

Familiar face accepts Hermiston Parks and Rec director job

Brandon Artz has first day Monday, Nov. 15

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The new Hermiston Parks and Recreation director did not have far to move his possessions from his old office to his new one next door. On Monday, Nov. 15, Brandon Artz took a step up from his role as interim director to enjoy his first day as the regular director.

Artz had been the interim director for more than two months, as he covered for Larry Fetter, who left the parks director position when he recently retired.

“I’m excited to get



Brandon Artz, the director of Hermiston Parks and Recreation Department, moves some of his possessions into his new office Monday, Nov. 15, 2021.

started,” he said.

Artz, who said he expected an official announcement later

in the day, explained Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith and a hiring panel

made their decision late last week. Smith affirmed the new hire in a memo to city employees.

“I feel confident that he will do a very good job and be an asset to the city for a long time,” the memo states.

A press release on Nov. 15 quotes the city manager’s belief in Artz’s “vision, energy and leadership” and describes him as “a major asset to the community.”

Artz said the first “big project” for him is a groundbreaking for the Teen Adventure Park, a skate park across from Hermiston’s police and fire station. He also was working on placing a large Christmas tree in downtown Hermiston for the holidays.

Artz is a graduate of the University of Idaho,

he obtained a bachelor’s of arts in exercise science and health and a master’s degree in movement and leisure sciences. While studying for these degrees, he played football and then worked as a U of I assistant coach. He followed up this experience with more than two years of work as a recreation coordinator in McMinnville. Other work includes two years as a recreation specialist in Vancouver, Washington.

He said his experience in different positions has given him insights into different sides to which he must be attuned. As a parks and rec director, he serves athletes and nonathletes, alike, he said, and he expressed the feeling that he could do this.

He came to Hermiston to

work as the recreation supervisor, under Fetter. Working for more than four years in the department, Artz obtained mentorship from the previous director as Fetter approached retirement, Artz said.

“I got to oversee all of the recreation here in the department, and then also see what (Fetter) was doing in park development on the higher end of things,” he said. “It got me ready for this position. He retired in September, and now we’re off to the races.”

According to the city’s press release on Artz’s new role, Hermiston has 15 parks that cover more than 100 acres, 10 miles of trails and a community center that hosts more than 200,000 event and program participants each year.



A billboard on Highway 395 in Hermiston advertises the Lego shop in Hermiston in October 2021. The billboard is larger than the sales floor of the shop.

Small shop owners build on success with billboard larger than their sales floor

By ERICK PETERSON
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HERMISTON — If Julie and Bobby Lara want to fit their new roadside billboard onto their sales floor, they will have to roll it up. Even then, it would be a tight fit for their 48-by-12-foot billboard to fit into a 28-by-12-foot space.

The Laras own JB Brick Company, 295 E. Main No. 1E, Hermiston. There, they sell several different Lego sets and individual pieces. It is a rare store, Julie pointed out, saying it is the only store like it from Boise to Portland.

The idea to rent a billboard was Bobby’s. He was driving down a highway when he noticed what he thought was an available sign. He asked about it, but discovered someone had beaten him to the punch. It was not, as it turned out, available. It also was \$1,700 per month, which was outside of their budget.

But the couple still thought it would be a good idea, and they started looking around for another sign.

She said they believed a billboard was the right move because their business was doing well, Julie said. The last couple of years had been profitable for their business. As people were confined more to their homes, they explored several hobbies. Many people started building Lego kits as an alternative to regular puzzles and television, Julie said.

In addition, they had success with other forms of promotion. Newspapers, radio, television and social media all gave boosts to the business. After some searching, they decided on their current sign, which costs just under \$900 per month, Julie said. It is on Highway 395, visible as drivers enter Hermiston.

Many people have commented on it, she said in an interview Oct. 21, and it has driven some people into her shop. Still, she is waiting to see if it will pay for itself.

It is a big move, but a necessary one, she said. Almost every day, even though she first opened the store August 2019, local people still are surprised by its existence. Even people who own businesses on the same street, only a couple of blocks away, are just now discovering it. She had to do something, she said.

This season, as people get ready for Christmas, is especially good for her. Last year was “insane,” she said. She had a terrific amount of business, and she hopes to repeat this success.

Her only other concern about the store is a shortage, she said. She said she worries about being able to acquire enough Lego sets to meet the holiday demand.

And with new Lego sets, including the latest in Star Wars and the new Ideas lines, she said she hopes she will have enough Legos to build on her success.

Blue Mountain Wildlife reports six raptors too injured to save

PENDLETON — The wild bird rescue operation Blue Mountain Wildlife in Pendleton reported another rough week for raptors.

The nonprofit organization and facility at 71046 Appaloosa Lane in its weekly newsletter reported it had only seven admissions last week, but six of those were for raptors and none could be saved.

Three great horned owls had humerus fractures, and a fourth was tangled in a fence. A sharp-shinned hawk was shot, and a red-tailed hawk likely was struck by a vehicle.

“Living in a world filled with humans is no easy task for wildlife,” the newsletter stated.

Wrong-way driver near Pendleton was man missing from Nevada

PENDLETON — A traffic stop near Pendleton led police to find a man missing from Nevada.

Oregon State Police reported a black Chevrolet Silverado at 8:12 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 16, was heading west in the eastbound lanes from Exit 209 in Pendleton. A Umatilla County sheriff’s deputy was entering the freeway at milepost 207 and stopped the pickup. Ryan Sharp, senior trooper with Oregon State Police, arrived soon after.

The pickup’s driver was confused, according to OSP, and a check on his identification revealed he was an 82-year-old man who was reported as a missing or endangered person from Reno.

State police took the driver to its office in Pendleton and contacted his wife. Police then checked him into a local hotel and secured his vehicle in the OSP parking lot.

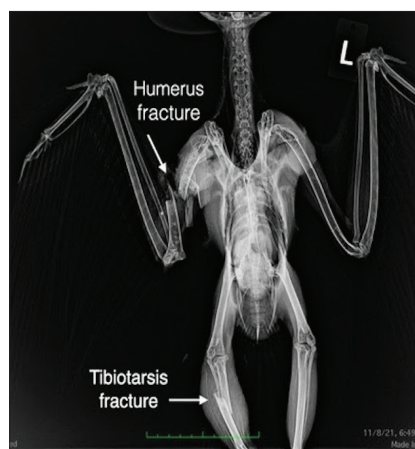
Oregon State Police also reported the man’s wife and a relative were leaving Reno the morning of Nov. 17 to get him in Pendleton.

Crash blocks I-84 rest area at Boardman

BOARDMAN — A crash between two pickups Tuesday, Nov. 16, on Interstate 84 blocked the entrance to the Boardman Rest Area. Oregon State Police also reported one driver ended up with several citations.

The wreck occurred a little before 8:30 a.m. at the entrance to the I-84 eastbound rest stop near Boardman. State police reported a Dodge Dakota

LOCAL BRIEFS



Blue Mountain Wildlife/Contributed Image
This image of an X-ray from Nov. 8, 2021, shows injuries a great horned owl suffered. The bird was one of six raptors the Blue Mountain Wildlife, Pendleton, received that week for serious injuries, and none of the birds could be saved.

pickup tried to enter the rest area from the fast lane too late but was moving slowly. A GMC Sierra pickup towing a large fifth-wheel recreational vehicle tried to overtake the Dodge and pass on the right side.

The vehicles collided, causing the RV to flip onto its left side, blocking entry to the rest area. The crash also caused damage to a highway sign and a utility pole.

An Oregon State Police trooper, personnel from the Oregon Department of Transportation and Umatilla Electric Cooperative responded to the scene.

An OSP trooper cited the driver of the Dodge, Ariane Lee Williams, 35, of Gresham, for careless driving, driving uninsured and driving without a license.

State police did not specify if anyone was injured.

But that night at about 10:40 p.m., a 28-year-old man from Surrey, British Columbia, suffered minor injuries when he rolled the semitrailer he was driving on Highway 82 near milepost 10 at Umatilla. Oregon State Police reported the driver fell asleep at the wheel and the vehicle rolled onto its side. The passenger was not injured.

Local offender in jail in theft case

HERMISTON — Local offender Carlos Joaquin Barragan of Hermiston is again in jail.

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said officers arrested Barragan, 43, in relation to all-terrain vehicle thefts in October.

Police on Oct. 10 at about 7:30 a.m. responded to the 700 block of West Highland Avenue on a report of a

suspicious vehicle. Officers found a pickup hauling a trailer carrying three ATVs, which were stolen, Edmiston said.

Suspect took off from the vehicle, but police caught and arrested Mayro Guzman, 30, for vehicle theft and four counts of first-degree theft. The investigation continued, Edmiston said, and led to Barragan.

Police caught up with Barragan on Monday, Nov. 15, at his father’s home in Hermiston. Edmiston said the family cooperated with officers, who found Barragan trying to hide in a crawl space.

Police arrested Barragan for four counts of first-degree theft and three counts of vehicle theft and booked him into the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton.

Edmiston said this makes the 15th time Hermiston police have arrested Barragan, who also has another 79 citations. In 2009, he helped set up the largest illegal marijuana crop in Grant County, and in 2011 in federal court he pleaded guilty to conspiracy to manufacture and deliver more than 1,000 marijuana plants.

No print paper on Thanksgiving holiday

PENDLETON — In observance of the Thanksgiving holiday, the East Oregonian will not publish a print edition on Thursday, Nov. 25.

“It’s a chance to give our employees an opportunity to spend an uninterrupted holiday with their families,” said EO editor Andrew Cutler.

The EO will publish an expanded edition, including additional comics and puzzle features as well as the weekly GO! magazine, on Tuesday, Nov. 23.

An e-edition only paper will be published on Thanksgiving and will be available to paid subscribers through the East Oregonian website, www.eastoregonian.com. The Thanksgiving e-edition will include local stories, an opinion page and sports.

To make sure you are subscribed to the e-edition:

- Log on to www.eastoregonian.com/users/forgot, enter your email address and click “I’m not a robot” then “Reset Password.”
- An email will be sent to you with a link to click on, click on the link.
- A website will popup to enter your new password.
- You’re all set.

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WILDHORSE RESORT & CASINO
11/19-11/23
Cineplex Show Times
Theater seating will adhere to social distancing protocols
Every showing \$7.50 per person (ages 0-3 still free)

Ghostbusters: Afterlife (PG13)
4:40p 7:40p
extra 1:40p showing 11/20 & 11/21

King Richard (PG13)
4:50p 8:10p
extra 1:10p showing 11/20 & 11/21

Clifford the Big Red Dog (PG)
3:10p 3:40p 6:00p
extra 1:20 showing 11/20 & 11/21

Eternals (PG13)
4:30p 8:00p
extra 1:00p showing 11/20 & 11/21

Ron's Gone Wrong (PG)
8:20p

Venom: Let There Be Carnage (PG13)
5:30p 7:50p
extra 12:50p showing 11/20 & 11/21

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