

EAST OREGONIAN

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The Pendleton High School Rhythmic Mode Dance Team performs an exhibition show Feb. 26, 2022, during Hearts in Motion at Pendleton High School.
Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

146th Year, No. 57

WINNER OF 16 ONPA AWARDS IN 2021

\$1.50

Best of the best

Wilkerson, Williams awarded Hermiston's woman and man of 2021



Diners gather Wednesday, March 2, 2022, at the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce's 52nd Annual Distinguished Citizens Awards at the Hermiston Community Center.
Photos by Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian



Alberta Wilkerson, left, and Steve Williams, right, accepts the Woman of the Year and Man of the Year awards on Wednesday, March 2, 2022, at the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce's 52nd Annual Distinguished Citizens Awards at the Hermiston Community Center.

Christmas Express honored alongside community members and businesses at annual gala

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — A pair of beloved Hermiston community members Wednesday, March 2, took the stage to receive the honors of Woman of the Year and the Man of the Year for 2021.

Many of Hermiston's top community members were present in one room for the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce's 52nd Annual Distinguished Citizens Award Gala that recognized local people and business for their contributions in 2021.

Woman of the Year

The Woman of the Year Award went to longtime community volunteer Alberta Wilkerson.

Presenter Shirley Parsons, past Woman of the Year recipient, said Wilkerson has been an active participant in the greater Hermiston area for more than 47 years.

"Her life represents a life of serving others, sharing her talents, gifts and time to both children and adults," Parsons said. "Always striving to make her community a better place, helping those in need and adding a touch of beauty along the way."

Her community involvement includes more than 20 years of service as a leader in 4-H, participation with Bloomer Girls Garden Club, volunteering with Relay for Life and at the Hermiston Warming Station.

Wilkerson worked on the Funland Playground construction and rebuilds, was involved in Special Olympics and even opened her home to two interns of the Hermiston Herald. And she has participated each year with I Love My City.

Even on her walks, Parson said, Wilkerson picks up cans and bottles and returns them for deposit.

And Wilkerson never wanted recognition for herself.

In accepting the award, Wilkerson said she was embarrassed.

"It's just unbelievable that I could receive this," she said. "I feel so honored to be with all of you that have been honored before."

Man of the Year

Banker, consultant and diehard Oregon State University Beavers fan Steve Williams received the award for Man of the Year.

Presenter Josh Burns said he wanted to share what Williams has been involved with.

As an example, Burns said, when he and his family

moved from Hermiston to Baker City, he had to resign from nine boards.

Williams has been a Cub Scout leader, a coach for AAU basketball, Little League and the swim team. He's served as a chamber ambassador, on the Hermiston Development Corporation, Blue Mountain Community College Finance Committee and the Umatilla Electric Cooperative's Business Resource Center.

"He's dedicated to our city," Burns said.

And starting this July, he will be the District 5100 governor for Rotary International, guiding 74 Rotary clubs in Oregon and Washington.

"This man is different," Burns said. "He's different because every opportunity that he has and committees to serve, he puts 100% of himself into."

Burns said Williams lives his life by Rotary's Four-Way Test: Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

"And I can tell you if he's involved, it is and it will," Burns said.

In accepting the award, Williams described Hermiston as a magnet, and it is because of the people in the community.

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Spend it while you got it

One-time funds in 2022 short session leads to millions of dollars for Eastern Oregon

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

SALEM — Almost \$5 million is coming to the Hermiston area to build a center to help people in a behavioral crisis, \$1.5 million is going to the efforts to restore Pendleton's Historic Rivoli Theater and Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, is getting \$5 million to expand its surgical center.

Those funds and a lot more came out of the 2022 short legislative session, which is wrapping up Friday, March 4, four days ahead of its deadline.

Republican Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena said to speed up the session, his

party on March 3 agreed to suspend the rules that required the full reading of bills before floor votes, a move the GOP used to slow down majority Democrats from ramrodding through their agenda.

Hansell during an interview March 3 said he would be heading back home after the final few bills go to a vote March 4. He said this short session was unusual because of the influx of federal money for allocations.

"So it was far more than what I remember the short session having available in the past, and it will be a one time opportunity type thing," he said.

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

The project to restore the Rivoli Theater in downtown Pendleton is receiving \$1.5 million out of the 2022 Legislature. Tens of millions in funds are coming to Eastern Oregon out of the short session, including \$1 million each to several county fairs for infrastructure improvements and almost \$4.6 million for a center in the Hermiston area to help people suffering a behavioral or mental crisis.