

A week of ballet birthdays

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The dancers of the Pendleton Ballet Theatre are quarantining at home these days. The isolation is almost unbearable for the close-knit troupe of dancers and their instructor, Julie Sneden-Carlson, who normally spend numerous hours together every month.

When two of the dancers had landmark birthdays last week, the troupe found a way to celebrate.

Samantha Mahaffy hit 30 on April 14 and Austin Ford turned 18 two days later. Mahaffy, a yoga teacher and a lead dancer at PBT, danced the role of the Snow Queen during the company's winter performance of "The Nutcracker." Ford, a senior at Pendleton High School, played the lead male role.

The dancers geared up to surprise Mahaffy first.

"It was her 30th birthday," Sneden-Carlson said. "We couldn't let that go by."

Mahaffy's phone dinged at 9 that morning. She read the text and smiled. The selfie from former PBT dancer Eliana Hansen, who now lives in New Jersey, showed Hansen with a sign saying, "Happy 30th Birthday, Sammie." In place of the zero in



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Sydney Enright writes "Happy Birthday" in chalk on the path at Community Park on April 14, 2020, to honor fellow dancer Sammie Mahaffy on her birthday.

30 was a toe shoe. Texts from her fellow dancers and others kept coming until about 8 that night.

That evening, after a birthday dinner of OMG! burgers at her boyfriend Jeff Nirshl's house, Nirshl casually suggested going for a walk to nearby Community Park. As they walked, they observed more people at the park than normal. Still closer, Mahaffy noticed words in chalk on the pathway.

Somebody had written "Happy 30th birthday Sammie." She realized that fellow dancers, their family

members and former colleagues were stationed all along the path, carefully distanced from one another. Mahaffy teared up and stayed that way. She received gifts, birthday wishes and air hugs. Her former boss at the Speakeasy Salon, Katie Jones, read her a poem. At the end, they coaxed her to the middle of the grass.

"We all made a great big circle around her and sang 'Happy Birthday,'" Sneden-Carlson said.

Next came Ford's birthday. Ford had been missing dancing. He mentioned to his

mom that all he wanted for his birthday was to be back with his dancing family.

He got his wish, or at least as close as could get during a pandemic. On the evening of April 16, they gathered silently, parking their 15-or-so cars in a row by the Ford house. On tap that night would be a showing of PBT's performance of "Wizard of Oz," projected onto the side of the home. They deposited cards, gifts and Ford's favorite junk food on a table. Some settled with blankets into lawn chairs.

Ford, hearing suspicious sounds in the side yard, came out to check. He was greeted with hooting and hollering.

"He was pretty shocked," Mahaffy said. "The look on his face was priceless."

The dance company also figured out a way to honor Sneden-Carlson the next day on her birthday. They organized a drop-off schedule, and all day long the PBT director got knocks on her door as people left cards, balloons and chocolate on her porch and delivered birthday wishes from a safe distance. Sneden-Carlson said she felt touched.

"It was an amazing week of togetherness," she said. "There's so much love in this group."

BRIEFLY

Body found after motorhome fire in Milton-Freewater

MILTON-FREEWATER — A body was found Thursday morning after authorities responded to and extinguished a motorhome that was engulfed in flames on Southeast 12th Street in Milton-Freewater, according to a press release from Milton-Freewater Police Chief Doug Boedigheimer.

The Milton-Freewater Police Department, Milton-Freewater City Fire Department and the Milton-Freewater Rural Fire Department were called around 6:45 a.m. Thursday and arrived to a motorhome "fully engulfed" in flames in the backyard of the residence, the release stated.

The identity of the deceased has "not been positively determined," and no other details are available as the fire is investigated.

Merkley, Wyden announce \$430K in grants for tribes

WASHINGTON — Oregon's U.S. Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden announced Thursday that tribal communities in Oregon will receive more than \$430,000 to support the needs of elders and in an effort to curtail the spread of the coronavirus.

The Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center on the Umatilla Indian Reservation was a recipient, receiving more than \$76,000.

"The coronavirus poses unique risks and challenges to elders in communities across Oregon — and some of these challenges are felt the hardest among tribal communities," Merkley said. "The federal government is not doing enough overall to help tribes through this crisis, but I'm glad that these grants will help keep food on the table for these communities."

The funding is being allocated by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, which Con-

gress approved last month. "Tribal elders throughout Oregon facing both COVID-19's health dangers and economic uncertainties urgently need support to get through this historic crisis," Wyden said.

The awards, which will fund meal delivery and supportive services for Native American elders, are being distributed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

County reports three more COVID cases

UMATILLA COUNTY — The number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 continued to rise Friday as Umatilla County Public Health reported three new people have been infected with the virus.

The county identified one of the patients as being in close contact with the previous case, as all three recover from home in self-isolation.

The new cases bring the total number of people actively infected with the coronavirus to 16, while the rest are considered recovered. One patient remains in the hospital.

Most of Umatilla County cases are concentrated in the Hermiston and Umatilla areas, although the county isn't attributing COVID-19 cases to a specific area if it hasn't reported more than four cases.

The county hasn't shared individual demographic data either, but it has begun releasing countywide data.

As of Thursday, more than half of COVID-19 patients were women and more than a quarter were between the ages of 50-59, although the public health department cautioned that the sample size was too small for statistical analysis.

The three cases reported Friday matches three other days for the most reported in a single day since the beginning of the outbreak. As of Friday, 582 tests have been conducted in Umatilla County.

— EO Media Group

Hermiston City Council to meet Monday

Grassroots organization will address homelessness

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The Hermiston City Council will start their Monday meeting off with a work session at 6 p.m. to discuss homelessness.

Residents have created a grassroots organization called Stepping Stones to address homelessness in Hermiston, and on Monday they will present a plan to the city council for providing shelter for the area's homeless residents.

The meeting will be held at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, 1705 E. Airport Road, but limited seats for the public will be available due to COVID-19 restrictions, and people are encouraged to participate online or by phone instead. In-person meeting attendees can carefully drive around the "road closed" sign on Airport Road in order to access EOTEC.

For the 7 p.m. meet-

MEETING AVAILABLE ONLINE

Both the work session and the 7 p.m. regular meeting of the Hermiston City Council will be live streamed on YouTube at <https://bit.ly/HermistonYouTube>, or people call in to listen or make comments during the public comment period at 206-462-5569, using the meeting ID 322-962-8667. For the full agenda packet for Monday's meeting, visit hermiston.or.us/meetings.

ing, agenda items include a request for the city to vacate a roughly 500-foot portion of East Ridgeway Avenue east of Northeast Seventh Street and west of Diagonal Boulevard. The section is undeveloped right of way that is not currently used for traffic.

Santiago Communities, Inc. plans to build a 199-space manufactured home park in the vacant property to the north of the right-of-way, and the developer hopes to use the right-of-way as the required setback for the homes on that side of the development.

The council will also vote on two updates to the city code. The first makes changes to the process for hearing appeals to code enforcement actions. The second creates a section on administrative warrants, which would allow the code enforcement offi-

cer to get a warrant "authorizing entry onto property for purposes of conducting an administrative search, inspection or investigation, or authorizing an administrative seizure of property or abatement of a nuisance as authorized by the Code."

The council will vote on authorizing the city manager to accept up to \$250,000 in Federal Aviation Administration grant funds to complete design work on a rebuild of the apron at the Hermiston Municipal Airport, and \$69,000 in stimulus money from the CARES Act for airport operations in light of reduced air travel during the pandemic.

They will also vote on authorizing the city manager to apply for matching grant funds to build a "teen adventure park" on North First

Street across from the police station.

In addition, the council will vote on a proposed supplemental budget, which cities use at the end of their fiscal year to resolve differences between what was budgeted and what happened during the year. The supplemental budget before the council Monday includes such items as adding \$53,000 in Federal Emergency Management Agency funds for the flooding of Riverfront Park, and authorizing the expenditure of \$568,000 to rebuild Funland Playground.



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"I'm a big believer in Umatilla County, and as your county commissioner I will get to work on Day One making sure we remain the best place to live, work and raise a family."



dandorran@dorran.com | ddorran.com

DAN DORRAN
Paid for by Friends for Dan Dorran.
242 E. Main St., Box 2020, Hermiston, OR 97838

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