

Feds back \$9.5 million loan for Hermiston hotel

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Developers of a hotel in Hermiston received the OK for a federally backed loan of almost \$9.5 million. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development on Saturday announced it is guaranteeing the loan to A-1 Hermiston for the construction of a new 85-room Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott. Old West Federal Credit Union is providing the 29-year loan of \$9,472,500 at 5.2 percent interest. The total project is just shy of \$11.4 million, according to the USDA. A-1 Hermiston, a subsidiary of the A-1 Hospitality Group, has to come up with \$1.9 million for its contribution.

Taran Patel with A-1 Hospitality said the company was pleased to receive the USDA approval. “We are now working on final Marriott design and sourcing our gap funding,” Patel continued. “There’s no current definitive timeline set, but we will be moving as quick as possible. A-1 Hospitality is excited to expand our footprint into the growing Hermiston market.”

The Hermiston Planning Department in December gave conditional approval for the hotel to occupy a spot near the Denny’s between Highway 395 on one end and East Airport Road on the other. That places the hotel within a moment’s drive of the Eastern Oregon Event and Trade Center. The site plans calls for a four-story structure more than 200 feet long and about 150 feet wide from the edge of the front awning to the back patio wall. According to the approval letter, the project must improve the frontage road along the edge of the property, the hotel cannot exceed 50 feet in height, and the Hermiston Irrigation District gets to approve the site plan before the city issues building permits.

City planner Clint Spencer said the land use zone at the site allows hotels outright, so there was no need for a review from the planning commission. The hotel boosts the number of accommodations for the region’s burgeoning tourism, and according to the USDA, the project will create 21 full-time jobs.

Our stolen sisters

Native women have a murder rate 10 times higher than the national average

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

A paper lantern rose gently in the breeze and promptly caught on fire. The lantern launch happened Sunday evening at the Tamastslikt Cultural Institute as part of a national day honoring missing and murdered indigenous women. While the flameout wasn’t exactly what organizers had envisioned, it might be a fitting metaphor for native women who are seemingly disappearing into thin air. According to National Crime Information Center statistics, there were 5,712 cases of indigenous women or girls vanishing or being murdered in 2016. Only 116 of them appeared in the U.S. Department of Justice database. “Our women are going missing,” said Kola Shippentower Thompson, who helped organize the lantern launch. She and others say there is an epidemic of indifference regarding these cases. Native women have a murder rate ten times higher than the national average. No national database tracks them, so the number could actually be much higher. Thompson, a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, has experienced personal loss. An aunt’s death about 30 years ago was ruled a suicide, something that family members considered unclear and underinvestigated. Another aunt and a cousin went missing for a week in 2004 and turned up dead in the back seat of a wrecked car off Old Emigrant Highway. The

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Andrea Camacho watches a lantern rise during a remembrance of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women held Sunday evening at the Tamastslikt Cultural Institute.

Newspaper welcomes new managing editor

By CHRISTOPHER RUSH
East Oregonian

The *East Oregonian* has hired a new editor who is no stranger to Northeast Oregon. Andrew Cutler, an Idaho native with experience at papers in Oregon, Idaho and South Dakota, started work for the *East Oregonian* on Monday, after spending 16 months as a manager of communications and public relations for Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative in Baker City. “We’re delighted to have someone of Andrew’s journalistic experience and Northeast Oregon background lead our award-winning newsroom,” said Regional Publisher Chris Rush in making the announcement. “I’m certain Andrew will continue the tradition of excellent community-focused journalism already established here at the *EO*.” Prior to going to work for the electric cooperative, Cutler spent five years in La Grande as the editor of *The Observer*, with the last three including an additional role as publisher of the publication. “I’m excited about coming to Pendleton and, specifically, working at a paper like the *East Oregonian* and for a company like the East Oregonian Media Group,” Cutler said. “This paper has a long legacy of great journalism. Its reputation is unmatched by any paper in



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Not on my watch

A dog works a small herd of cattle during the Pendleton Cattle Barons event at the Pendleton Convention Center.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney