

Essential workers organize counterprotest

‘Essential not Sacrificial’ demonstration set for noon on May 30

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — When one group of Hermiston-area residents rallies on May 30 to protest restrictions put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19, some essential workers those rules could help protect are planning to make their voices heard in counterprotest.

Deidre Torres is spearheading a demonstration she calls “Essential not Sacrificial” that will take place at noon on May 30, the same time as the “Hermiston Freedom Rally” protest downtown. Participants plan to meet in their vehicles in the Bi-Mart parking lot, displaying signs calling for a safe reopening plan, and drive through town in a socially distanced form of protest.

“We’ll be following the (Centers for Disease Control



EO file photo

A “Heroes Work Here” sign honors essential workers at Guardian Angel Homes in Hermiston in April. Deidre Torres hopes people will parade through town in support of social distancing rules that protect essential workers on May 30.

and Prevention) guidelines to protect people, prevent exposure and keep everyone safe,” she said.

Torres said she isn’t against reopening businesses again in some form, but she objects to ideas espoused by at least some organizers of Reopen Hermiston that businesses shouldn’t be required to follow safety rules, such as

wearing masks, and that mass gatherings should start again immediately.

“I’m not necessarily against reopening, I’m just against a complete, unilateral reopening without a science-based plan,” she said.

She said she just wants to make sure that local government officials know that not everyone agrees that everything should be opened up

now. She said many essential workers she knows are also worried not only about getting the virus, but also spreading it to others who are more vulnerable.

“Everyone has made sacrifices,” she said. “I’m not able to attend my little brother’s graduation ceremony. I’ve been quarantining for two months. I haven’t hugged my mother for

two months.”

Rebecca Wallace Corff, who is helping Torres organize the event, said hospital workers are often “gagged” by privacy laws that don’t allow them to discuss details of what they have personally seen while treating COVID-19 patients. But as a hospital worker herself, what she can say is the things she has seen are enough to make her scared that people aren’t taking the virus seriously enough.

“It’s a horrible disease,” she said. “You don’t want to get it, and you don’t want your kids to get it.”

She said she hopes people will see the counterprotest and realize there is a “silent majority” that are in favor of practicing social distancing.

A Gallup poll published May 19 found that 54%

of Americans were “very confident” social distancing measures saved lives, while 31% of respondents said they were “moderately confident.”

Wallace Corff said she understands that when human beings are scared, they retreat to a place of denial as a way to handle their fears. But she said if people don’t trust the government, she hopes they will trust doctors, nurses and other health care professionals who want everyone to be safe and healthy.

With dueling protests in Hermiston set for the same day, Essential not Sacrificial participants are encouraged to stay in their vehicles and not interact with protesters in either camp. A code of conduct for the event can be found on the Essential not Sacrificial Facebook page.

The Salvation Army thrift store is now open and ready for business

By **KATHY ANEY**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Salvation Army was stretched thin.

The organization’s thrift store — its top source of income — closed in March along with most other retail business in Oregon. At the same time, more people started showing up at the noon meal offered six days a week at Salvation Army headquarters.

“Instead of 30 or 40 people a day,” said Corps Officer DeWayne Halstad, “all of a sudden, it went up to 75, 100, 125, all the way up to about 150. It blew us away. There were a lot of people we had never seen before.”

They varied demographically from young children with their parents to senior citizens. To encourage social distancing, the lunch crew put meals in to-go containers and told diners to take them off-site. Eventually, the numbers dipped back down a little, but hovers around 100. Feeding so many is expensive, especially without income from the store.

“We lost about \$80,000 from the store that would have helped with our feeding program,” he said.

On Tuesday, when the thrift store reopened, Halstad seemed visibly relieved. Money would start flowing back into the coffers. Customers, many who had called asking when the store would reopen, were coming back.

They didn’t need much urging. The store opened early at about 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday and immediately people trickled in and started browsing. Six or seven employees, ringing up purchases, stocking shelves and cleaning, wore bright red masks emblazoned in white with “The Salvation Army.”

Manager Rocky Newton greeted familiar customers by name as they entered the store.

“Hi, how are you,” she called. “It’s good to see our people coming back.”

When one unmasked customer unexpectedly hugged her, she was caught off-guard, but relaxed into it for a second. The man wandered toward the clothing racks and was soon engrossed in shopping.

Before COVID-19, Newton said 150 to 180 peo-



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Isha Brown, an employee of the Salvation Army Thrift Store, sorts through donated items on Tuesday shortly after the store reopened.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Averyal Thomas waits on a customer at the Salvation Army Thrift Store on Tuesday, the day the store reopened, after closing because of COVID-19 two months earlier.

ple visited the store each day, with some 120 of them making purchases. In the first hour after reopening on Tuesday, about 30 shoppers came and went, most carrying purchased items.

Patrons will notice changes. Hand sanitizer is available at cashier stations, which will eventually feature plexiglass sneeze shields. Dressing rooms are unavailable. Employees rou-

tinely sanitize point-of-sale machines, doors and carts.

Halstad didn’t seem worried about all those people out there cleaning and purging their homes while self-quarantining who will eventually find their way to the store with boxes and bags. He laughed at a photo he’d seen posted on Facebook of a car filled with donations for the day the Salvation Army reopened. The

store will eventually get deluged, he said, but until then, bring it on.

Halstad praised those who helped the local Salvation Army feed an increased number of visitors during the time of reduced income from the store.

“The community has been very supportive,” he said. “We put it out on Facebook that we needed food and people responded.”



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