Drive-by graduation celebration

Pendleton parents honor graduates in a time of social distancing

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — High school seniors won't be going to prom, playing spring sports or otherwise experiencing the waning days of their final year in anything close to the typical way. Even in-person graduation ceremonies are uncertain.

So parents do their best to honor their graduates in a time of social distancing. Drive-by parades. Street banners. Stadiums lit for 20 minutes.

On Saturday, a group of parents of Pendleton High School seniors — the Senior Parents Committee — pulled off a yard decorating event with gusto. The group invited the public to cruise Pendleton streets viewing yards decorated to celebrate seniors.

On the North Hill, Aaron Luke's mother, Rachael Luke, let her creativity flow. Around the yard stood various versions of Aaron from grade school through high school, appropriately dressed for the time. His junior self wore his Oregon State Championships track and field T-shirt. For another year, he sported a cross-country sweatshirt. Another shirt identified Aaron, who plays french horn, trumpet, saxophone and bass guitar, as a band member.

"This is Aaron across the years," said Rachel Luke, who waved at someone slowing his car to take a look at the display.

And so it was around town. Most yards included signs printed at Creative Signs, featuring a photo of the senior and a congratulatory wish. The adornments varied from student to student.

Near Community Park, a display at the home of Jake and Margaret Osborne honored their granddaughter Tanna Stewart and Tanna's friend Macy Rosselle. Both girls live out of town, so this made the most practical sense. Signs attached to the house identified Tanna as a future Central Washington University Wildcat and Macy as an Oklahoma State University Cowboy.

Macy, 17, lives on a wheat ranch near Adams. She said watching coronavirus disrupt her senior year was heart-wrenching.

"It was difficult," she said. "It is weird not going back to school and not being able to see your friends."

Rosselle attempts to focus on the future, which appears promising. She won a $1,000 Oregon Wheat League scholarship and snagged a prestigious leadership scholarship from Oklahoma State, according to her mom. Macy said looking ahead makes her less crazy than dwelling on what is lost.

"It's sad," she said, "but we've got to move forward and look at the best side of things."

Not far away on Perkins Avenue, the adorned yard of Allen and Michele Madril celebrated their daughter, Ashlynn Madril. A huge "We (heart) Ashlynn" spread across the yard, surrounded by green and gold balloons.

Michelle Madril, the communications chair for the PHS Class of 2020 parent committee, said students and parents are going through something similar to the stages of grief.

"It's so unprecedented," Madril said. "At first we didn't know how to feel. We held on to the hope they'd go back to school. We feel helpless and that's not a good way for a mom to feel. Moms are fixers."

As an adult, she said, she understands that these few months are only a small portion of a life.

"But for a 17- or 18-year-old, this is their whole world right now," she said. "It's a big deal."

Madril said the yard decorating idea came from a parent who had seen posts about a yard decorating event in another state. The yard decorating project quickly ignited.

"This is one small way to celebrate them," Madril said. "This is one thing we have control over."

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Fourteen images of Aaron Luke at various ages adorned the senior's front yard Saturday during the Senior Yard Decorating Event. Aaron's mother, Rachael Luke, decorated the yard to honor her son.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Macy Rosselle, a senior at Pendleton High School, stands by a sign celebrating her impending graduation on Saturday. Rosselle plans to attend Oklahoma State University.

BRIEFLY

Latest rise in COVID-19 bumps up hospitalizations

UMATILLA COUNTY — Three Umatilla County residents are now hospitalized with COVID-19 as Umatilla County Public Health announced four new cases of coronavirus on Monday.

According to a county press release, two of the newest patients are being treated for the disease in the hospital, adding to the one person who was already in the hospital with COVID-19. The other two people identified in the announcement are recovering from home in self-isolation.

Since the beginning of the outbreak, the county has reported 37 confirmed cases of the coronavirus.

The county is reporting no deaths from COVID-19, 21 recovered patients and 16 active cases.

Umatilla County Public Health is continuing to not include demographic information with individual cases, but a map last updated April 21 shows a concentration of cases in the Hermiston and Umatilla areas. The map does not highlight any areas where there have been less than four cases and is scheduled to be updated again on Tuesday.

Out of the 650 tests conducted in Umatilla County, 37 have come back positive.

Kayak Public Transit pushes closure to May 2

PENDLETON — The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation are extending the closure of Kayak Public Transit due to COVID-19 until May 2, a press release said.

The tribes will continue to monitor the situation and will make a determination about the following week on or before May 1, the release said.

The closure — in response to COVID-19 — started on Monday, March 23.

"Kayak recognizes its role as a lifeline for access to employment, medical and shopping needs throughout the region and we do not take this action lightly," the release said.

Kayak Public Transit operates three fixed routes and four commuter bus services in Southeastern Washington and Northeastern Oregon, including La Grande, Hermiston and Walla Walla, Washington.

PHS names Sherman County principal as new AD

PENDLETON — Amid a statewide shutdown in student athletics, Pendleton High School has hired a new athletic director.

The Pendleton School District announced Friday that Mike Somnis will take over as an athletic director and assistant principal at Pendleton High School. Somnis replaces Troy Jerome, who is resigning to become the superintendent of the Pilot Rock School District.

Somnis comes to Pendleton from the Sherman County School District, where he served as the K-12 principal. Despite narrowing his focus, Somnis will actually be in charge of more students at his new job: Pendleton High School's enrollment is more than three times as big as Sherman County's entire district.

With a bachelor's degree from Eastern Oregon University and a master's degree from the University of Phoenix, Somnis started his career teaching in Yuma, Arizona, according to a district press release.

He would go on to teach a variety of subjects and a number of sports throughout his career, including time spent as the varsity coach for high school basketball and football.

Prior to his three-year stint in Sherman County, Somnis was the assistant principal and athletic director at The Dalles High School.

Somnis

Besides his extensive experience in athletics, the district praised Somnis for his experience in evaluation and his "integrity, listening skills, and ability to build high-quality relationships with students, staff, and patrons."

Dutch Bros. Coffee coming to Pendleton

PENDLETON — The country's largest privately held coffee drive-thru company is coming to Pendleton, the Pendleton Round-Up announced in a Facebook post Saturday morning.

Dutch Bros. Coffee will have a drive-thru location in the new building at the Pendleton Round-Up Grounds, according to the post.

"In addition to its mission of speed, quality and service, Dutch Bros. is committed to giving back to the communities it serves, which was one of the many qualities we as an organization were looking for," the post stated. "We wanted a company that gave back in big ways."

The location will be owned and operated by Marc and Angela Lee, who first franchised a Dutch Bros. location in La Grande in 2007 before expanding to Hermiston in 2012.

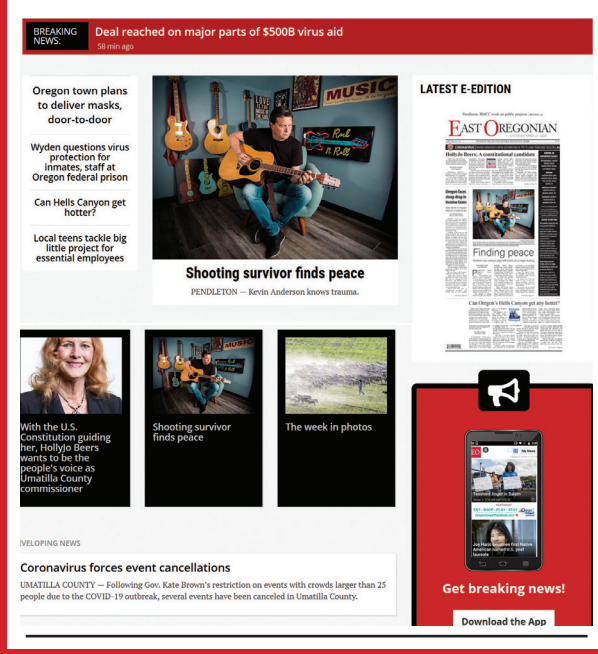
According to the post, the Lees have donated 1% of their gross annual sales back to their communities and hold quarterly fundraising events, such as the Dutch Love Day in Hermiston where proceeds were donated to the Agape House.

The post didn't announce an opening date, and Pendleton Round-Up Publicity Director Pat Reay could not be reached for comment.

— EO Media Group

CINCO DE MAYO PARADE
May 5th • 4:30pm
Sun Terrace Parking Lot
1550 NW 11th St., Hermiston
Decorate your vehicle and drive around our community parking lot for our residents to enjoy!
As we continue to do everything we can to keep our residents safe & support them during this tough time, we are asking for signs of encouragement, balloons and words of support to help them feel the love.
We will be providing tacos to go!
If you are interested, please call Monica at 541-564-2595 for more information and to let us know you are coming.
Sun Terrace Hermiston
A Retirement and Assisted Living Community
A REGENCY PACIFIC COMMUNITY
Bringing independence to living and quality to life
Accepting applications.
One bedroom units available.
Contact Pam at
541-564-2595

EAST OREGONIAN
PRINT DELIVERY IS GOING TO 3X/WEEKLY
STARTING IN MAY, THE PRINTED NEWSPAPER WILL ONLY BE PRODUCED AND DELIVERED ON TUESDAYS, THURSDAYS & SATURDAYS
However, our online news coverage will continue uninterrupted at eastoregonian.com



To activate your subscription online, go to https://subscription.eastoregonian.com/CircStore/ or call our customer service department at
1-800-781-3214
EAST OREGONIAN