

# Airport: Expanded services draw customers to Hermiston

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thought it would be, particularly using the pedals that steer the plane while it is on the ground.

"The landing ... that was ... I may have run into a building," she said sheepishly.

After getting to check out what day-to-day life at a small municipal airport is like and asking questions of the pilots who land there, Melson said she still wants to head to college and study aviation after she graduates.

"If anything, it's opened my eyes to more things I could do," she said.

Melson isn't the only teen getting experience with aviation. The airport's repair hangar opens its doors to any interested teenagers every Thursday from 6-9 p.m.

Soon Umatilla School District will start busing kids to the airport on Thursday nights as part of its after-school STEM program, and Leirvik said he is working with Hermiston High School to set up something similar. Students who participate in the Thursday night sessions will learn how to take apart and rebuild an airplane engine, among other skills.

Some area middle schools have already taken field trips out to the airport in recent months. Adults can also check out the airport and learn more about aviation at the airport's monthly breakfasts, where pilots and others with an interest in aviation are invited to gather at 8:30 a.m. on the last Saturday of every month.

Mike Martin is the breakfasts' "head pancake maker." Martin has a plane and hangar in Hermiston and has served on the city's Airport Advisory Committee for about 10 years. He is excited about what Gorge Aviation Services has



Mechanic Lisa Sturgeon works on the annual maintenance inspection for a Piper Super Cub on Tuesday at the Hermiston Municipal Airport.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris



From left, Bud Van Ryn, airport manager Rolf Anderson Leirvik, Dan Burns and Ron Linn have a discussion in the lobby during coffee hour Tuesday at the Hermiston Municipal Airport.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris



A single-engine Diamond trainer owned by Gorge Aviation Services sits on the tarmac in front of the office at the Hermiston Municipal Airport.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Previously, for example, people who wanted to get their pilot's license had to go up to the Tri-Cities for lessons. That's where Martin's wife learned, and he said the commute increased the time commitment. Now that instructors are available in Hermiston, Martin is taking lessons for instrument flying, or flying through no-visibility conditions.

"It makes you a better pilot ... I wouldn't have thought about it if I had to drive up to the Tri-Cities," he said.

Anderson Leirvik said there are five or six beginners taking lessons right now, another five who are refreshing themselves after years of not flying, and a handful of experienced pilots taking the instrument flying classes.

In addition to having flying instructors available, Martin said he also appreciated the addition of the mechanic shop. There is a serious shortage of qualified aviation mechanics in the country, he said, and "you don't want just any Tom, Dick or Harry working on your plane."

In that vein, while the field trips, internships and night classes for high school students don't directly benefit pilots at the airport, Martin wholeheartedly supports them as a way to spark interest in aviation careers for young people.

He said the Airport Advisory Committee is working on a 25-year plan for the airport. The committee would like to see the airport expanded someday, and has come up with new ideas, such as connecting the airport to the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center so that people flying in for conferences and other events there don't need to pay a taxi to take them up to Highway 395 and back down the next road to EOTEC.

accomplished so far. Martin said in the 1980s Hermiston had city leaders, such as Tom Harper, who were passionate about aviation. Once those leaders moved on, however, the airport was "forgotten" for decades and not living up to

its potential. "The airport needs to grow with the city," he said. Martin said assistant city manager Mark Morgan has been a "godsend" for the airport in recent years as he has worked hard to bring in millions of dollars in Federal

Aviation Administration grants. Those grants have paid for a taxiway realignment, pavement overlays, new lighting and moving and expanding the fuel station. Now Gorge Aviation is helping create a 180-degree turnaround on the opera-

tions side with new programs and services, Martin said. "I want the community to know these things are available to them, because a lot of people don't know all they need to do is go there and ask," he said.

# Taxes: Not everyone will see a big change in returns

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people already saw the benefit in the form of bigger paychecks. That's because the law forced employers to change what they withheld. But the system is far from perfect, and many workers didn't have enough in taxes set aside. Now, the IRS wants that money.

In addition, the law also eliminated personal exemptions, increased child credits, limited popular deductions and generally upended many familiar practices that determine what happens at tax time. That has taxpayers feeling a bit unmoored.

"We were very comfortable with our tax law, it had basically been there since 1986, suddenly all these things that were very important to people changed ... it's all different," said Howard Gleckman, a senior fellow at the Tax Policy Center.

Kraft and Elias are able to pay their tax bill but he's still stunned. He even tried to reverse-engineer things to figure out where they went wrong, diving into page after page of IRS rules. He painstakingly put together all the numbers.

The couple ultimately asked a CPA to verify the figures they were seeing on TurboTax. Crushing, they were correct.

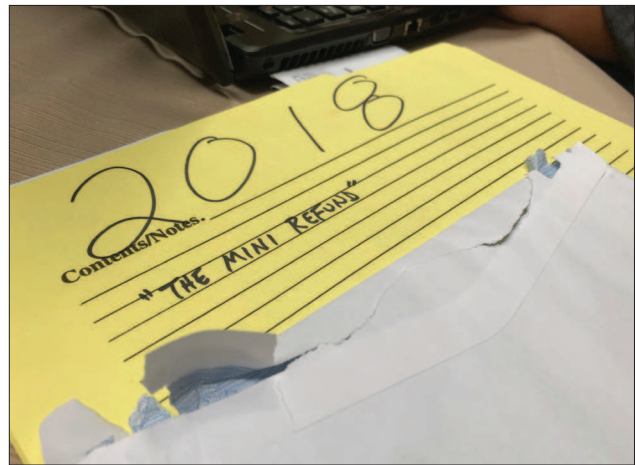
Their total tax was up slightly — by about \$300 because of changes to their financial picture. Their effective tax rate was lower, but they still owed the government.

"I feel like I have reached a stage of grief of acceptance," he said. "In a twisted way I should have been paying this all year and now I just have to pay it in one lump sum."

A number of experts such as Gleckman are urging taxpayers to obsess less about their refund or what they owe when measuring



At left, Kevin McCreanor works on a laptop near paperwork in Atlanta. The first tax filing season under the new federal tax law is proving to be surprising, confusing (and occasionally frightening) for some Americans. McCreanor and his wife normally get a sizeable refund each year. While they know waiting for a large refund isn't the best strategy financially, they like a refund and they put anything they get back toward their daughters' education.



AP Photos/Cody Jackson

the effect of the new tax law. These are just a sliver of your tax picture.

But the truth is, many Americans have come to rely on refunds. About three-quarters of U.S. taxpayers typically get one and they had averaged around \$2,800. For some low-income households it is the biggest cash infusion of the year.

The IRS reported Thursday that the average tax refund as of the second week of filing season was \$1,949, down 8.7 percent from the year earlier. The total number of refunds is down 16 percent.

Experts caution it is too early to draw conclusions about a tax season that ends in April.

Plus, the number of returns — 27 million as of Feb. 8 — is down 10 percent from a year ago, due in part to the partial government shutdown. The picture will become much clearer as more filings are processed, refunds are issued and the IRS gets back up to full speed.

All the same, the initial results have surprised early filers and worried those who haven't yet tackled their taxes.

Part of the problem centers around how employees

and employers adjusted (or didn't adjust) withholdings from paychecks to account for the law's changes. The government issued updated withholding guidelines to help employers determine how much to set aside from an employee's paycheck to cover taxes. Withhold too much and you get a refund at tax time; too little and you owe.

It is at best, an estimate. But it's an estimate that grew drastically more difficult to make under the new law.

The Government Accountability Office estimated in a report last summer that about 30 million workers had too little withheld from their paychecks, which made their take home pay bigger but increased their tax liability.

That's about 3 million more workers than normal. Few taxpayers appear to have heeded the IRS' advice to do a "paycheck checkup" to make sure they had the proper amount withheld.

Payroll processor ADP, which is responsible for paying one out of every six Americans, said the vast majority of people in its system didn't update their withholdings last year. Some taxpayers who did make adjustments found

they couldn't get it quite right.

Kevin McCreanor of Milton, Georgia, and his wife normally get a sizeable refund each year — it was more than \$12,000 last year. While they know waiting for a large refund isn't the best strategy financially, they like a refund and they put anything they get back toward their daughters' education. Their income, earned primarily from his wife's job in telecom, can vary greatly, so there was comfort in never facing a big bill.

The couple increased her paycheck withholdings to ensure the same but found they are only getting back \$519 this year. Their income and tax rate did increase, and McCreanor acknowledges there is probably more he could have done to prepare but he is very disappointed all the same.

Some surprises were welcome, however. Brian Goodell and his wife typically face a tax bill of anywhere from \$10,000 to \$15,000 each year. But this year the Tigard, Oregon, couple is getting a \$15,000 refund. They believe they got some benefit from the increased child tax credit. They also made more

charitable donations and increased their withholdings. While Goodell isn't entirely sure why it worked out so well, he'll gladly take the refund.

Taxpayers can get a better sense of how they fared by looking at their tax liability or effective tax rate. This information is often available on the summary received from an accountant or tax preparation software. They can also look at the "total tax" on those summaries or form 1040. These are not perfect measures either, but provide some perspective.

And remember that getting a refund is not necessarily a good thing. Breaking even is really the best outcome from an economic point of view. If you get a refund, that means the government has been holding onto your money when you could have been using it.

Also, consider that taxes are rarely an equal comparison from year-to-year, said Eric Bronnenkant, the head of tax at Betterment and a CPA and certified financial planner. People's lives change in ways that can dramatically influence their taxes, such as marriages, divorces, children, moving or job changes.

# Hangar: Building would be 18,000 square feet

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designing and testing a driverless air taxi concept.

Although PAE is a multi-billion-dollar company, Airport Manager and Economic Development Director Steve Chrisman said defense contractors often prefer leasing existing infrastructure rather than building their own.

He anticipated that companies would begin privately investing in their own infrastructure once the airport hits a "critical mass" in terms of development, but until then, Chrisman said the city would have to provide space to drone companies.

The city previously took out a \$1.7 million loan from the state in 2015 to build the hangar for A<sup>3</sup>, but most of that loan was forgivable if the UAS range generated 165,000 in total labor hours at the range by April 2022.

While the deal for the new hangar is just a straight loan, Chrisman said it could reduce the burden of the A<sup>3</sup> hangar loan by creating "several dozen" jobs at PAE ISR.

Because the rental revenue exceeds the loan repayment schedule, several councilors supported the idea of using all of the lease revenue to accelerate the repayment period from 25 years to 16 years.

Before the council unanimously voted to take out the loan, City Manager Robb Corbett said he didn't see a reason why the city couldn't continue to use state loans to build hangars, especially if a company expressed interest in renting one.