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MILTON-FREEWATER

Another round of repairs for pool

Beleaguered Joe Humbert Family Aquatic Center to fix recurring issue

By SHEILA HAGAR
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

MILTON-FREEWATER — Linda Hall is very much hoping the third time will be the proverbial charm.

Hall, city manager, was filling in the Milton-Freewater City Council last week on the status of the public pool.

Plans call for the Joe Humbert Family Aquatic Center to open on Memorial Day and stay that way until Labor Day, Hall said, but that's been said before.

The facility, rebuilt in 1996 after voters approved a bond, has suffered largely from age and a little from human error, officials have said.

In 2019, the pool closed at the end of July as a baffling, recurring issue clouded the water time and time again. The problem, while not toxic, hampered lifeguards trying to see swimmers in the water.

Through a process of eliminating possible causes, it was discovered the rubber coating that had been applied on pool walls that spring as an upgrade was disintegrating into the water.

Eventually city administrators and pool experts decided it made the most sense to close the aquatic center and reopen the next year. Refunds and holdovers were offered to season pass holders.

Along came 2020, which not only brought a highly contagious, global pandemic, but continuing issues with the pool. The replacement coating was a finicky product, requiring certain outdoor temperatures for a stretch of days and zero rain, Hall said last June. At the same time, Oregon's COVID-19 restrictions affected every recreational setting and use.

In just a few weeks, the new coating also began failing, and smoke from regional wildfires made outdoor recreation unhealthy.

The pool closed early for a second year, after about three weeks of operation.

Aquatic facility experts eventually found the pool surface and much of the equipment had reached life expectancy of about one-quarter of a century and that to continue recoating the plaster did not make sense, either economically or operationally.

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INSIDE • AgriBusiness

Umatilla County in 'two-week caution'

County reports 84 COVID-19 cases over the last two weeks

By BRYCE DOLE
East Oregonian

SALEM — Umatilla County could move back to the high coronavirus risk category as it begins a "two-week caution period" starting Friday, April 23, amid a sharp spike in COVID-19 cases.



Murdock



Shafer

Umatilla County reported 84 cases over the last two weeks, a total that would qualify it for high risk, bringing increased restrictions on indoor activities and commerce countywide.

"It's very disappointing and very disturbing," Umatilla County

Commissioner George Murdock said of the recent uptick in cases.

In a press release on Tuesday, April 20, Gov. Kate Brown announced that 10 counties in Oregon will move to high risk this week after reporting increased rates of infection. And two other counties — Malheur and Grant — would join Umatilla in the "two-week caution period."

The state determines a county's risk level every two weeks based around reported cases and infection rates, but will allow a county to remain at its current level in a "two-week caution period" if it

moved down in the most recent assessment.

Umatilla County moved to moderate risk on April 9 after reporting some of its lowest COVID-19 totals since spring 2020, according to data from the county health department. Last week, however, the county reported a sharp increase of 54 new cases.

"It isn't just a little bit of an increase," Murdock said. "It's enough of an increase that, when you're flirting with moderate (risk) versus high (risk), you can't afford

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Irrigation equipment waters a field west of Echo on Wednesday, April 21, 2021. According to the National Integrated Drought Information System, the west end of Umatilla County is experiencing moderate to severe drought.

Drought declared

Umatilla County moves to declare drought as officials raise concerns for agriculture

By BRYCE DOLE
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners in a Tuesday, April 20, meeting moved unanimously to declare a drought disaster in the county and are asking that Gov. Kate Brown and U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack follow suit.

If the state declares a drought, local farmers could receive relief in the form of state or

federal grants, officials say.

"We have a very large area in Umatilla County that is in the severe drought stage right now, with another equally large area in extreme drought," Umatilla County Commissioner Dan Dorrnan said in the meeting, adding that "the rest of the county is either in abnormally dry or moderate drought."

Dorrnan said people in the agriculture industry have been reaching out to him and voicing concerns over the current conditions.

"Right now, there's cattle farmers that are beginning to have to buy hay because of no early grass, and that's a big worry," Dorrnan said. "Dryland wheat farmers, where are they going to be and what kind of moisture are

they looking at? Are they going to be able to sustain the crops they have until the next rain they get?"

Don Wysocki, a soil scientist for Oregon State University based in Umatilla County, said this year's wheat crop is in dire need of rain.

"If we get rain too late, we can't really recover," he said. "I think it's still at a stage where if we get rain, we'd have pretty good recovery. But another week or two and we're going to be beyond good recovery."

Counties like Baker and Union have already declared a drought as much of Central and Eastern Oregon is experiencing

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Cost overruns stretch park renovation budget

Parks and Recreation Department proposes reducing scope of Til Taylor Park project

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Pendleton Parks and Recreation Department has proposed reducing the scope of the Til Taylor Park renovation project because of cost overruns, but the Pendleton Development Commission is considering going over budget to help the department complete its original vision.

At a Tuesday, April 20,

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IN OTHER BUSINESS

The Pendleton Development Commission opened up its wallet in other ways at its April 20 meeting, including:

- The commission agreed to spend \$55,000 to help pay for renovations at the Pendleton Convention Center's Happy Canyon Room.

The convention center has already fundraised more than \$100,000 from individuals and nonprofits, but the commission's contribution will help the city cover any cost overruns.

According to a staff report, the renovations will include a new ceiling, flooring, fresh paint,

lighting and "back lit LED murals." Staff believe the upgrades will help the Happy Canyon Room become a venue unto itself and also offer another selling point to both existing events and prospective events.

- Commission members voted to give downtown building owner Vicky Pearce a grant to help renovate the second story of the Crabby's building from 220 S.W. First St. to 221 S. Main St.

In a staff report, Charles Denight, the commission's associate director, wrote that Pearce intends to convert the upper story to office space and has already identified

a tenant.

The commission granted Pearce \$63,760, or 40% of the project's total cost.

- Lastly, the commission voted to expand its housing renovation program to include rental properties.

The program will provide forgivable loans for housing renovations under slightly different rules than the loans offered to owner-occupied houses, but Councilor Steve Campbell said the change was meant to address the fact that 70% of the houses in the urban renewal district are rentals.

