felt that they weren't responding to his concerns and took to Facebook to solicit complaints from other parents before he took them to the Pendleton School Board on Monday.

Ruth said his posts on various pages garnered 1,800 interactions.

While Ruth's comments were restricted to three minutes under board rules, the comments left under the post touched on similar things: late buses, long bus routes, and bullying on the bus going unchecked.

Pendleton School District Superin-

tendent Chris Fritsch said the district is sympathetic to parents' concerns about the bus system, adding that a poor experience on the bus can lead kids to have a tough day at school.

But Fritsch attributed most of the problems to Midco's shortage of bus drivers, an issue that the company has publicized over the past few years.

A lack of bus drivers means routes must be consolidated and cover more stops, leading to kids spending more time waiting for and on the bus.

An accompanying lack of substitute drivers means the problem is only

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HERMISTON

MAKING MUSIC ON A BUDGET



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Sophomore Caleb Michael, left, junior Jerence Lyons and sophomore Kevin Bethel play alto saxophone on "Rock Lobster" with the pep band during a winter sports pep rally Tuesday at Hermiston High School.

Hermiston bands get grants from district foundation

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

The Hermiston High School band room is packed on Tuesday as students scramble to put their instruments away and rush to class after playing at an assembly that morning. Playing at assemblies, football games and outdoor competitions, the instruments are often out

in the elements, and begin to have problems after such exposure.

Between instruments, sheet music and travel, most school music programs have a lot of funding needs. Meeting those needs can be especially difficult in rural areas, or with smaller programs.

Hermiston's bands recently received some money from the Hermiston Education Foundation to help with those needs. HEF awarded band directors Daniel Allen, Cristian Mata and Sean McClanahan \$4,031 to purchase a set of warm-up books for both

middle schools and the high school.

"The books have exercises that work on scales, patterns, tuning," McClanahan said. "There are 10 to 15 different techniques, and it works on those in all the different key centers."

He said the uniform curriculum across grade levels will make it easier for students to learn those techniques, and instructors to teach them.

"There are just more tools at your disposal to help

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