

Utility birds



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

A large flock of birds lay claim to a utility pole and the surrounding lines on Nye Avenue in Pendleton early Thursday afternoon.

Day of the Dead in Hermiston

By JESSICA POLLARD
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The main commons of Hermiston High School will be filled Friday night with live music and traditional Mexican food to celebrate Día de los Muertos — Day of the Dead — for the first time.

Cristina Cuevas cannot wait.

For Cuevas, it's just one of what could be many more cultural events to come. For she and high school graduation coach Omar Medina have finally moved forward with a new club at the high school — Juntos, which translates to Together, based around Latin American cultural awareness and leadership.

"We wanted to bring more cultural awareness, and more events, to Hermiston High School," Cuevas said. "But we also wanted to encourage students to go on college visits and get involved in leadership."

Last year, Medina and Cuevas helped hold leadership elections for the club. Currently, there are seven student leaders, and membership has been expanding.

"We'd been trying to get a group going for a little over a year," Cuevas said. "Hands-on activities have called to the students. We're doing things, not just sitting there talking."

Medina said the hope is to eventually bring students to regional leadership seminars and trainings as well. At the end of last year, the group sat down and brainstormed different events that Juntos might

host. Day of the Dead stuck out.

"We wanted to start strong this year," Cuevas said. "We jumped through the hoops as far as getting all of the approvals. The students were pretty excited, as far as having this as our first event."

Day of the Dead, which really is from Oct. 31 to Nov. 2, is an Aztec holiday that originated in Southern Mexico. It's centered around celebrating the lives of loved ones who have passed away, and has combined with Catholic traditions as well.

"It's an event that's celebrated all over Latin America, not just in Mexico," Medina said. "It's about remembering those that are deceased. Your family is built from the people that came before you."

The holiday shares some symbols with Halloween. Namely, skulls. But they hold a different, less spooky, significance.

"The skulls have sort of, over time, evolved to represent Day of The Dead," Cuevas said.

According to the Smithsonian, sugar skulls — calaveras — represent the sweetness in life and are meant to be offerings to the deceased.

But according to Cuevas, it's not all about death.

"The idea of it is also to appreciate those who are still with us," she said. "Those that are in your life and you choose to have as your family. I think some of the symbolism has faded."

Medina and Cuevas know that fall sports are still alive and kicking, which could

IF YOU GO

What: Day of the Dead
When: 6-8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 1
Where: Main commons, Hermiston High School
Cost: Entry is free, and a full meal — complete with a drink and dessert — is \$5
Of note: Parents of students in Juntos helped fundraise for the food

affect event attendance. The slow pitch softball team is headed to the state championship Friday night, and both the Hermiston and Pendleton football teams have games as well. But that doesn't bother the newly formed club.

"This is our first year doing it, so hopefully it will take off from there," Medina said. "We want kids and families to come and have fun."

Medina said attendees can expect to get a taste of enchiladas, agua frescas, Mexican hot chocolate, atole — a hot corn-masa based drink — and pan dulce, a sweet bread with cookie-like topping.

Advanced Placement art students will provide face-painting. There will be sugar cookie decorating, a movie showing, and live music as well.

"Having the opportunity to learn more about different cultures really helps to understand each other better and not have that close-minded thinking," Cuevas said. "I think the best place to do that is in this educational setting, where people can come in and learn more about others."

Helmeted man pleads innocent to break-in, burglary

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — A man reported missing from Milton-Freewater pleaded not guilty Monday in Walla Walla County Superior Court to residential burglary.

Casey M. Hale, 18, allegedly broke into a remote cabin near Klicker Mountain Road before three men arrived Sept. 25 to stay with the owner's permission, records stated.

They found the cabin had been trashed, records stated, with garbage, dishes and other items strewn on the main floor. One of the men went upstairs to the master bedroom, where Hale allegedly hid behind a bed while donning a red motorcycle helmet, records stated.

The man convinced Hale to go downstairs, where he was given water and food, records stated, and Hale asked for a Bible. The men gave him the book and he left the property, but he refused to take off the helmet during the whole interaction.

Another burglary report nearby had been taken prior to this one, regarding a man wearing a red helmet, records stated.

Umatilla County Sheriff's Office detectives also told police Hale matched the description of a man reported missing from Milton-Freewater, who used the alias Mike Hanson, of Dayton.

Hale originally was scheduled for arraignment earlier this month, but was ordered to receive a competency evaluation before pleading.

After he pleaded Monday, his trial was scheduled for Dec. 18.

Lexington taking applications for new mayor

LEXINGTON — The Lexington City Council is accepting letters of interest for the position of mayor.

Councilor Bobbi Gordon said the city has already received one letter and will likely appoint someone to the position during their Nov. 12 council meeting, so people who are interested in applying should submit their letters prior to that date.

BRIEFLY

Applicants must be a resident of Lexington for at least one year before applying. If appointed, they will fill the seat vacated by Marcia Kemp until the November 2020 election, at which point they must run in the election in order to keep the position.

For more information, contact the city at lexington.oregon@gmail.com or 541-989-8515.

Baker County man takes director role at BMCC

BAKER CITY — Blue Mountain Community College has hired Baker County native Ian Howarth as its new regional director of Baker and Union counties. The college also announced Howarth will lead BMCC's Baker County Center in Baker City.

Howarth begins his role Nov. 4. He succeeds Dan Koopman, who resigned from BMCC earlier this fall to take a position with Southwestern Oregon Community College after four years in the position.

Howarth serves as the military chaplain for the Idaho Air National Guard and Oregon Army National Guard, a position he's held since 2010. During that time, he also was the regional early assessment support alliance coordinator for the Center for Human Development, La Grande, and a mental health counselor for New Directions Northwest, Baker City. Howarth also served as a teacher and youth leader at Harvest Christian Academy, Baker City. BMCC President Dennis Bailey-Fougner said bringing on a local is a boon.

"We look forward to enhancing the educational opportunities and services to the residents of Baker and Union counties with someone who knows the region so well," he said.

Milton-Freewater murder defendant awaits evaluation

PENDLETON — Murder defendant Shayla Fawn Record Tsosie of Milton-Freewater is waiting to undergo a psychological evaluation.

The case had a status check conference Thursday morning at the Umatilla County Courthouse, Pendleton. Tsosie's attorney, Kara Davis of Pendleton, said the court approved funding for the evaluation, which could be completed in November.

"Ms. Tsosie was involuntarily committed to a mental institution by the state of Washington prior to being incarcerated," Davis said, "so obviously, an evaluation needs to be completed before we can move forward"

The court set the next hearing for Nov. 25.

Tsosie, 22, pleaded not guilty in September to stabbing and killing her boyfriend, Christian Rodriguez Calvillo, 22, at their home in Milton-Freewater. She remains in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton.

Meanwhile, the murder case against Antonio Vasquez-Vargas remains on hold.

Vasquez-Vargas, 53, faces charges of murder and felon in possession of a firearm for the November 2018 shooting death of Renee Luiz-Antonio where the two men worked at a dairy in Umapine. According to state court records, the case depends on whether Vasquez-Vargas has the mental fitness to participate in his own defense.

Circuit Judge Christopher Brauer is presiding over the case and set a hearing Nov. 13 to find out the status of Vasquez-Vargas' evaluation report.

— East Oregonian staff and wire services

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Zombieland: Double Tap (R)
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Joker (R)
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