

Turbine blades stir up trouble for recycling business

By SHEILA HAGER
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

MILTON-FREEWATER — A longtime Milton-Free-water businessman has appealed a recent state environmental fine of \$57,282.

Sam Humbert was issued a fine for establishing a solid waste disposal site without a permit, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality officials said in a letter Sept. 1. Humbert appealed the finding Sept. 22.

The illegal dump is off Eastside Road and was started in 2019, DEQ spokesperson Laura Gleim said last week.

Humbert reported the operation to the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers that same year, and that agency shared the information with the DEQ. An investigation revealed discarded wind turbine blades — with an overall measurement of about 2,741 cubic yards — had been placed on the private property and were adjacent to wetlands.

Humbert had not been issued the necessary solid waste disposal site permit from the state for that purpose, according to legal documents.

The law was not broken on purpose, Cindy Granger said Wednesday, Dec. 1.

Granger is the daughter of Sam Humbert and was speaking on behalf of the windmill recycling operation on her father's land.

“There was a lot of miscommunication and misunderstanding with everyone involved,” she said.

The intention was to take the blades from decommissioned wind machines, of which a multitude march across the hills in Umatilla and many other Oregon counties.

Land-based wind turbines have been increasing in manufactured size in the last 20 years, to an average of 295 feet — about the height of the Statue of Liberty, according to the federal office of



Greg Lehman, Walla Walla Union-Bulletin, File
An evening rainbow east of the wind turbines on the south side of the Walla Walla Valley in 2015. Milton-Freeewater businessman Sam Humbert is appealing a state fine of more than \$57,000 for disposing of wind turbine blades.

Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy.

The blades can measure 115-165 feet long.

Sam Humbert has been recycling the copper and iron elements in the blade metal. The remaining parts have been going to permitted landfills in Athena and Boardman, Granger said.

However, the mistake was made in not realizing the Eastside property only is permitted for “clean fill,”

such as old concrete, and that the giant blades did not fit the designation, Granger said.

As soon as Humbert received notice of the issue, steps were taken to clean up the site, and that work is continuing.

“We want to get it done and do it properly,” Granger said.

Included in the civil penalty fine is \$30,882, representing the money earned from selling the copper and

iron part of the windmill blades, Gleim said.

That number can be recalculated once the property is cleaned and in compliance with state regulations.

Humbert's citation also includes having solid waste next to a natural spring on the property, but no financial consequence was attached to that, Gleim added.

Although more than \$57,000 seems hefty, some DEQ fines can reach more

than \$1 million, depending on the violation and if it is a repeated offense, she said.

Granger said it has been gratifying to work with the environmental regulatory agency, and the family expects to have the cleanup work accomplished by the end of January.

The Humbert family is done working with windmills, she added.

“This was a learning experience,” she said.

They do expect to pay a fine, as the metal was put in a landfill without a permit, however unintentionally, Granger said.

The bigger question in the air is what will become of every enormous wind machine when they cease to function, Granger said.

“There's not a good answer for windmill disposal yet. They take up a lot of air space in a landfill, which is important ... once it's full, what are you going to do?”



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
People skate at an artificial ice rink Friday, Dec. 3, 2021, on H Street in Umatilla during a tree lighting ceremony for the city's Christmas tree.

‘It’s an exciting time to be a part of Umatilla,’ city planner says

Ice skating and winter festival bring people to revamped town

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

UMATILLA — The city of Umatilla on Friday and Saturday, Dec. 3-4, opened its ice skating rink to the public as part of the Umatilla Winter Festival.

Hanna Keister, Umatilla community development coordinator, said the original plan was to do something big in 2020, but coronavirus concerns created a delay. There was not a festival last year, so plans changed, she said. Otherwise, the city might have had a big celebration with another idea — live reindeers — as the center to the event.

This year, too, may have included reindeer, Keister said. Unfortunately, she added, the animals were in low supply and high demand elsewhere, so the festival had to go with another plan.

“We decided we’d get an ice-skating rink,” she said, “and the city manager, David Stockdale, ran with that idea, and thought we should just buy one because it would be a boon to the community.”

The rink is 2,900 square feet.

So far, she said, a lot of people have shown interest, and the city had tried it out before the festival. The Monday before Thanksgiving, staff members skated on the rink, Keister said.

She added the rink is available for rental during the week, \$150 for two hours. On the weekends, individuals can use it for \$3 per person.

She said she envisions the rink being a permanent fixture in a festival street, which could be built in the near future. For now, though, she said the rink will stay where it is December through February.

“We’ll see how it goes,” she said. She noted that there is “a lot of buzz around town” about the rink. On the first day of the festival, though, just prior to the start of the event, she admitted to being

a little nervous whether people would attend.

Skaters took to the rink during the festival, which had nine vendors. Head Start also had a booth.

Keister said this was a special event for Umatilla, which has worked to revamp this section of the town.

“Sixth Street in the last couple of years is completely different,” Keister said.

Esmeralda Perches, development and recreation manager, also boasted of the town. She said new recreation activities will continue occurring alongside revitalization projects. A resident since 1995, Perches said she is excited about these projects. Improvements to local businesses, made possible by development revitalization grants, have made a difference, she said.

“We’ve funded about \$225,000 this year to help them revitalize their buildings,” Perches said. She pointed to nearby businesses, including Java Junkies and The Bridge Bistro & Brews, and said, “We’re coming up.”

Community Vision Open House unveils Hermiston’s future

Proposed indoor aquatic center among the most popular topics

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Hermiston community members had another opportunity last week to learn about the city's 2040 survey and give input on the city's future.

The Community Vision Open House was Thursday, Dec. 2, in Grace Baptist Church, downtown, while the town's tree-lighting ceremony took place.

“This is a community vision, not just a city staff vision, so we are trying to encourage as much participation as possible,” Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith said.

The open house attracted the attention of people who had not heard of the project previously, according to Hermiston officials, and city representatives, including city councilors, were present to explain the Hermiston 2040 survey results.

According to the survey, people want more stores, additional restaurants, an indoor pool and aquatic center. City officials and members

of the public initially discussed the results at The Hermiston Vision Labs, Nov. 16-17. The open house Dec. 2 was the latest public event regarding the survey.

City Councilor Roy Barron was on hand at the open house and he talked about the survey effort and said there had been a lot of excitement from the public. The item that attracted the most interest at the open house, he said, was a possible indoor sporting facility and aquatic center.

This is something that has long been a goal for the public and the \$28 million cost is a concern, so a lot of planning is necessary to fund it in a responsible way, he said.

“I think it's on the horizon, for sure,” he said.

In from Portland, Sarah Singer Wilson of SSW Consulting was in the building to meet locals and discuss the project, which she described as “asking people what Hermiston wants to be when it grows up.”

In the church, the list of goals were broken down into categories: “Safe and Healthy Hermiston,” “Sustainable Hermiston,” “Growing and Prosperous Hermiston” and “Connected and Engaged Hermiston.” Those categories were posted throughout a room, with lists of action items.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
A Hermiston 2040 graphic adorns a poster Thursday, Dec. 2, 2021, at a Community Vision Open House the city of Hermiston held at Grace Baptist Church in downtown Hermiston.

CONTACT US TODAY ABOUT OUR HOLIDAY SPECIALS!

1740 Washington Baker City, OR 97814

1-800-399-3912

www.bakercitygmsales.com

BAKER GARAGE, INC.
ESTABLISHED 1913

CHEVROLET GMC

Thank you for supporting Newspapers In Education NIE

GOLD SPONSORS
Community Bank

SILVER SPONSORS
Alive and Well PPP
CHI St. Anthony Hospital
Corteva Agriscience
Desire For Healing Inc
Hill Meat Company
Northeast Oregon Water Association
OSU Extension Service- Umatilla County
RE/MAX Cornerstone
Rick's Car Wash
Tum-A-Lum Lumber
Western Radiator

BRONZE SPONSORS
A & G Property Management & Maintenance
Blue Mountain Community College
Coldwell Banker Whitney & Associates, Inc.
Davita Blue Mountain Kidney Center
DuPont Pioneer HiBred Research Center
Jeremy J Larson DMD LLC
Kelly Lumber Supply Inc
Kiks Golf Center
Kirby Nagelhout Construction Co.
Kopacz Nursery & Florist
Landmark Tax Services
McEntire Dental
Mid Columbia Bus Co
NW Metal Fabricators Inc
Rob Merriman Plumbing & Heating Inc
The RBH Group LLC
The Saddle Restaurant and Lounge
Willowbrook Terrace

OTHER SPONSORS
Barlyte Specialty Foods
Umatilla Electric Cooperative
CMG Financial
Duchek Construction
Episcopal Church of the Redeemer
Hermiston Public Library
Hodgen Distributing
Pendleton KOA
Starvation Ridge Farming, LLC
Sun Terrace Hermiston

CHI St. Anthony Hospital
CORTEVA agriscience
Jeremy J. Larson DMD
ALIVE & WELL PPP

THE SADDLE RESTAURANT & LOUNGE
KOPACZ NURSERY & FLORIST

Want to see your name here? Call 541-276-2211