

Man's death in Columbia River appears to be accidental

By CAMERON PROBERT
Tri-City Herald

KENNEWICK — Investigators believe a Pendleton man found dead on Friday, May 14, in the Columbia River accidentally drowned.

The Snohomish County Medical Examiner's Office wrapped up an autopsy on

Oscar Castaneda last week, and concluded he wasn't injured before he went into the river, slightly upstream of the Lampson hydroplane pits in Kennewick, Benton County Coroner Bill Leach said.

While everything indicates he died from drowning, the coroner's office is performing blood tests to

make sure he wasn't under the influence of drugs and alcohol, Leach said.

"At this point, it's looking like an accident," he said. "They just want to make sure there isn't any underlying intoxicants."

While the coroner's office didn't initially plan for an autopsy, it now wants to make sure foul play

was not involved.

No more information has been released about what Castaneda, 29, was doing in Columbia Park overnight. Castaneda was fully clothed, so it didn't appear that he was swimming. He lived in Pendleton, but had family in Pasco.

A woman reported seeing what appeared to be a body

or a mannequin in the river at 8:15 a.m. on May 14 and called police.

When they arrived, they found Castaneda's body floating near the east end pits where Columbia Basin Dive Rescue divers helped take him out of the water.

A GoFundMe account was set up to help with funeral expenses for the family.

"We lost a very special person in this world physically, but we will always have great memories of him in our hearts," organizer Rosana Villalpando wrote. "I appreciate any help you can give the Castaneda Torres family."

According to Facebook posts from his fiancée, they were expecting their first child together in September.

LOCAL BRIEFING



John Hughel/Oregon Military Department Public Affairs

Umatilla fifth and sixth grade students spend the afternoon designing and testing straw rockets at the new STARBASE Academy at the Umatilla Chemical Depot on Friday, May 21, 2021. As the fourth STARBASE Academy in Oregon, the students are getting an early start before the formal grand opening in September when all area students return to classrooms as COVID-19 conditions improve for all local students.

Academy to educate kids in STEM

UMATILLA — Local officials got their first glimpse at the Oregon Military Department's new STARBASE Academy at the Umatilla Chemical Depot on Friday, May 21, according to a press release.

The free program provides fifth and sixth graders the opportunity to hone their science, technology, engineering and math skills for "real-world" settings. It includes 25 hours of STEM instruction for fifth graders and 20 hours on hands-on, project-based after school instruction for sixth graders, the press release said.

Several eager Umatilla students volunteered to try out the academy in advance of its grand opening in September, which will make it the fourth academy of its kind statewide. The students at the May 21 preview designed and tested straw rockets and learned from Oregon National Guard members, the press release said.

The other academies are in Portland, Klamath Falls and Warrenton, and will serve 17 school districts with nearly 4,650 students in 2022, the press release said.

A total of 67 STARBASE Academies in 39 states and territories educate more than 75,000 students annually

nationwide, the press release said.

Hermiston School District to provide free summer camp

HERMISTON — Hermiston School District is providing a free summer program to enrolled students grades kindergarten through fourth grade this summer.

The program will take place June 21 to July 31 (except July 5), Monday through Friday, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

According to an announcement from the school district, the academic portion of the day will take place from 7:30 a.m. to 1:45 p.m. with math, literacy and science activities, plus field trips and swimming lessons. Afterward students will have the option of participating in sports, attending the Champions daycare or going home for the day. Breakfast, lunch and dinner will be provided free on site and transportation to and from the program is also available.

Registration is May 24-28. Visit the Hermiston School District Facebook page or hermiston.k12.or.us to register.

Hermiston's budget sees 19.5% increase

HERMISTON — The city of Hermiston's budget committee is recommend-

ing the city council pass a proposed 2021-22 budget that is \$11.2 million larger than the previous year.

City Manager Byron Smith told the committee the 19.5% increase was due to a number of large capital projects the city is undertaking in the coming year. Those include construction of a new city hall, an infrastructure project at the South Hermiston Industrial Park, resurfacing the apron at the Hermiston Municipal Airport and various water and sewer projects.

Some of the city's capital projects will be paid for at least in part by grants from the state or federal government. The \$2 million airport project, for example, will be covered by a combination of money from the Federal Aviation Administration and Oregon Department of Aviation.

Smith said the pandemic didn't affect some of the city's revenues, including the transient room tax, as much as feared, but the city did lose about \$800,000 on the parks and recreation side.

The proposed budget includes a 1% cost of living increase for staff in July 2021 and a 1.5% increase that will take effect in 2022 if revenues come in as expected. The budget includes a one-person increase in staff, from the equivalent of 121.47 full-time employees to 122.47 FTE with the hiring of an extra water utility worker.

—EO Media Group

Hermiston 2040 asks residents to envision the city's future

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The city of Hermiston is asking residents to think big as they imagine what the city might look like 20 years from now.

The city, led by a steering committee representing various community partners, has launched Hermiston 2040, an effort to create a 20-year vision plan for the community.

"We're looking to those of you who live, work and play here to help us create the guiding vision for Hermiston's future," the flyer announcing the project reads. "This road map, anchored in the people of Hermiston's values, will chart the way our city will look, feel and work over the next 20 years."

To launch the project, the city created a new website, hermiston2040.com. The website encourages people to sign up to get involved throughout the feedback-gathering process.

It also contains a link to the city's first Hermiston

2040 survey. The survey asks people connected to Hermiston a series of questions about how they perceive Hermiston and what they would like to see change.

City Manager Byron

"I THINK PEOPLE ARE SOMETIMES SKEPTICAL, BUT THIS IS A SINCERE EFFORT TO FIND OUT WHAT THE COMMUNITY WANTS US TO WORK ON."

— Byron Smith, city manager

Smith said the initial survey is to help the steering committee find overall themes and trends, before

drilling down on those specific topics with more surveys and focus groups with residents. They also plan to do other types of outreach, including booths at community events and open houses, as COVID-19 conditions permit.

"I think people are sometimes skeptical, but this is a sincere effort to find out what the community wants us to work on," Smith said.

He said the final document, which likely will be produced sometime this fall after a summer of gathering feedback, will be available to the entire community so that other organizations can use the information provided.

Smith said the city has done similar 20-year visioning efforts before and it has been helpful in guiding community leaders. Past feedback about the need for more parks and recreation offerings prompted the city to improve parks and add trails, for example.

For more information about the effort, visit www.hermiston2040.com or email info@hermiston2040.com.

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