

# Funland rises from the ashes yet again

By **BEN LONERGAN**  
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — A group of eager children gathered alongside Hermiston Mayor David Drotzmann under the arching entrance to the new Funland Sunday, July 4, for the grand opening of the new facility.

“Three, two, one,” the crowd counted down before Drotzmann’s giant scissors sliced the ribbon and a flood of children flowed across the park.

“It’s amazing,” yelled one child as he sprinted across the playground. A stilt walker dressed like Uncle Sam, a pair of pirates and Santa Claus mingled amongst the crowd, taking photos with children as they explored the new playground.

Elsewhere, Khloe Velasco swung across the variety of playground structures, taking in each one. Velasco still remembers the old Funland and said it was hard to choose which one she liked better.

“I like both,” Velasco said. “They’re different, but both great.”



**Silas Townsend, 2, crosses a rope walkway Sunday, July 4, 2021, during the grand opening of the new Funland Playground in Hermiston.**

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Velasco said she enjoyed the variety of new slides and the many buildings and store-fronts to play in.

While slides and play structures attracted Velasco’s attention, her 4-year-old brother Ivan Velasco said his favorite part of the new playground was the large concrete corn near the front

of the park.

“I want to go on the corn,” he said before running off toward the piece of play equipment.

Larry Fetter, director of the Hermiston Parks and Recreation Department, said the corn, and other large concrete structures, were unique to Funland.

“All of the cement structures are custom to Hermiston,” he said.

The Funland Playground features a variety of play structures, including three main zones: the Wild West, Adventure and Farmland. In addition to original playground structures, the playground features a soft,

rubbery play service that has been designed to complement the various areas of play.

For Fetter, the July 4 grand opening marked a major milestone in the completion of the project. While some lighting, fencing and sod construction remains, Fetter said it was “exhilarating” to be able to see children on the playground once again.

“I’ve been looking forward to this for two years,” he said. “It’s a great day to celebrate.”

Also to come is a monument and fence recognizing the project’s donors. In addition to a \$752,000 insurance payout from the previous playground, the Funland Fundraising Committee, in partnership with the Hermiston Parks and Recreation Department, set out to raise an additional \$810,000 toward the playground’s \$1.75 million price tag. The city acknowledged the support of the Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions clubs as well as others who helped fundraise for the project.

The new Funland is the third iteration of the playground, originally built in

1996. The first playground burned down in 2001 and its replacement burned down in May 2019 in a suspected case of arson.

Due to Funland’s history with fires, the city of Hermiston has said the new structure was built with fire-resistant materials and features surveillance cameras to further deter vandalism.

Greg Collins explored the playground with his daughter during Sunday’s event. Collins, who said he helped with some of the final construction of the playground, said the playground was unlike anything he’d seen before.

“I think it’s amazing,” he said. “I have never seen a park on this scale.”

As a parent, Collins said he felt the park offered a variety of engaging play areas and said he would have loved to have something similar as a child. He said he thought the park would become a frequent destination for his family and others in the community.

“The other parks in Hermiston,” Collins said, “are going to be feeling a bit empty.”

# Fall from ledge injures 2, kills 1

East Oregonian

PILOT ROCK — A fall from a ledge in remote Umatilla County south of Pilot Rock left two men seriously injured and one dead.

The Umatilla County Sheriff Office reported the rescue and recovery effort required the help of numerous agencies and emergency responders, including an Oregon Army National Guard Black Hawk helicopter.

Kyler Carter, 23, called 911 on Friday, July 2, at approximately 9 a.m. and reported he and two friends, Cody Watson, 21, and Braydon Postma, 23, all of Pilot Rock, were injured in a fall.

The trio had been recreating at the Big Falls on West Birch Creek — a steep, rocky falls — south of Pilot Rock and had fallen approximately 50 feet off a ledge. The sheriff’s office also reported Carter said the fall occurred around 9 p.m. the night before.

He was unable to get cell-phone service at the location of the accident and had to climb out and hike to a place so he could call 911.

Watson and Postma remained where they had fallen, according to the sheriff’s office, and Carter



**A team of emergency responders on Friday, July 2, 2021, work during the rescue and recovery of three men from Pilot Rock who fell 50 feet from a cliff at Big Falls on West Birch Creek south of Pilot Rock. The fall injured two and killed one, Cody Watson, 21.**

Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office/Contributed Photo

reported his friends had critical injuries.

The sheriff’s office activated its search and rescue unit, and the Pendleton Fire Department responded along with LifeFlight. The sheriff’s office also contacted the Oregon Office of Emergency Management and requested an aircraft with a hoist due to the nature of the injuries and the location.

Umatilla County sheriff’s deputies and their K-9 unit also responded. Search and rescue requested assistance from the U.S. Forest Service to see if any fire crews in the area could respond quickly, and contacted the Union County Search and Rescue team to mobilize its rope team.

A Forest Service short-haul helicopter from McCall, Idaho, and an Oregon Army

National Guard Black Hawk from Salem joined the effort to provide hoist capability.

A Forest Service 11-member fire crew with a fire paramedic was able to reach the location and provide initial assistance.

Upon arrival, according to the sheriff’s office, Watson was dead, and Carter and Postma had significant injuries.

Additional first responders hiked into the location. The multiple agencies coordinated a plan for the careful extraction of the survivors. Both needed immediate medical assistance. The sheriff’s office reported the Black Hawk team was able to extract Carter and Postma and transport them to St. Charles Medical Center, Bend.

Umatilla County sheriff’s deputies took over the death investigation.

Members of the search and rescue team remained with the body overnight until around 10 a.m. July 3, when another Black Hawk crew returned and assisted in recovery.

The sheriff’s office turned over the body to Burns Mortuary, Pendleton, and also reported any further information on the condition of Carter and Postma is unknown at this time.



**Firefighters respond Sunday, July 4, 2021, to a semitrailer fire on Interstate 84 westbound at exit 210 in Pendleton.**

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

# Truck fire in Pendleton closes Interstate 84

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — A semitrailer fire Sunday, July 4, at a Pendleton offramp led to the shutdown of Interstate 84 and to a grass fire in the median.

The Pendleton Fire Department at approximately 3:45 p.m. received the callout for the vehicle blaze on Interstate 84 westbound at exit 210, Pendleton. The fire gutted the cab of a semitrailer and spread to the highway median, burning the median for about a fifth of a mile.

The driver of the semi was able to exit the vehicle

safely and suffered no injuries, according to the Pendleton Fire Department. Fire officials on scene said the cause of the fire had yet to be determined.

Pendleton Fire Chief Jim Critchley said crews extinguished both fires before 4:30 p.m., although firefighters remained on scene to mop up debris and coordinate removal of the charred vehicle.

The pair of fires shut down the interstate in both directions, with the eastbound lanes reopening at roughly 4:30 p.m. and the westbound lanes remaining diverted until later in the day.

## LOCAL BRIEFING

### Smith recovering from shoulder surgery

HEPPNER — State Rep. Greg Smith is recovering at home in Heppner from a shoulder injury he suffered while serving in the Oregon Legislature.

In early May, Smith said he was preparing for a trip back to Eastern Oregon when he stepped off a curb and fell on his shoulder, tearing his rotator cuff. Smith said he had been dealing with shoulder pain for years, but the fall was the final straw. Doctors recommended he get shoulder reconstruction surgery, and Smith underwent the knife.

Smith said he took a few days off from the legislative

session following the surgery, concerned the pain medication he was taking would affect his performance. He soon returned to his legislative work, but Smith said he was fortunate he had most of that in the can by the time he came back.

“I had it all teed up and ready to go,” he said.

Smith said the initial

weeks after the surgery were “extraordinarily painful,” but with the legislative session ending June 27, he’s back home continuing his recovery with six months of physical therapy.

Smith, a Republican, has served in the Oregon House of Representatives since 2001.

— EO Media Group

## CONCEALED CARRY PERMIT CLASS

SATURDAY  
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Hermiston  
Ranch & Home

9AM  
& 12PM  
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Oregon Included No Fee

Oregon Only \$45

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Valid 35-States, including Washington

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<b>TUESDAY</b>	1:30pm	Bucking Horse Stampede — Main Street
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>	9:00am 2:00pm 6:00pm 7:00pm 9:00pm	Little Buckaroo Special Needs Rodeo Slack — Arena Rodeo Gates Open — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena PRCA RODEO — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena Family Fun at the Thunder Room — DJ
<b>THURSDAY</b>	9:00am 9:00am 2:00pm 6:00pm 7:00pm 9:00pm	Tough Enough to Wear Pink Walk Steer Tripping, Three Rounds Slack — Arena Rodeo Gates Open — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena PRCA RODEO — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena Tough Enough to Wear Pink — Wear Pink Fun at the Thunder Room after Rodeo — Stay Tuned!
<b>FRIDAY</b>	10:00am 2:00pm 6:00pm 7:00pm 9:00pm 9:30pm	Chief Joseph Junior Parade — Main Street Slack — Arena Rodeo Gates Open — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena PRCA RODEO — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena All Teen Dance — Joseph Community Center Live Music and Dancing at Thunder Room — Whiskey Creek
<b>SATURDAY</b>	10:00am 2:30pm 6:00pm 7:00pm 9:00pm 9:30pm	Grand Parade — Main Street Slack — Arena Rodeo Gates Open — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena PRCA RODEO — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena All Teen Dance — Joseph Community Center Music and Dancing at Thunder Room — FrogHollow Band After Rodeo — Cowboy Breakfast — Rodeo Grounds — til 3:00am
<b>SUNDAY</b>	6:00am 9:00am	Cowboy Breakfast — Rodeo Grounds — til 10:00am Cowboy Church Service

To purchase tickets and for more information visit [www.chiefjosephdays.com](http://www.chiefjosephdays.com)

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