

Multiple agencies respond to Pilot Rock fire



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Fire crews work to extinguish a fire on Northeast Second Street in Pilot Rock on Wednesday, May 5, 2021. Umatilla County Fire District No. 1 Division Chief and Fire Marshall Scott Goff said the district was dispatched to the scene at roughly 10:15 a.m. for a fire in an outbuilding on the property that spread to the main home. Goff said fire crews managed to contain the fire to the initial structure and the home, and all of those in the house were accounted for with no known injuries. Engines from the Umatilla Tribal Fire Department, East Umatilla Fire and Rescue and the Pendleton Fire Department provided mutual aid to the Pilot Rock Rural Fire Protection District.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Fair Appreciation Dinner canceled

HERMISTON — The Umatilla County Fair Appreciation Dinner set to take place on May 15 will be combined with next year's event instead.

In a letter to sponsors, Fair Manager Angie McNalley said that Umatilla County moving back to high risk restrictions for COVID-19 would not allow the fair to hold a full event, and after speaking with the county health department about different options, the fair board agreed it did not want to cut anyone from the guest list.

McNalley said fair organizers are still hard at work planning the 2021 fair, and still plan to hold the fair on Aug. 11-14. The fair court, grand marshals and other honorees for the 2021 fair will be honored alongside the next year's honorees during the annual Fair Appreciation Dinner in January 2022.

Morrow County declares drought

HEPPNER — The Morrow County Board of Commissioners has formally declared a drought in the county and formally asked Gov. Kate Brown for state support.

A letter from commissioners to Brown, dated April 28, describes conditions this year as "severe" and projected to continue.

"There is a potential for Morrow County agricultural and livestock, natural resources, recreational and tourism, and related economies to experience widespread and severe damage resulting in extreme weather conditions in the County," the letter stated. "The County is experiencing negative impacts in agriculture."

It asks that Brown issue an executive order declaring a drought in Morrow County and that state agencies, including the Oregon Water Department, operate within their authority to assist the county in mitigating damage from the drought.

The resolution passed by the board, declaring the drought on a county level, states more than half the county is in severe drought and the rest is in moderate drought or abnormally dry conditions. If that continues, the resolution states, water users will have a significantly shortened season for water access.

Umatilla dictionary now on the web

MISSION — The Umatilla language is now accessible to anyone in the world with an internet connection.

In a press release, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

announced that the Umatilla Language Dictionary is now online.

A collaboration between the CTUIR Language Program and Amazon Web Services, the Tribes' intent was to educate tribal members on their language and raise awareness on the tongue.

The prevalence of the Umatilla language has diminished over the years as many of its fluent speakers have died. The CTUIR established a language program in 1996 to preserve the language by recording elders and teaching the language to tribal youths and adults.

"This is a gift to the youth," Noel Rude, the dictionary's author and a former tribal linguist at the Tamastlikt Cultural Institute, said in a statement. "No matter where they find themselves, they will have access to the beautiful words of their elders. May this kindle their curiosity! And may their elders' legacy never fade."

The dictionary can be accessed at <https://dictionary.ctuir.org>.

DHS sponsors tennis shoe drive

PENDLETON — A partnership between Every Child Oregon and the child welfare branch of Oregon Department of Human Services is sponsoring a tennis shoe drive for foster children in Umatilla and Morrow counties as part of Foster Care Awareness Month, according to Heidi Zeigler, the community development director for the Department of Health and Human Services in the two counties.

Donors can drop off the shoes at Sweet Potatoes Closet and the Desert Lanes bowling alley in Hermiston, Hamleys Western Store in Pendleton, Baker Boyer Bank in Milton-Freewater, or Bank of Eastern Oregon in Heppner and Boardman, Zeigler said.

People can also make donations online via Amazon Wish List by making a purchase through www.smile.amazon.com/hz/charitylist/1s/13M-M6IEUXXJA3/ref=smi_ext_lnk_lcl_cl, which will automatically ship the donation to Sweet Potatoes Closet. The drive will last through the end of May, with shoes being distributed to children in June, Zeigler said.

In addition, DHS will also be collecting gift cards and certificates for foster families this month in place of the annual foster parent appreciation dinner, which was canceled due to the ongoing pandemic, Zeigler said.

People wishing to donate gift cards must do so by May 14 by emailing Marvin Hamilton with DHS at marvin.hamilton@dhs.oregon.gov or call 541-564-4484.

—EO Media Group

Wyden talks policing during town hall

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Mental health issues were top of mind for the first half of a virtual town hall that Sen. Ron Wyden held for residents of Umatilla, Union and Wallowa counties on Sunday, May 2.

Wyden broached the topic during the first question of the day, asked by Umatilla School District Superintendent Heidi Sipe, about federal support for students as the country rethinks "nearly every aspect of education" following the pandemic.

Wyden addressed standardized testing, saying that this year it seems best for teachers to address learning loss in the classroom rather than taking time out for standardized testing this year. He said schools will need additional funding to help students catch up after lost learning opportunities, and pointed out the funding included in the American Rescue Plan for schools to do just that through summer learning opportunities and other strategies. He said he is also concerned about students' mental health, and wanted to see funding to adequately address those needs, too.

"I am very troubled by where we are with respect to mental health services,

particularly for children, (and) seniors in rural areas," he said. "The mental health claims as a result of the pandemic have gone through the stratosphere."

He revisited the topic after a question by Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock, who said he was hearing from police that they want to "get out of the mental health business" and wanted to know what Wyden was doing to address that issue.

Wyden said he knows that police don't want to be forced into acting as mental health counselors, but mental health professionals also don't want to be forced into acting as police. So he has been pushing in the last year for Congress to pass the CAHOOTS Act, modeled after a program started in Eugene, that would fund partnerships between law enforcement and mental health professionals to form joint 24/7 crisis response teams. One billion dollars in seed money for a CAHOOTS-like program reimbursed through Medicaid was included in the American Rescue Plan.

Wyden said the topic is very personal for him, because



Chrisman



Murdock



Sipe

the Wyden household spent many years worried about the safety of his brother, who had schizophrenia and was often wandering the streets late at night.

Murdock told Wyden that Umatilla County is very interested in participating in a CAHOOTS program, and has already set aside hundreds of thousands of local dollars in the budget to be able to jump on board when gets started. Wyden said the federal funding will be channeled through the states, and he hopes to see rural communities participate.

"I'm thrilled that Eastern Oregon wants to be the rural example for CAHOOTS," Wyden said.

Steve Chrisman, Pendleton's airport manager, thanked Wyden for his work to get funding for Pendleton's UAS range.

While the airport has seen success in that area, he said, the airport's traffic control tower is not equipped with radar.

"We are managing our air traffic using radio line of

More online
A recording of the full town hall can be found on the People's Town Hall Facebook page.

sight," he said.

He described "remote tower" programs being piloted that use a system of cameras broadcasting to a wall of screens that allows rural air traffic controllers to better track air traffic. He asked if there was any chance of federal funding for something like that for rural airports.

Wyden said he'd like to work very closely with the city on that, and said if Chrisman could send along an example of an existing program working, his office could run with it from that point.

"Some people will say, well Ron, you're a privacy guy, why would you be for drones?" he said. "It would be foolish, even by Washington, D.C., standards, to ban technology innovation. The question is how the technology is used. You want to use technology in a constructive way to make it possible for people to get air services and do it in a safe way. The same is true for mountaintop rescues and firefighting efforts."

New police station in Milton-Freewater up for vote

LOCAL ELECTIONS 2021

By SHEILA HAGAR
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

MILTON-FREEWATER — Ballots have gone out to Umatilla County voters for the May 18 election.

In Milton-Freewater, residents are voting on a number of unopposed school board, water control district and Port of Umatilla directors seats.

As well, there are two open positions for the Umatilla County Library District, each with three candidates in the running.

Arguably, the biggest decision in this election will come in checking "yes" or "no" for a general obligation bond authorizing a new police station in Milton-Freewater.

If the \$7.7 million request from city leaders is approved, the money will come from property taxes, at 87 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value, or about \$7.25 per month on a house valued at \$100,000.

According to various online realty sites, the median home price in the city is about \$225,000.

The current police station has lived in the basement of city hall here for about a century, officials said.

The area consists of small rooms that mostly lack natural lighting and reliable temperature control. Technology and storage now take up a portion of the office space meant for humans.

The proposed station will be built on a city-owned lot behind city hall. At about 7,200 square feet,

the structure would house Milton-Freewater police patrol officers and 911 dispatchers.

Plans include conference and report-taking rooms, two holding cells, offices, evidence rooms, a public lobby, a break room, interview spaces and training areas.

The building will have earthquake protection, be set up for today's technology, accessible to people using mobility devices and provide privacy and safety for residents to attend to police business, city officials

said earlier this year.

The bond amount is adjusted for a possible 4% cost escalation.

In addition to being mailed in, Umatilla County ballots can be dropped off at the following locations:

- Milton-Freewater city hall, 722 S. Main St., drive-up boxes located in rear parking lot.
- Umatilla County Courthouse, Room 18, 216 S.E. Fourth. St., Pendleton, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Mon-Fri. On May 18, the office will accept ballots from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

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