

First Hermiston watermelons ready

Heavy snow in February had put the crop behind schedule

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Hermiston's most famous crop is shaping up nicely this year.

Bellinger Farms started selling their first batch of watermelons this week and Jack Bellinger said he was pleased with the sugar content and weight.

"All indications suggest that it's going to be a good year, quality-wise," he said.

He said he was surprised with how much the early melons weighed this year, making him cautiously optimistic about the season.

Heavy snow in February had put the crop behind schedule, Bellinger said, and he had expected to see a gap between when his early fields and late fields were ready. Instead, ideal weather in June helped speed things up and will help keep watermelons rolling into the store.

"I would have guessed we wouldn't start until July 15 or so," he said.

Watermelons are already available for purchase, how-



Becky Conant purchases Hermiston watermelons at the Bellinger Farms shop on Highway 395 in Hermiston. Conant is bringing the watermelons to a family reunion in Florence as a remembrance of growing up in Hermiston.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

ever, and Bellinger said their operation would start shipping them outside of Hermiston on Friday.

Walchli Farms watermelons are not quite ready yet, but Patrick Walchli said they are looking good and will be here "shortly." The large family-owned farm sells its melons out of a warehouse

on Loop Road.

"Right now they're not ripe, but I expect to have good quality from what we've seen," he said.

He said in Eastern Oregon you never know what you're going to get, weather-wise, during a growing season.

The region's climate is

one of the reasons Hermiston watermelons are so sweet, however. Hot days spur the plants to produce more sugar for energy, and cool nights help them retain the sugar. The taste makes the melons a coveted commodity around the United States, and draws people to Hermiston each year.

Women's coalition to host economic summit

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The Eastern Oregon Women's Coalition is gathering big names and big companies in Hermiston to discuss the economic status of the region.

"The inaugural Eastern Oregon Economic Summit will offer in-depth discussion about factors affecting rural Oregon's economy, from the impacts of legislation enacted during the 2019 session to changes in technology, demographics and environmental resources," a press release states.

Coalition President Bobby Levy said the event,

which is slated for July 26 at Hermiston High School, differs from other economic summits because it targets the entirety of Eastern Oregon rather than a specific city or county.

"In visiting with private and public sector leaders, there was no singular event to address Eastern Oregon's economic issues or how to grow rural Oregon's presence in Salem and beyond," she wrote in an email. "This summit will bring a wide variety of issues under one roof and help attendees leverage the area's economic growth. We intend for this to be an annual event."

Levy added that the coalition has organized a gov-

ernor's luncheon during Round-Up week for the past six years.

The summit has already booked speeches from U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, R-Hood River, as well as all three members of the state Legislature's northeast Oregon delegation — state Reps. Greg Barreto and Greg Smith, and state Sen. Bill Hansell.

The event will also features talks from leaders at PAE ISR, a Virginia-based defense contractor that has based its West Coast drone operations in Pendleton, and Woodgrain Millworks, a Fruitland, Idaho, moulding manufacturer that bought sawmills in Pilot Rock and

MORE INFORMATION

The Eastern Oregon Economic Summit requires registration and will run from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on July 26 at Hermiston High School, 600 S. First St. For more information, visit www.easternoregonsummit.com.

La Grande in 2018.

In the afternoon, the summit will transition to discussion panels that will cover various economic topics, including state and federal policy, housing, natural resources, broadband, and business recruitment.

Program grants Pendleton police new dog

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Pendleton police Chief Stuart Roberts reported the department is getting a new four-legged officer.

"Several weeks ago, we applied for a rare opportunity to obtain a K-9 through a scholarship process, which included letters of interest, a phone interview, justification and formal application," Roberts said Thursday, after he received notice Working Dogs of Oregon would award one of two K9 scholarships to the Pendleton Police Department.

The organizer and trainer are working to

schedule a trip to Pendleton to introduce the available dogs, Roberts continued, and to further explore the department's needs and capacity, along with promoting Working Dogs Oregon.

The organization announced the program on June 20 to provide "two fully trained police dogs to law enforcement agencies that show the need, desire and community support to qualify for a dog." Seven police departments at that time applied for the scholarship, which is worth more than \$40,000 between the cost of the dog and the training.

Roberts added Pendle-

ton's police dog is a "four odor narcotics detection dog," but the value of such dogs has decreased with Oregonians voting to legalize marijuana.

"Most agencies across Oregon retired their four odor dogs, but we retained Lucy, because she was still a viable option for schools," Roberts explained, "and we could not afford to replace her at \$10,000-\$15,000 plus 10 weeks of handler training."

Winning a new dog changes that, he said, and the department plans to retire Lucy, whose age and health now limit her use, in the near future.

Roberts also said the best case scenario is the new dog "will have the ability to train/certify in narcotics detection, accelerant/explosive detection and provide patrol support (tracking/apprehension)."

BRIEFLY

Containment expected Friday on Blue Ridge Fire

JOHN DAY — Forest Service officials anticipate the Blue Ridge Fire will be fully contained Friday.

Crews and engines will continue mop up on the 667-acre lightning fire 4 miles north-

west of Flagtail Lookout Thursday, according to a press release.

Staffing the fire are 125 people, including nine engines, four hand crews and one water tender.

Temporary road closures are in effect on forest roads 2400-054, 2180-173, 2180-257, 2400-275 and 2400-389.

Athena Caledonian Games

July 12-14th

Friday:
Caledonian Dinner & music by Anna Burgess in the Park

Saturday:
Highland Dance Competition
Skweez the Weezle, Celtic Band

Sunday:
Kirkin' o' the Tartan church service in the park
Blue Mountain Wildlife Lynn Tompkins and Birds-12:30 pm

Picnic with Caledonian food vendors
Bring a blanket and enjoy music, dancing and sharing in the park!

PENDLETON CENTER for the ARTS

DAVID WEBBER in the East Oregonian Gallery 'til July 27. FREE Admission

Made possible through the support of Lauren Ludwig of Edward Jones.



Hells Canyon Motorcycle Rally Photo, File

The Hells Canyon Motorcycle Rally will celebrate its 20th anniversary this week, and its new organizer is excited about the growing popularity of an event that brings thousands of riders and others to Baker County.

Motorcycle rally set for Baker City

By **SAMANTHA O'CONNOR**
EO Media Group

invite everyone. More than 1,500 riders rolled into town in May of that year.

(The event later moved to June and, eventually, to its current slate in July to take advantage of more reliable weather.)

Kurt Miller of Baker City has been an integral part of the rally for the past several years, and last year officials announced that High Desert Harley-Davidson would oversee the event starting in 2019.

Godfrey said word about the rally continues to spread throughout the country.

He said he has received emails from travelers who have heard about the rally and want to visit Baker. Godfrey is also hearing from "national corporations wanting to come for next year."

"This is a family event," Godfrey said. "We want everybody to bring their kids down, check out all the motorcycles, check out the vendors, and we have the flat track races Friday night."

Steven Adler, former drummer with Guns 'N Roses, will be performing Saturday evening at the fairgrounds along with two other music acts from Boise. Music starts at 6 p.m.

There will be a private meet-and-greet with Adler before his show, and only 30 tickets are available.

"We're excited about it, we have visions to continue every year and make it bigger and better and keep it going," Godfrey said.

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