



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Kindergarten students from Rocky Heights Elementary School in Hermiston clutch their pumpkins Thursday, Oct. 28, 2021, during a class trip to the Bellinger Farms pumpkin patch, Hermiston.

Pumpkins:

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Their great-grandmother, Sue White, joined the children on their field trip, as did their mother, Karisa White.

"We're pretty darned excited," Sue White said.

She recounted times recently when she would take family walks with the girls.

"They would take a walk around the block and say 'GG, this looks like a good house to trick-or-treat at.' So, yes, they are happy," she said.

Karisa White agreed, adding the girls were disappointed last year. Two years ago, they got to trick-or-treat for the first time, walking house to house. They loved it, their mother said. Then, when they could not repeat this tradition the following

season due to the coronavirus pandemic, they were crestfallen.

As they love makeup and costumes, Halloween is suited to them, their mother and great-grandmother said. To finally be able to have Halloween activities, such as trick-or-treating, they planned and the hayride they did Oct. 28, they were pleased.

This is the sort of experience Stephanie Wyant, Rocky Heights Elementary School principal, hoped the young students could enjoy.

"We have worked very hard to provide experiences for our students in a year that is not so typical with limitations," she said.

She expressed the importance of living with joy and normalcy, despite the pandemic. In sending her

students to field trips, they could live a more regular life. In addition to having fun, she said, students also could incorporate the trip into their academics. Older children did science and math on their trips, according to the principal, learning about agriculture by seeing growing things and practicing measurements by measuring pumpkins.

Wyant said other activities, such as costume parties at the school, also add to the children's happiness.

"It's something we've done in the past and we are glad to do it this year," she said.

Meanwhile, people at Bellinger said they also are pleased to help children get some enjoyment out of the season. Marleaux Scaggs, the restaurant manager at

the Bellinger Farms Gourmet Shoppe, was just one of the happy people at the store.

Scaggs said she saw around 60 or more schoolchildren each day visit the shop for hayrides during October. Some days, she would see 90.

"Jack likes to give back to the community, and that's how he does it," she said, referencing Jack Bellinger, owner of the shop and farm.

The hayrides were free to the children, Scaggs said.

She added the shop will have more events. It will host wine events the first Thursday of every month. It also will have Christmas cookie decorating activities and photos with Santa photos as it had in the past.

These activities are important, and she is glad to have them, Scaggs said.

Roads:

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Simons said the city provided the contractor with an extension on 10th Street, but the delays were compounded when the contractor decided to leave town to work on projects in other cities, leaving other Pendleton street projects without conflicts due to utilities unfinished. The contractor eventually returned and completed all the streets on

its slate, Simons said, but its workers didn't finish until a day or two after their targeted September end date.

Downtown street reconstruction projects were covered financially by the city's urban renewal district, and therefore used a different contractor for those projects. But the downtown contractor ran into the same problem as the contractor working on Northwest 10th — shallow gas lines that required action from Cascade. Again, Simons said the downtown

contractor was provided extensions but didn't work on other, conflictless streets during the works stoppage.

Streets that were supposed to finish on Friday, Oct. 29, are now scheduled to reopen in mid-November. While some cities will end their construction season when the weather gets cold, Simons said the contractor will be expected to work on every day it's dry enough to do asphalt and concrete work.

Simons said the city is considering assessing a

\$500-per-day damages fee on the contractors for not finishing their work on time without proper explanation. In the long-term, Simons said the city could make its timeline language in its street construction contracts more stringent, but it could also lead to higher bids from contractors. The city also intends to hold a follow-up conversation with Cascade about verifying gas line depths before Pendleton starts street construction projects.

Police:

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Two dispatchers work in a small, dimly-lit room near the entrance. They take 911, business and utility calls, which can be hectic when the city experiences a power outage like it did earlier this month. Linda Hall, the city manager, said it's the oldest dispatch center in Oregon.

"It kind of feels like we're dinosaurs," Rebecca Simmons, a dispatcher, said.

Boedigheimer and Hall know these are not the optimal conditions for public safety work. But police officers, they said, are not ones to complain — at least to them.

The new station, on a city-owned lot across the street, will be about 7,200 square feet. It will have larger rooms for conferences, report-taking, private interviews, training and evidence. It also will have a public lobby, a larger dispatch center for more employees, and new offices



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Milton-Freewater Police Chief Doug Boedigheimer shows the cramped changing area his officers have in the police station Thursday, Oct. 28, 2021, that operates in the basement of the Milton-Freewater City Hall. The department is getting a new, larger building due to a \$7.7 million bond voters passed in May.

and holding cells.

Hall said the plan also is to have a "wellness room." This will allow police who worked a night shift a place to rest before they have to testify in court, Hall said.

"They work long shifts," Hall said. "And they rotate

shifts. In very stressful conditions, it will be so nice for (police) to have a nice break room space ... Those things that larger departments have taken for granted, our men and women have not had."

Those facilities, they say,

will provide a range of benefits, the most valuable being more space for officers to talk comfortably with residents, something Boedigheimer noted is especially important with growing distrust between police and the public amid national police scandals.

Stores:

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According to a 2019 CNN Business article, Dollar General and Family Dollar usually target low-income areas across the population density spectrum. Dollar General especially focuses on rural America: about three in four Dollar General stores are in towns with 20,000 people or fewer.

Although dollar stores can bring new jobs and more shopping choices, critics told CNN the chains unfairly compete with locally owned retailers and grocers while failing to offer essential products like fresh produce. Some cities, including Birmingham, Alabama, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, passed laws restricting dollar store growth.

In a response to a request for an interview, Dollar General spokesperson Emma Hall touted the chain's charitable efforts and its focus on convenience and affordability when choosing new locations.

"We also take demographic trends, competitive factors and traffic patterns into consideration," she wrote in an email. "We know convenience is a major factor in our customers' shopping decisions as we generally serve customers within a 3-5 mile radius, or 10 minute drive. We further strive to provide convenience for customers who may not have affordable nearby retail option. These locations were a great fit for Dollar General."

Family Dollar is owned by Dollar Tree, another chain of dollar stores that has locations in Pendleton and Hermiston.

A statement from Family Dollar and Dollar Tree also highlighted the stores' charitable efforts while adding its stores work in concert with local grocers and vendors to help cover "food deserts" where fresh produce and protein are scarce. In some areas, Family Dollar is piloting frozen meat and produce sections.

"We understand deeply the concerns of many local officials regarding the changing nature of our shared communities across the country, and — as part of those communities — we are always looking for ways to help our neighborhoods be healthier, stronger, and safer," the store states.

For all the national contention, Local business and government officials aren't

sounding the alarm.

Dave Meade, the manager at Columbia Harvest Foods in Umatilla, said he thinks his store can find a niche and co-exist with Dollar General. Walmart is only a few minutes away by car in Hermiston, and it remains Columbia Harvest Foods' main competitor, Meade said.

"Walmart is still the 800-pound gorilla," he said.

Some Heppner residents were concerned enough about Dollar General to begin circulating a petition before the store bought any property in town. But Heppner City Manager Kraig Cutsforth said protests died down as the store came to fruition. In his view, Dollar General is easy to work with while providing jobs and replacing a recreational vehicle park that drew community complaints.

Back in Pilot Rock, city recorder Teri Bacus said the only local retailer the dollar stores might affect is the Pilot Rock Market, the local grocery store. Bacus said she thinks the market still can thrive by focusing on what the dollar stores don't have: liquor and fresh meat.

Meade, Cutsforth and Bacus all said they hoped the dollar stores would allow residents to spend more money in the community and spend less time shopping in Pendleton, Hermiston or elsewhere.

While the dollar stores are in development, local business has picked up. A new bar called The Vault Tavern has opened up in the old Archie's Restaurant space and a new hunting store has opened right next door on Main Street. Bacus said Pilot Rock is working on an economic development plan with Eastern Oregon Business Source and expects all of these businesses to be a part of the revitalization effort.

Janelle Hampton and her family bought the old schoolhouse several years ago and are in the process of turning it into a venue and gathering space. She was the one who sold the neighboring space to Eyes North to make way for Family Dollar.

Much in the same way pioneers on the Oregon Trail used the Pilot Rock geological formation as a landmark on their journey, Hampton said the city of Pilot Rock could use the schoolhouse, local attractions and a couple of dollar stores to bring in visitors on their way to the Blue Mountains or California.

"You need to have privacy to make folks feel like they can trust you and talk to you," he said.

The new department also will have upgraded technology, including radios, video cameras and an automated fingerprinting system. A recent overview study by a Portland-based outfit found the city had some areas where the police department needed to improve its communications, Boedigheimer said.

"It doesn't make sense to take a whole bunch of old

stuff to a brand new building," he said.

Hall said the city has preliminary plans for what it will do with the basement after the police leave. They might convert the space into an area to store records, she said. That could allow more space for something such as a judge's chamber or spaces where attorneys can meet with clients, she added.

"Police are good at coping with their conditions," Boedigheimer said. "But I think this will make them content."

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