



East Umatilla Fire and Rescue/Contributed Photo  
Fire bursts Sunday, Sept. 5, 2021, from the top of the Long Branch Cafe & Saloon, Weston.

# Fire damages Weston's iconic Long Branch Cafe & Saloon

East Oregonian

WESTON — A fire on Sunday, Sept. 5, tore through Weston's Long Branch Cafe & Saloon.

The blaze seriously damaged the iconic business on Main Street, according to photos from the East Umatilla Fire and Rescue. The flames bulged high from the top of

the building and collapsed its ceiling, the photos show.

In an email, East Umatilla spokesperson Suzie Reitz said firefighters responded to the scene of the fire at 4:50 p.m. A person was in the building but got out safely as firefighters arrived, Reitz said.

East Umatilla reported it sent an engine, a ladder truck,

ambulance and more along with 11 firefighters. The Milton-Freewater Rural Fire Protection District responded as well with five firefighters and provided mutual support with an engine and a command vehicle.

Firefighters have yet to determine the cause of the fire, and no injuries have been reported.

# Umatilla business couple enjoying side-by-side stores

By ERICK PETERSON  
East Oregonian

UMATILLA — Techla Fish and Travis Mix have had some ups and downs during the pandemic. On a sad note, they have lost family. They also havv gotten sick with COVID-19, twice. In short, this has been a trying time. Still, there has been something good during this time. They started new businesses.

A flower shop, called Uptown Floral, and a game store, Game Forge, occupy side-by-side storefronts on Sixth Street in Umatilla.

They are not new to business, as they have owned stores in the past. Fish even grew up in a florist family, as her mother and grandmother had a shop under the same name she has for her store.

## Flowers

It is a family tradition, she said. Advised by her sister on the name Uptown Floral, Fish said the store had to be named after her family's old store.

"It could not be any other way," she said. The pair had been working. Fish was employed at H&R Block. Mix was at Amazon. During the pandemic, they were suddenly unemployed. And it was during this time, they started thinking about what they wanted to do with their lives — not what they had to do, but what they wanted to do.

They wanted to follow their passions, so that is what they did.

They took their savings and money from pandemic checks, and they put it into a new business. They started the floral business first, placing it in their garage. It was a safe bet, they figured, because Fish had a lot of experience. Also, a major florist in the area was closing, which would mean less competition. They knew it would not take long to develop a clientele.

They were right. Business took off, Fish said, and they quickly built a solid customer

base. This allowed them to purchase leases on the two spots in Umatilla, stores that would be next door to each other.

Fish was ready to move her flowers into the building, so it opened first, around October/November 2020. It took a little longer for Game Forge, because Mix still had to build an inventory. Its grand opening was July 17.

## Games

"These are vastly different businesses," Fish said. She spends her days arranges bouquets, while her husband sells games and organizes game events next door.

Still, they enjoy being close to one another. Their stores are joined by a door in the back. They even share a bathroom.

"That part can be a little stressful, actually," Fish said, laughing about the bathroom.

Mix said one of the best things about this arrangement is being close together and to their son, Rodger, who spends much time in their stores.

"It's really, really fun," Rodger said. Spending time in the store, he gets to play games and paint miniatures. He also likes meeting customers and recommending games, such as Zombie Kids, Ticket to Ride, Pandemic, and Small World.

Mix said enjoys doing something he likes — working for himself, rather than working for someone else.

A gaming fan, he is surrounded by Risk, Dungeons and Dragons and more.

"I like board games," he said. "Now, I don't have to spend much money on them."

One other bonus: He buys games for himself at a discount.

But Mix also said he is happy to contribute to his community. He likes to provide fun for people who might not otherwise have much to do. At his shop, he hosts various gaming tournaments and activities. Some days, people even bring their televisions and consoles to play at tables in Game Forge.

# Hermiston library showcases local artist

By ERICK PETERSON  
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — As an artist with a social media following, Hermiston resident Amy Fuentes is used to attention. Now, though, a new venue is housing her work.

The Hermiston Public Library chose Fuentes as its artist of the month. Her paintings will be on display in the library throughout September.

The 22-year-old artist said she is figuring out her future. Currently a personal banker at Washington Federal in Hermiston, she has been living in town since the seventh grade. She graduated from Hermiston High School, and she took art classes for three of her four years there.

But it was back in elementary school where she "discovered" herself as an artist. Her uncle, an artist, introduced art to her.

"I'd watch him draw, and it intrigued me," she said. He showed both her and her sister how to draw. He is a pencil artist, but also does pen and graffiti-style work. She keeps in close contact with him by sending him her work. He responds by telling her how proud he is of her.

Meanwhile, Fuentes' sister also continued her drawing but began work in fashion, drawing dresses.

Fuentes draws subjects that interest her. Music is a topic to which she frequently returns. She has drawn JayCool, Kendrick Lamar and Drake.

She likes the messages of these rap artists. JayCool, for instance, speaks to the meaning of life — life is more than money and fame. Little things matter. Family matters.

When she started painting at age 19 she was merely trying to decorate her room. She viewed decor on social media and she would



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

The work of Hermiston artist Amy Fuentes is on display at the Hermiston Library during September 2021.

use it for inspiration. This was a good way to save money.

Painting on canvas, moving away from pencil, she developed as an artist. She continued painting, and she shared her work on her own social media. Then, one day, the library called.

"I was really surprised," she said. "I was just posting for myself and maybe to get my work out there, but you never know who is watching."

She is excited to have five paintings on display. They are of the rappers she likes, people who influenced her. One work, in particular, features Kendrick Lamar and JayCool. This painting is the recreation of a concept she saw online, which was hopeful of a collaboration between the two rappers.

Fuentes has never tried rapping, but she enjoys getting involved with rap through painting.

She also is doing non-rap-related work. She is working on a mural in DailyFix Nutrition, a Hermiston store she frequents.

She said that working on a larger canvas, as she is now with the mural, is daunting. Still, a person needs to try new things, she said. The painting will be something simple involving flowers.

## LOCAL BRIEFING

### Connell accepts lead advisor role

HERMISTON — Umatilla Electric Cooperative Business Resource Center hired Kristin Connell, a Hermiston native, as the led business advisor serving the UEC service territories.



Connell

Connell spent the last 27 years in the staffing industry helping local businesses hire qualified employees.

"The opportunity to continue working with business owners and being actively involved in my community means a great deal to me," Connell said. "I look forward to one-on-one business advising with new and existing business to help support and grow their business."

Greg Smith, the center's executive advisor, said, "We are pleased to have someone with the connections to businesses in the Hermiston and surrounding areas that Kristin has. This will go a long way in developing and strengthening partnerships which benefit business owners and help grow and sustain the local economy."

Smith also the Republican representative in the Oregon House for the 57th District, which includes Hermiston.

The Business Resource Center team specializes in helping business owners access the capital they need to start or grow their business. It provides one-on-one business advising, access to COVID-19 relief v, webinars, and training opportunities.

To schedule a free and confidential appointment, call 541-289-3000, or email uebcrc@gmail.com.

### Woman injured in crash near Pasco

PASCO — A Milton-Freewater woman was hospitalized Saturday, Sept. 4, in a two-car crash with a Burbank man on U.S. Highway 12 inside Pasco city limits, according to a release from Washington State Patrol.

Erica Mijangos, 35, of Milton-Freewater, was traveling west on Highway 12 when she turned left onto

East A Street, failing to yield right of way to eastbound traffic, according to the release. She was injured and transported to Lourdes Medical Center in Pasco.

Jose Segura, a 31-year-old Burbank man traveling east on Highway 12, struck the side of Mijangos' car.

Segura received no significant injuries, according to the WSP. Both vehicles were totaled. Drugs and alcohol were not involved, according to the WSP.

### Commissioners consider new livestock district

PENDLETON — The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners this week considers a petition for a new livestock district in Meacham.

The intended district is east of Interstate 84 and would be more than 2,000 acres. The county plans to hold a public hearing on the district on Oct. 20. The principal petitioner for the district is Kent Madison, of Echo, according to county documents.

Commissioners also vote on a new service coordinator position for the county's developmental disabilities program.

The proposed position would assist the county in conducting a service equity study and plan over the next two years, as required under the county's contract with the Oregon Office of Developmental Disabilities. The position would cost approximately \$102,500, and state funding would pay of it, according to county documents.

The board meets Wednesday, Sept. 8., starting at 9 a.m., in room 130 at the Umatilla County Courthouse, 216 S.E. Fourth St., Pendleton. Other items on

the agenda include:

- A 150-acre expansion of the city of Umatilla's urban growth boundary.
- Two grants for system sustainability projects in Hermiston and Pendleton.
- An appointment of the Board of Property Tax Appeals.
- An annual notice of the tax foreclosure process, which the East Oregonian publishes.
- A regional homeless shelter.

### Council to look at convention center booking policy

PENDLETON — In its last meeting before the Round-Up, the Pendleton City Council will consider changing its booking policy for the Pendleton Convention Center and the Vert Auditorium.

If the council approves the resolution at a Tuesday, Sept. 7, meeting, the convention center will prioritize economic impact, hotel stays, repeat business potential and longstanding community events should there be two events vying for the same date, time and space.

The council also will hear reports from Kimberly Lindsay of Community Counseling Solutions about the organization's services and Pendleton Fire Chief Jim Critchley about the department's travel volume during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The council meeting will be Tuesday at the council chambers in city hall, 500 S.W. Dorion Ave. The meeting also can be accessed virtually via Zoom at <https://bit.ly/3jKiFQy>.

—EO Media Group and the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

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