



EAST OREGONIAN

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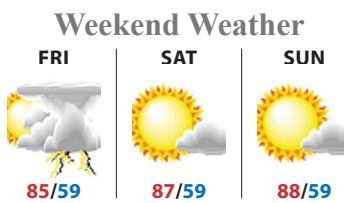
\$1.50

Your Weekend



- **Kids Fishing Derby**, Twin Ponds, Ukiah
- **Stahl Building** open house, Athena
- **Oldies Night** salutes Elvis, Milton-Freewater

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Community looks to support ex-railroad employees

May 25 was the final day of work for most employees at the Hinkle Rail Yard

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The shock of last week's announcement that Union Pacific Railroad would be laying off nearly 200 employees in Hermiston may still be wearing off, but area organizations are looking at what they can do to help those facing unemployment.

Saturday, May 25, was the final day of work for most employees at the Hinkle Rail Yard.

Oregon laws require large employers conducting a "mass layoff" of 50-plus employees or at least 33 percent of their workforce to post notice of the event, triggering assistance for the newly unemployed workers. CAPECO of Pendleton is Umatilla County's "rapid response" agency in such situations.

The nonprofit is holding an event on Tuesday at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. at the Hermiston Community Center, 415 S. Highway

See Railroad, Page A8

PERS eats into city budget

Hermiston general fund seeing 25% increase in PERS costs

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — As Hermiston city officials budget for the coming fiscal year, the costs of the Public Employee Retirement System continue to grow.

City manager Byron Smith wrote in the forward to the proposed 2019-20 budget that the city's general fund was seeing a 25% increase in PERS costs, on top of steep increases over the past few years.

"This will not be sustainable for many more years," he said. "This increase is eating up most if not all of our revenue growth."

In the police department, for example, PERS expenses are

increasing by \$210,000. Police Chief Jason Edmiston said the continued increases restrict his ability to add new personnel.

The city council will vote on the 2019-20 budget during their June 10 meeting. The budget includes a 2.75% cost of living increase for employees, and maintains current staffing levels at 120 full-time employees.

See Budget, Page A8

PERS COSTS

Hermiston's annual payments into the Public Employees Retirement System have increased by 128% in the past six years. On Thursday the House passed a bill which will pull small amounts of current employees' contributions into paying down some of the system's \$27 billion debt.

Saying a sad goodbye

Congregation sells historic church and moves out

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — From her pew, Louise Thompson gazed up at a lofty stained glass window.

The scene depicted Jesus with a child on his lap and she imagined herself sitting on his lap, too, basking in his glow. Thompson, who grew up in Pendleton's First United Methodist Church, has done this almost every Sunday of her life.

But this would be the last time.

A couple of years ago, the 113-year-old stone church went on the market for \$410,000. A buyer is in the process of finalizing the sale, so the band of believers is looking for a new home.

The stately house of worship at 352 S.E. Second St. has become a money pit that members just can't afford any longer. Inside the sanctuary's south wall lurks extensive water damage that requires something in the neighborhood of \$100,000 to repair. Other challenges include asbestos, cracking and peeling, crumbling mortar and deferred maintenance throughout the building.

For years, members hung on, but finally voted to sell their house of worship.

"This building is old and we have tried to keep it up, but it's consuming our resources," said Wanda Remington, president of the church's administrative council, at the time. "It was an

See Church, Page A8



Staff photos by Kathy Aney
A stained glass window glows inside the 113-year-old Pendleton United Methodist Church building on Southwest Second Street after the church's final service inside the historic building.



INSIDE

Evangelists Nathan and Tracy Webber to speak Sunday in Stanfield, **Page 3A Online**
See more photos from Sunday's final service at **EastOregonian.com**

Three worshipers aren't able to sing the final hymn at the congregation's last service at the historic Pendleton United Methodist Church.

"WE REALIZE THIS CHURCH IS AN ALBATROSS. IT'S A BEAUTIFUL ALBATROSS, DON'T GET ME WRONG, BUT IT'S STILL AN ALBATROSS."

Wanda Remington, president of the church's administrative council

Extension leader plans to retire

Phil Hamm stepping down after 29 years at the Hermiston-based center

By MITCH LIES
For the EO Media Group

HERMISTON — There was the late blight scare, bouts with silver scurf, corn smut and a beet leafhopper that came from out of the blue and transmitted a deadly plant virus.

And through it all there was the underlying principle that Phil Hamm operates by, the idea that he and others at the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center are there to help farmers be more successful.

As plant pathologist and then director at the Eastern Oregon research and extension facility, Hamm has helped growers battle several potentially devastating plant diseases over the past three decades. Come the end of August, however, those days will be over.

Hamm announced recently he is retiring after 44 years with Oregon State University, including serving the last 29 years at the Hermiston-based center and the last 14 as the center's director. He has worked half-time since 2012.

Looking back, Hamm identified several highlights, including multiple bouts with plant diseases of potatoes, such as silver scurf and late blight.

A foliar disease of potatoes, late blight spread rapidly after appearing suddenly in the Columbia Basin in the mid-1990s.

"In the '90s, we spent considerable effort and collaborated with many others to help overcome issues with late blight," Hamm said. "Today, it is still out there and costs growers money to manage, but for the most part, we know how to man-

See Extension, Page A8



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