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Aspen Springs reopens as a secure residential treatment facility

Lifeways accepting patients for ‘safe, supervised, short-term’ care

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The former Aspen Springs Psychiatric Hospital in Hermiston has reopened as a secure residential treatment facility.

The 16-bed hospital closed in early April, about seven months after it opened. The board of Lifeways, the community mental health provider that built the facility, stated they could not find the psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses needed to staff the building



Ben Loneragan/East Oregonian, File

Lifeways closed its Aspen Springs Psychiatric Hospital in Hermiston after just over six months in operation, but has now reopened the building as a secure residential treatment facility.

around the clock.

Lifeways announced on Tuesday, May 4, that Aspen Springs is now accepting patients as a Class II Secured Residential Treatment Facility.

“The Lifeways Team appreciates all the support we have received from partners at all levels of care and community in Umatilla County and throughout the state,” the news release stated. “Lifeways remains dedicated to those needing a care team to walk by their side on their journey back to health and wellness. Thank you for your continued support during this transition.”

A psychiatric hospital provides the highest level of psychiatric care in the state, caring for individuals in the midst of an acute mental health crisis. A secure residen-

tial treatment facility also treats patients on an inpatient basis, but is a step down on the level of severity. Lifeways describes it as a place for community members ages 18 and up “seeking safe, supervised, short-term psychiatric recovery and stabilization.”

Services provided will include medication management, individual and group therapy, skills training and “wraparound” support for patients reintegrating back into the community. There are 16 beds available.

For former Aspen Springs Psychiatric Hospital patients, their patient records can be accessed by contacting Julie Hyslop, medical records supervisor, at jhyslop@lifeways.org or 702 Sunset Drive in Ontario.

PENDLETON

Budget gets shot in arm

City’s proposed increase in general fund linked to \$3.4M federal stimulus

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Thanks to the most recent round of federal stimulus, the city of Pendleton’s budget is likely to rise again this year despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

The city has proposed that the 2021-22 general fund, the city’s only discretionary fund that pays for services like police, firefighters and parks, be set at \$20.3 million, a 14% increase from the previous fiscal year. The city’s total budget — proposed at \$105.2 million — also represents a slight increase from the prior year.

City Manager Robb Corbett attributed much of the growth to the \$3.4 million Pendleton expects to receive from the American Rescue Plan Act, the \$1.9 trillion federal government stimulus bill meant to provide economic relief to people and entities affected by COVID-19.

While the city is still figuring out what parameters there are on how to spend the money, a preliminary plan would spend some money covering financial losses from the coronavirus and on a tourism initiative. But the lion’s share of the money is being allocated toward facility maintenance.

Corbett and other city staff have long spoken about the need to address the million of dollars of deferred maintenance associ-

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Ben Loneragan/East Oregonian

David Shasteen sprints into first base during a Dream Team softball game at Hermiston’s Field of Dreams on Tuesday, May 4, 2021.

‘DREAM TEAM’

Hermiston Little League teams pair up with special needs athletes to create a night of fun

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — On Tuesday nights at Hermiston’s Field of Dreams, a very unusual softball game takes shape.

Both teams wear the same green T-shirts, emblazoned with the words “Dream Team.” There are half a dozen shortstops, but zero

outs. The game is only two innings long.

The weekly games are part of an annual tradition that takes place each spring when special needs athletes ages 6 and to young adult play together, helped along by members of local Little League teams. On Tuesday, May 4, the Devin Oil Marlins softball team and the Hermiston Generating Cardinals baseball team were taking their turn.

“My favorite part is at the end of each game, when they ask, ‘When do we get to play again?’” Coach Tasha Bleyenbergh said.

She and Coach Kristi Smalley gather their 18 players each week at 6 p.m. They start out by pairing up Dream Team athletes with Little League athletes for a game of catch to warm up, then lead everyone in some stretches before the athletes divide into two teams and the game begins.

“Are we gonna have some fun tonight?”

Smalley asked everyone during the May 4 game, while everyone enthusiastically chimes back that fun is the focus.

David Shasteen, age 9, said he has been on the Dream Team for several years now. His favorite part is getting to swing the bat at the plate.

There are no strikes — players get to hit the ball as many times as they need, either from a ball pitched by a coach or a T-ball tee — and David said he usually hits the ball right away.

“But sometimes I miss the ball on the fourth time or the second time,” he said.

The players’ skill varies widely. During the first inning, one player wandered toward third base after hitting the ball before her Little League buddies got her going in the

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Pool ready to reopen

Pendleton Aquatic Center to reopen under new rules

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Pendleton Aquatic Center is opening for the first since 2019, but what its reopening looks like is highly dependent on Umatilla County’s COVID-19 risk level.

In an interview, Parks and Recreation Director Liam Hughes said the pool will reopen on June 12 after spending 2020 dormant.

Hughes said the “game changer” for the aquatic center was the state’s

new standards for outdoor gatherings. While the state used to cap gatherings at a flat number, the state now factors in people per square feet and county risk level.

With the Pendleton Aquatic Center offering 128,000 square feet of space, the aquatic center offers some flexibility for city staff.

“We’re really fortunate that the aquatic center is such a large facility,” he said.

With Umatilla County currently at a high COVID-19 risk level, the aquatic center can welcome in up to 670 guests simultaneously. But the aquatic center’s capacity rises and falls with the county’s risk level.

Should the county fall into the extreme level, the city would cut off general admission to the pools,



Ben Loneragan/East Oregonian

The lap pool at the Pendleton Aquatic Center sits full of water on Wednesday, May 5, 2021.

only allowing pool classes to operate at the facility. On the other hand, should the county graduate to moderate risk, the aquatic center’s

capacity would grow to 1,100.

If Umatilla County manages to

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