

Hermiston still planning for June graduation, with modifications

District working to come up with a way to recognize graduating seniors

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — It won't look like it usually does, but Hermiston School District Superintendent Tricia Mooney is still telling high school seniors to save the date for their June 4 graduation.

Mooney provided an update on the school district to the Hermiston City Council on Monday, and during the presentation she told councilors that the district was working to come up with a way to recognize seniors without breaking whatever social distancing rules are in place in the county by June.

"It won't be a group. We won't have all the seniors together in a room like has been traditional, but they will have an opportunity to walk across a stage and be handed their diploma in a cap and gown," she said.

Students and their families should stay tuned for more details as the date draws closer.

Mooney said the change to distance learning to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has been a difficult one, and she has been encouraging teachers to prioritize "compassion and connection" as they guide students' at-home learning.

"This is something none of us has ever done before," she said.

The district has now handed out more than 2,400 Chromebooks to help students connect online with homework and video sessions, and Mooney announced they have now taken the next step in securing routers and Wi-Fi



EO file photo
Josh Goller, vice chair of the Hermiston Board of Education, speaks during Hermiston's 2019 commencement ceremony at the Toyota Center in Kennewick, Wash.

hotspots for students without internet to connect their Chromebooks to at home.

The routers have a radius of 100 to 150 yards. They are named HSD Home and only district-issued Chromebooks can connect to them. There are routers located at:

- Vista Mobile Home Park (three different spots)
- Ridgeway Apartments
- Fifth Street and Madrona Avenue
- Northwest Sixth Street between Hartley and Ridgeway avenues
- 1200 block of West Ridgeway Avenue

Mooney said other routers have been located in homes where students from several surrounding homes can use them, and the district has 40 "hot spots" that can be checked out to students in need who live out in the county.

"Obviously, in a time when everyone is looking

for routers and hot spots we had to wait a little while to get ours, but that is great news," she said.

Mooney said the district has now delivered more than 45,000 meals to students and are up to about 2,000 per day.

However, funding for that service will end as the school year ends in June. At that point, the district will switch to its usual summer meal service program, which will require students to visit one of several meal sites around town to pick up the meal themselves.

"As we get that finalized with the Department of Education and get some approvals, we will be doing a large push to get that information out to parents because that is going to be a huge adjustment for the parents that now are relying on that meal delivery, when we can no longer do that," Mooney said.

In answer to questions

from the council about school funding, Mooney said on a statewide call with superintendents recently they were told that all state agencies were planning on an 8.5% reduction for the biennium, which since the biennium is already halfway over, "feels like 17%."

The Oregon Legislature had previously passed a new corporate activity tax to give schools a major boost in funding, but Mooney said it's unlikely now that districts will see that money for the next school year. She said the district would honor its contracts with social workers and other positions it had already hired.

"We're going to be able to keep all those positions, but we're going to look at other areas where we can tighten our belt," she said.

Despite the setback, Mooney said the district does have financial reserves and other tools to weather the storm of COVID-19.

BRIEFLY

Pendleton man accused of child sex abuse

PENDLETON — A Pendleton man is facing felony charges for sexually abusing a child after he was arrested by Pendleton police earlier this month while allegedly trying to drive a 9-year-old girl to Portland.

A Umatilla County Grand Jury indicted Steven Lee Fox, 54, on April 20 for one count of first-degree sodomy, one count of first-degree sexual abuse and one count of unauthorized use of a vehicle. All of the charges are felonies.

Fox pleaded not guilty to all charges.

The Pendleton Police Department arrested Fox on April 11 on Interstate 84 after a woman initially reported he had taken her vehicle and her 9-year-old daughter and was driving to Portland.

Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts said his officers "pinged" Fox's phone in order to locate him. Roberts said officers then interviewed the child and conducted an investigation into suspected abuse by Fox.

According to court records, Fox has faced dozens of criminal charges through the years, ranging from burglary to forgery and dating back to 1984 in

Multnomah County.

Records also show Fox was previously accused of sex crimes in Multnomah County in 1993, when charges for first-degree rape, first-degree sodomy and second-degree sexual abuse were all dismissed.

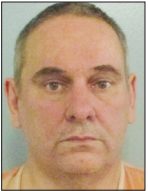
According to the *East Oregonian* archive, Fox ignited an all-night search after walking away from a prison work crew in February 2015, while serving time for burglary and robbery convictions at Two Rivers Correctional Institution in Umatilla.

Fox is scheduled to appear for a pretrial conference May 11 and his trial is currently set for June 8. He is lodged at the Umatilla County Jail in Pendleton on \$120,000 bail.

Mosquito control district to begin spray operations

HERMISTON — The West Umatilla Mosquito Control District will soon begin spraying for mosquitoes throughout western Umatilla County, the district announced in a press release on Tuesday.

The district, which covers a 525-square-mile area



Fox

that includes Hermiston, Umatilla, Stanfield and Echo, reports that large bodies of water will be sprayed using a helicopter while smaller areas will be treated by hand. The district will also use "truck mounted ultra low volume sprayers" to control adult mosquitoes. Aerial and truck mounted spraying will be done in the early evening hours just after sunset.

Of the 45 species of mosquitoes found in Oregon, the district commonly sees 12 species of mosquitoes including two that are possible carriers of West Nile virus.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the district offices will be closed to the public, face-to-face services requests will be avoided and all communication with the public will be done via phone. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is no data to suggest that COVID-19 or other similar coronaviruses, such as SARS or MERS, are spread by mosquitoes or ticks.

Residents can assist in cutting down the mosquito population by eliminating sources of standing water where mosquitoes breed. This includes keeping gutters and ditches clear, changing birdbath and water bowls frequently

and stocking water troughs and ornamental ponds with mosquito fish, which the district has available for free at their office.

If residents do not wish to have your property sprayed, call the district at 541-567-5201 and ask to be placed on the no-spray list.

East Oregonian changes go into effect

PENDLETON — Thursday's print copy of the *East Oregonian* marks the final issue as a five-day-a-week publication.

There will be no newspaper delivered Friday. Publication will pick back up with Saturday's issue.

And then beginning Tuesday, the *EO* will be delivered Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays to subscribers' mailboxes. It will be for sale by 7 a.m. at retail locations and in racks.

The *East Oregonian*, serving the community since 1875, will continue to publish local news daily through its digital edition, eastoregonian.com. Subscribers may activate their online subscriptions by logging on to <https://subscriptions.eastoregonian.com/CircStore/> or by calling the customer service department at 1-800-781-3214.

— EO Media Group

EAST OREGONIAN

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Shooting survivor finds peace

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