HIGH PERCH

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A red-tailed hawk sits in a snag off of West Gettman Road on Thursday in Hermiston.

Students stay busy with robotics over Spring Break

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

Students from Umatilla and Pendleton have stayed busy over Spring Break, volunteering at robotics events and preparing for their own competitions.

The students of Umatilla High School's robotics team are busy handling the pressures of an upcoming competition for the FIRST Robotics district competition in Tacoma next weekend. Small groups of them gathered throughout the week to work on their projects.

Elizabeth Loera was working on a submission for the Entrepreneurship Award, which is like a business plan of how the team operates. Alexander Gutierrez was working on the Chairman's Award, for which he had to create a presentation, a video and an essay about the team's community involvement.

The rest of the team was busy ironing out programming issues with the robot, including looking at the code and reviewing data from previous competitions.

"If things play out well enough, we'll go to Worlds in Houston," said Naomi Wyckoff, the team's programming lead.

Loera and Gutierrez, both seniors, are also members of the city of Umatilla's youth advisory council. Eight students from the high school meet monthly with the city council and the budget committee, and work on community projects. This week, they spent time maintaining trails in some local parks.

While the Umatilla students worked on their projects, some robotics students from Pendleton headed west to help some other students with theirs.

Three students from Pendleton High School were traveling to Lake Oswego to volunteer for a robotics competition there.

Coach Julie Smith said the team is in a league that competes in two competitions a season, and tries to volunteer in at least one more. Though the team did fairly well, Smith said they likely will not qualify for regionals this year.

"We struggled with our first competition," she said. "The design didn't work so well."

But the students will get the chance to work with other teams. At the competition in Lake Oswego, junior Landon Thornburg will be supervising the practice field, where teams go to test their robots as they make changes in between competitions.

Maddie Thomas, a junior, will work as a field resetter — getting the next group of teams out on the field after each match, which is about 2.5 minutes long.

Jim Smith, a freshman, will work as a floater, helping out wherever he is needed.

Thornburg said one of the core premises of robotics is "gracious professionalism." He said volunteering to help other teams allows them to do just that.

"We want to help other teams have as much fun as we do at our event," Thomas said.

Spring cleanup starts Monday for Hermiston

East Oregonian

Spring cleaning season is here, and two Hermiston events are offering help.

On April 1-7 residents can dump loads less than 2.5 cubic yards for free at Sanitary Disposal, and get up to $14 off larger loads at the transfer station at 81444 N Highway 395. Tires are billed at the regular rate.

For questions, call Sanitary Disposal at 541-567-8842.

On April 13, the city of Hermiston is hosting its annual free recycling event from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the Umatilla Electric Cooperative parking lot, 750 W. Elm St.

Parks and recreation director Larry Fetter said the event is for Umatilla County residents only, and vehicles with Washington license plates will be turned away.

The annual event collects literal tons of old objects — last year nine tons of tires alone were hauled away for free.

Fetter said the city will be accepting the usual items, including old electronics, appliances (including refrigerators containing freon), chunks of cement, scrap metal, plastics, tires (with or without rims), batteries (as long as they're not leaking), paint and more.

They will not be collecting pesticides or other hazardous materials, motor oil, old cars or providing shredding services. However, Fetter said they can provide people with a list of businesses that take motor oil and information about how to donate old cars to the Good Shepherd Health Foundation.

Pilot Rock nears final deal on Bike Pit responsibilities

East Oregonian

The Pilot Rock City Council will consider approving a deal Tuesday night for the operation and maintenance of the Bike Pit.

The city owns the motocross park while the nonprofit Pilot Rock OHV Inc. oversees events there. The two sides have been working on a deal to delineate duties and responsibilities.

City recorder Teri Bacus told the council in a memo the agreement with the nonprofit "is the most efficient way to promote the Bike Pit as a city park" to bring in people to shop at the local grocery store or buy gas, thus giving a lift to economic development. Further, the deal would help show the Bike Pit as a family destination with camping and picnicking.

Under the terms of the agreement, representatives from the city and Pilot Rock OHV will create a master plan to guide development, maintenance and operations of the park. Pilot Rock OHV shall shoulder all improvements, including costs, and handle all events at the park.

The city in the deal takes on certain maintenance work, including repairs to fences and signs, mowing, and cleaning the parking lot. Other cleaning and upkeep falls to the OHV side.

The OHV also will provide comprehensive and general liability and event insurance, while the city provides a minimum amount of general liability insurance.

The deal also covers security, utilities and more. The Pilot Rock City Council meeting starts at 7 p.m. Tuesday, and the agreement is the lone action item on the agenda.

BRIEFLY

Pilot identified in crop duster crash

HERMISTON — Hermiston Police are investigating a plane crash that happened Thursday in Hermiston.

Theodore Pasicka, 60, was returning to the Hermiston Airport after finishing work for the day. For an unknown reason, as he was flying the crop duster plane back to the airport, witnesses say the plane inverted and crashed into a field near the Hermiston experiment station.

Pasicka suffered minor injuries and was alone in the plane.

Hermiston Police Captain Travis Eynon said they have not yet identified a cause for the crash, and that an investigation is ongoing.

Umatilla County Fire District sent a hazardous materials team to the scene as the plane was leaking fuel or pesticide after it crashed.

Hermiston to add modulars to two schools

HERMISTON — Hermiston School District will add modular buildings to two of its schools next month to keep up with population growth. New modulars will be placed at Sunset Elementary School and Hermiston High School during spring break.

A press release from the district said they are expecting an incoming kindergarten class of more than 450 students, and an incoming freshman class of 440 students.

Superintendent Tricia Mooney said the modulars are a temporary solution to continued growth, and the district's long-range facilities planning committee is working on finding a long-term solution to recommend to the school board.

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The Umatilla County Historical Society extends a warm thank you to the families, individuals and businesses who sponsored our third annual Trivia Games. These generous sponsors ensured the success of this important spring fundraiser. Trivia Games provides an evening of fun, food, and mind-stretching questions, which highlight the heritage and diversity of Umatilla County and Oregon.
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