

# Hermiston Assembly looks to future

## Church adapted to pandemic, readies itself for remodel

By ERICK PETERSON  
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The people of Hermiston Assembly are working toward a renewal.

Terry Haight, lead pastor of the church, said this renewal comes at a time when people are in need.

Haight, who has been Assembly pastor for more than 23 years, averages 120 attendees for Sunday service in his Hermiston church. Last week, he drew 150 worshippers. He also had a regular online viewing audience of 30 to 50 people.

Relaunching Sunday, Sept. 12, he said Hermiston Assembly has not actually ever been closed. It had church services for five months last year, reopened for three weeks in June and then shut down in-person services again during a new spike in COVID-19 cases. While their in-person services have been closed, they have broadcast services online, including YouTube.

During the online days, the church shifted from social media as a form of advertising to a primary form of communication. Haight and his team also developed a shorter, abbreviated service, called Church on Demand, a 20-to-25-minute church experience.

In October 2020, when the church brought back its in-person congregation, Haight and his team continued their work online, but they believed more changes were necessary. So they moved their congregation downstairs the following month, which is where they have remained.

Downstairs, they could space their chairs as needed. The pews upstairs could not, of course, be moved, which made social distancing difficult. The downstairs also is a smaller area, which was more appropriate, Haight said, to a smaller congregation. Fewer people had returned to

church since before the pandemic.

They were hopeful people would come back but only half of people did, Haight said, adding people probably were worried about COVID-19 infection.

He understands people's worries. He has had members of his church contract COVID-19. A spouse of someone who attends, he said, died, though Haight does not link the death to church attendance. He said he does not know anyone who died as a result of attending his church.

People on his ministerial team have contracted COVID-19, he said.

He said he makes announcements to wear masks, though he does not police the practice. Maybe 25% of people wear masks, he said.

Starting Sept. 12, volunteers and staff are working on a remodel of the church. Built in 1976, the remodel is not the first or even the largest. In 2004, new pews were installed and new carpeting was placed. The latest revisions include window coverings, which will block sunlight and allow the church to control lighting. This will be better for filming. Also, the church will have improved sound-proofing.

And though the stage also is being renovated — the iconic Jesus sign is being replaced — there will be no change in theology. In fact, the church is changing some of its language to clarify their Jesus-centered beliefs. A new mission statement proclaims, "We exist to make Jesus famous in our lives, homes and cities."

He is planning a new sermon series. Starting Sept. 12, the series will continue eight to 12 weeks with messages that follow one another.

### A right time for renewal and house parties

During the pandemic, Haight said he has had to "go back to the drawing board" to meeting people's needs. Online offerings were one major change, which has been embraced.

His congregation has gotten younger, he said, and their spirit is different. Whereas prior to the



Daniel Sandoval and Betsy Jones, of the Hermiston Assembly, clean doors on Tuesday, Sept. 6, 2021, during a work day at the church.

pandemic many people were going to church out of habit or obligation, many people now are appearing with greater interest. After having felt loneliness and depression from the isolation of lockdowns, they are returning to church with a hunger. They want to worship and gather with fellow believers.

He said his young worship team, with members in their 20s and 30s, are able to relate to new families, made up of people of similar age. Their presence keeps services active and creative, and they even manage to keep him young, he said.

Haight's son, Clayton Haight, is part of the youthful renewal. As Hermiston Assembly strategy and development pastor, Clayton is guiding the church outside of its building.

Starting a few months ago, he said, Hermiston Assembly has been promoting "house parties." These are gatherings of people inside of homes, focusing on prayer, family, and fellowship.

He said, the world is a different place now. Businesses have changed. Many of those businesses that have not changed, have failed. Churches also must change to meet new situations.

Bible studies in homes always were a thing, Clayton said. People have long gathered in the homes of other believers to pray and discuss scripture. The difference between house parties and Bible studies is that the house parties are fuller services. People who partake in them recognize their place in their religion as leaders and ministers in their own right.

It is a small-group model which can continue, even if new rules are created to govern action in the larger church building.

"With house parties, even if we see more limitations, in place, like before, these house parties can continue to thrive in small groups," Haight said.

Clayton added, he wants a church

that is resilient, that "leans into where culture is at." He also wants to find the best way to serve the community.

To date, Haight said, there are six homes that have served as house parties. They have filled to capacity, with 20 to 30 people.

Haight provides the parties with guides. As a licensed and educated minister, he said his role is to equip believers. He provides some order, though he does not their gatherings to be ritualistic, but people to make Jesus their centerpiece and to bless one another.

He hopes the suicide, pornography, loneliness and despair that have grown during the pandemic will be reduced by increased faith in God.

Austin Naillon, Assembly family pastor, said he likes the changes.

"We're excited," he said. "It looks like God is doing something big, and we couldn't be more excited."

Hermiston Assembly meets at 10:30 am for Sunday service.

# Dress-Up Parade returns Saturday

## Electric scooters in Pendleton going into storage for the week of Round-Up

By PHIL WRIGHT  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The first major event kick starting the week of Pendleton Round-Up rolls out Saturday morning. And Pendleton police as usual will close access to Court and Dorian avenues and call the tow truck to clear the way.

The Main Street Cowboy's Dress-Up Parade gets rolling Saturday, Sept. 11, starting at 10 a.m. in front of Pendleton City Hall on the 500 block of Southwest Dorian Avenue and heads east, takes a turn north on Southeast Fifth Street on the back side of the Umatilla County Courthouse and then a turn east onto Court

Avenue, where it trucks along until the finish past the Pendleton Round-Up Grounds.

Local start claiming spots early to catch the parade, and city crews and police start shutting down access to Court and Dorian at 7 a.m.

Pendleton Police Chief Chuck Byram said managing the Dress-Up and the Westward Ho! Parade are among the Round-Up elements that are most demanding on his 24-officer department.

That stems from folks who try to drive past barricades and express their ire to officers just doing their jobs to calling for a contractor to tow vehicles off the route.

In spite of advisories about not parking vehicles on the route Saturday morning, Bynam said every year 10-15 cars end up hitched to a tow truck.

Rather than impound the rides, he said, the company

leaves them in a nearby lot, where their owners can walk to get them for free.

Byram also said no one gets to ride around on the electric Bird scooters that dot the town. Those are going into storage for Round-up starting Sept. 11 and coming back out Sept. 19.

The Pendleton City Council in March approved a local law allowing electric scooters on city streets. The electric scooter company Bird of Southern California brought 55 scooters to town.

Pendleton's population booms during Round-Up, and the police chief said with the extra traffic and pedestrians, adding scooters to that mix creates the potential for conflicts and accidents.

"I think it's best for the safety and health of the public to put the scooters away for the week," he said.

## LOCAL BRIEFING

### Umatilla County reports 118th COVID-19 death

PENDLETON — Umatilla County reported its 118th COVID-19 death on Tuesday, Sept. 7.

The victim is a 31-year-old woman, according to a press release from the county public health department.

At least four Umatilla County residents under the age of 40 have died after contracting COVID-19 amid the delta crisis that has swept through the county and state during the past month, according to the health department. A 35-year-old Morrow County woman and a 19-year-old Union County woman died in August after contracting COVID-19.

Young people are getting sicker and are being hospitalized more often from the delta variant surge than at any other point in the pandemic, county health officials and hospital employees have said.

The latest reported victim tested positive

Aug. 25 and died Sept. 3 at a private residence, the county reported. She had underlying health conditions.

The disclosure comes as the county reported 91 COVID-19 cases on Sept. 7, showing another slight decline in cases after six consecutive weeks exceeding 400 cases, a total that shatters all previous pandemic records, according to state data.

Since the pandemic began, Umatilla County has reported 11,884 COVID-19 cases, according to the county health department

### Back to Work Day to be held Sept. 15

PENDLETON — Several Eastern Oregon towns are sites for WorkSource Oregon's statewide scavenger hunt for Back to Work Day.

The purpose of the event is to promote employment and support business customers, according to the announcement from Eastern Oregon Workforce Board.

The event is Wednesday, Sept. 15, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. WorkSource Eastern Oregon is seeking employers in the Pendleton and Hermiston areas who are interested in visiting with job seekers at worksites to discuss your hiring needs. For more information, call 541-276-6542 or email Rebecca Flores at rebecca.j.flores@oregon.gov or Yuri Madrigal at yuri.madrigal@oregon.gov.

Job seekers can obtain more information or register for the event by emailing worksource\_eastern\_oregon@oregon.gov or visiting WorkSource Oregon-Pendleton, 408 S.E. Seventh St., Pendleton; or WorkSource Oregon-Hermiston, 950 S.E. Columbia Drive, Suite B, Hermiston.

Baker City, Canyon City, La Grande and Ontario also are sites for Back to Work Day events. The first half hour of each event will be reserved for veterans.

Visit [www.eowb.org](http://www.eowb.org) for details of the hiring event, including times for each location.

— East Oregonian

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**RICHARD BONDURANT**  
Would like to give a  
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**Hermiston Police Department**  
**Umatilla County Officials**  
**First Christian Church Family**  
**Guardian Angel Home Staff**  
**Family, friends and all the other volunteers**  
**that helped us locate our husband,**  
**father and uncle.**

Again, to all a GREAT BIG  
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