

Funland playground gets \$250,000 federal investment

Funding comes through USDA Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — One source of funding for the construction of the Funland playground in Hermiston will provide a boost to future community projects as well.

The funding comes in the form of a \$250,000 investment through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program.

In this case, fundraisers working on behalf of the city to raise money for Funland have offered sponsors the opportunity to spread payments for large donations out over multiple years. The city tapped into Umatilla Electric Cooperative's Revolving Loan Fund to cover the difference up front, and will pay UEC back as sponsors make their payments.

According to UEC spokesperson Steve Myers, UEC in



Workers unload giant produce at the city of Hermiston maintenance facility in Hermiston on Monday, Sept. 28, 2020. The larger-than-life replicas will be a part of the new Funland playground when it is completed.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

turn tapped into the USDA grant program. The program provides grants and zero-interest loans to rural utilities, which in turn pass the money along to municipalities, busi-

nesses or nonprofits working in projects designed to create or retain employment in a rural area, according to a news release.

Twenty percent of the

interest-free loan to the city came from UEC's Revolving Loan Fund and 80% came from the USDA. When the city repays the loan, however, the Revolving Loan Fund will

be able to keep 100% of the funds, enabling UEC to reinvest that money into future community projects rather than sending it back to the federal government.

According to information provided by UEC, Funland is the fourth USDA REDLG project UEC has backed since the inception of its Revolving Loan Fund. In addition to community projects, the fund also provides low-interest loans to businesses. As of mid-2020, Meyers said, UEC has made 13 loans to area businesses, totaling \$1,627,250 from the original three projects. Six loans have been repaid in full.

"We are proud and excited to be able to leverage these USDA funds to help further the return of Funland, and we commend all who planned and built this worthwhile community project," Robert Echenrode, general manager and CEO of the Umatilla Electric Cooperative, said in a statement.

The wooden playground at Butte Park burned down in a suspected arson in 2019, and the city is rebuilding the site with a larger, improved version made of materials less susceptible to vandalism or arson. The project also includes improved security and lighting, an additional picnic shelter, and a building that will house restrooms and a concessions stand.

Hermiston plans hybrid learning for more grades

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Hermiston School District plans to bring more students back to the classroom with an expansion of hybrid learning to all elementary school students in early March.

In light of the "continued decline" of COVID-19 cases in the Hermiston ZIP code, the district reported in a news release, elementary schools are planning for second and third graders to return to the classroom part time on March 1 and fourth and fifth graders on March 8.

Kindergarten and first-grade students returned to the classroom on March 17.

Like the youngest grades, those that return in March will be split into two cohorts. Group A will attend on-site for three hours in the mornings, and Group B in the afternoon, with those not on-site learning online while the other group is in the classroom. On Fridays, students will learn from home all day



Hermiston School District/Contributed Photo, File

Hermiston School District plans to bring more students back to the classroom with an expansion of hybrid learning to all elementary school students in early March.

with "full class comprehensive distance learning" via video in the afternoons.

In a statement, Superintendent Tricia Mooney said the district tracks the Hermiston ZIP code's COVID-19 cases and calculates a rolling two-week number each Thursday as it works on reopening classrooms.

While Gov. Kate Brown announced in December 2020 that the Oregon Health

Authority's guidance on when schools can reopen was no longer mandatory, school districts reported they had learned that the liability protections granted by the state protecting schools from lawsuits over COVID-19 outbreaks would only be applicable if they followed those rules. For Hermiston School District, that means keeping cases in the city's ZIP code down to less than 88

cases reported over 14 days to offer hybrid learning at the elementary school level.

"Thank you for doing your part for our students and community to help bring our case counts down," Mooney said.

Hermiston School District now displays COVID-19 case counts relative to Oregon Health Authority's guidance on its website, where parents can track progress.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Wilcox family starts endowment fund

HERMISTON — New grants will be available to support children in the Hermiston area after the creation of the Wilcox Family Endowment Fund.

The endowment is a partnership between the Greater Hermiston Community Foundation and Alan and John Wilcox of the Wilcox Furniture family business. The Wilcoxes have donated an initial gift of \$100,000 to start the fund.

According to a news release, grants made from the endowment each year will support children's education, care and health in the greater Hermiston area.

"We believe that all of us have an opportunity to give back by helping our neighbors and community in whatever way we can," John Wilcox said in a statement.

The Greater Hermiston Community Foundation will house the fund and manage the grant application and selection process. Alan Wilcox said working with GHCF, which had already built a large endowment of community donations for charitable giving, was the way to most effectively focus the money on helping children in the area.

Greg Harris, GHCF board president, said in the news release that the foundation is proud to support the Wilcox Family Endowment Fund in quickly getting aid

to much-needed efforts.

"The youth of our community have shown the ability to do amazing things when given the tools to be successful," Harris said.

Application and grant information will be announced in the coming weeks. To learn more about the fund, visit www.GreaterHermiston.com or contact Dennis Barnett at dennis@barnettandmoro.com.

Man faces federal charges in death on tribal land

MISSION — A man is facing federal charges in the death of a man who was assaulted on the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, according to a press release from the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Tom Redhawk Tias, 21, was charged with voluntary manslaughter by the FBI on Feb. 9. The victim, Thomas James VanPelt Jr., 46, died from injuries suffered in an altercation on the reservation on Jan. 26.

Tias was transferred to federal custody last week after being held in tribal custody after VanPelt Jr.'s death. He has made an initial appearance by phone with a U.S. Magistrate Judge in Portland while in Umatilla County.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Oregon is prosecuting the case against Tias.

— EO Media Group

CTUIR to hold two-day mass vaccination event

Oregon National Guard deployed to help with vaccine administration

East Oregonian

MISSION — The Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center is hosting a mass vaccination clinic on Tuesday, Feb. 23, and Wednesday, Feb. 24, according to a Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation press release.

The health clinic has received 975 doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine from the Indian Health Service to put on a mass vaccination clinic. The Oregon National

Guard will assist with administration of the vaccines.

Vaccinations will be provided to enrolled members of the CTUIR who are 16 and over, employees of all CTUIR entities, including the Tribal government, Wildhorse Resort & Casino, Cayuse Holdings, Hamley's and Birch Creek Golf Course. Additionally, all residents of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, family members of CTUIR employees who reside in the same household and vendors and contractors who do work for CTUIR entities are eligible to be vaccinated.

"We are so proud to be able to vaccinate nearly 1,000 more people in our region,"

said CTUIR Board of Trustees Chair Kat Brigham. "IHS provided us with resources to go beyond our members and vaccinate our employees, Reservation residents and our employees' families. We are ready."

CTUIR is a part the Oregon Emergency Response System, which coordinates state resources in response to emergencies involving multi-jurisdictional cooperation. In response to a request for support for this mass vaccination event, the state has deployed 18 members of the Oregon National Guard to help administer the vaccines.

"With the help of Oregon National Guard medical

personnel we will be able to ramp up vaccinations beyond our own patient list," said Yellowhawk Chief Executive Officer Lisa Guzman. "This is such an important tool in fighting the virus. By the end of March we will have vaccinated more than 2,000 people."

This vaccine is provided to patients in two doses. Doses are given 21 days apart. The second dose or booster vaccine will be provided by appointment in March.

Prior to the mass vaccination event, Yellowhawk vaccinated more than 1,000 individuals, including CTUIR Tribal members, health care workers and first responders, starting in December 2020.

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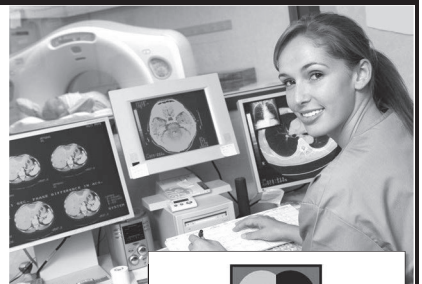
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Interested in a Medical Career?

Need funds to complete your training?

Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation scholarships are now being accepted from qualified local students through February 28th.

The Foundation is again pleased to partner with Tualatin Imaging to offer additional scholarships for students who have expressed interest in pursuing a diagnostic imaging career.



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