

EAST OREGONIAN SPORTS

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PENDLETON FAMILY AQUATIC CENTER



East Oregonian, File

Poolgoers cool off June 29, 2021, at the Pendleton Family Aquatic Center, a place beloved by former Pendleton city attorney, municipal judge and community volunteer Pete Wells.

Swim scholarship honors Pete Wells

Former city attorney had a fondness for the Pendleton Swim Association

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Up until about 10 years ago, former Pendleton city attorney, municipal judge and community volunteer Pete Wells would show up at the Pendleton Family Aquatic Center to try out the slides a couple of days ahead of opening day.

“He would show up in his Speedo and go down the slides a couple of times,” aquatic supervisor Jeff Hamilton said. “He had a lot of fun doing that. He’s been involved here as long as I have.”

Wells’ volunteer commitments in Pendleton are a mile long, but one that was close to his heart was the Pendleton Swim Association.

The Pendleton Parks & Recreation department wanted to honor Wells, who died Dec. 31, 2021, for his dedication to the swim program. It asked the city to establish the Pete Wells Memorial Aquatic Scholarship Program.

“We did approve it, and formally named it after him,” Pendleton Mayor John Turner said. “I respect everything he did for the city. This is going to help young people learn to swim who may not have the funds. It’s more than a worthwhile program. I think it’s great.”

Hamilton said he’s wanted to start the program for a couple of years, but didn’t have a name to go with it.

“Jeff proposed it to me, and we had a goal to establish a scholarship fund, but it was on the back burner,” said Liam Hughes, the Director of the Parks & Recreation Department. “This was the kick in the pants we needed. There is a big need in the community. We have never had a financial assistance program. We think this will be a big piece in breaking that barrier.”



Mary Wells/Contributed Photo

Former Pendleton city attorney, municipal judge and community volunteer Pete Wells was a longtime slide tester at the Pendleton Family Aquatic Center. He died in December 2021. The Pendleton Parks & Recreation Department has established a scholarship in his name to help low-income families afford swim lessons.

Mary Wells, Pete’s daughter, said the scholarship program is a wonderful way to honor her dad.

“The one thing I want is for my dad’s legacy to live on,” said Mary, who runs the swim lesson program in the summer. “This is something I would hope lives on and on and on. He was amazing. I would love for it to outlast me.”

With the Columbia River nearby, and little streams running throughout Umatilla County, Hughes said it’s important that all kids learn how to swim.

“I know for a fact I wouldn’t be here today if I didn’t know how,” Hughes said. “There was a time when I was 11 or 12 where I nearly drowned. Me and my dad were in the South of France and we went swimming one night at sunset. We got sucked out in a riptide. It would have ended badly if we didn’t know how to swim.”

The aquatic center gives around 500 swim lessons a year. The cost is \$50, which includes eight lessons over two weeks.

“We do our best to keep prices as low as possible,” Parks & Recreation communications coordinator Kaley Cope said. “What’s neat about this is all these years prior, we have not been able to offer swim lessons for kids whose families can’t afford it. This will allow us to help those families get these swim lessons.”

It would be the summer of 2023 before kids would benefit from the scholarship program. How many kids that will receive help will depend on how much money is raised.

The Parks & Recreation Department is doing private fundraising to bankroll the scholarship. It has three fundraisers set up, and cash donations to the scholarship fund are welcomed.

First up is the Duck Race. People can buy a duck for \$15 at the pool and at the office. The ducks will be sent down the slide on the annual Aquatic Blast Day, with the first duck hitting the water earning its owner a free pool pass for 2023.

On July 29, there will be a Round Up Day, where admission and concession purchases can be rounded up to the nearest dollar, with the extra money going to the scholarship fund.

The last event is the Fish Pond Olympics on July 30. Swimmers ages 3-12 will be able to show off their skills in a variety of events. The cost is \$10 per swimmer.

“It’s an easy way to contribute,” Mary Wells said. “I would love for everyone to contribute. It’s a life skill that can be provided for people who can’t afford it. I think every kid should learn to swim, but not every kid has the opportunity. I want this to be long-standing, not just a couple of years.”



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Anahi Avila, of Hermiston, heads the ball during a 2019 game at Kennison Field. Avila is headed in 2022 to Blue Mountain Community College to play soccer.

Dawgs’ Avila headed to BMCC to play soccer

Wolves have her penciled in as a defensive midfielder

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Anahi Avila has worn No. 16 on her soccer uniform since she was in the eighth grade. Nothing will change when she pulls on her Blue Mountain Community College jersey this coming fall.

“If I still have the number, people will know who I am, how far I have come, and how much I have grown,” Avila said.

Timberwolves coach Jordan Hillmick said he didn’t care what number she wanted, just as long as she would come play for his team.

“She is a great person, and her skill set will help us a ton,” Hillmick said. “To be able to find a player in our district and just down the road from Pendleton is always good. There are programs that wanted her on their teams, but we are local and competitive, and she will bring a lot to our team.”

Avila played center-back for the Bulldogs, but Hillmick sees her as a defensive midfielder at the college level.

“She is aggressive and very skilled,” Hillmick said. “We are excited to have her with us. She will do amazing things. She knows a lot of the girls on the team. During the tryout, my players told me, ‘We need her.’ After the tryout, I told her, ‘I need you.’”

Avila had talked to other community colleges in Oregon, but was having a hard time making a decision. Some offers came and went, but BMCC was still on the board.

“She wasn’t sure where she wanted to go,” Hermiston coach Freddy Guizar said. “She had multiple options, then coaches were leaving colleges. She got an offer from Lane Community College, but the coach left. It was hard for her to commit. She looked at BMCC and Jordan was willing to give her an opportunity. After one year, if she isn’t happy, there’s the transfer portal.”

Once Avila attended BMCC’s identification camp, she knew she found the right place.

“I had other options, but once I went to their camp, I loved the connection I had with the players and coaches,” she said. “It’s also closer to home. I find it way easier than driving 4 to 5 hours and not seeing my family a ton.”

Hillmick knows he found a gem with Avila.

“The small-school kids are a diamond in the rough,” Hillmick said. “They know nothing but hard work, and they know how to work.”

A three-year starter for the Bulldogs, Avila went from being a scorer her first year, to stopping goals the rest of her career. She had three assists her senior year.

“She was a big asset to our team,” Guizar said. “She played center back/defender. She was able to control the defense since her sophomore year.

She scored a lot of goals on JV, but her sophomore year we needed help on defense.”

Guizar said Avila will be a good addition to the Timberwolves.

“This is awesome for her,” he said. “She can learn there and then move to the next level.”

A teaching or nursing degree is on the horizon for Avila. She currently is taking part in a program through Hermiston High School that allows her to spend 90 minutes in the morning at one of the grade schools.

“I have the opportunity to go to the grade schools to see how the teachers work with their kids,” she said. “I love little kids, they have my heart. I want to help them. They go through so many things, and I want to be someone who can help them and be there for them. I did an internship with first grade, and now second grade, and it’s different. They are maturing. It’s so crazy to me how fast they grow up.”

A natural

Avila doesn’t come from an athletic family. Other than her older sister, Tina Rodriguez, playing softball at Irrigon High School, Avila carries the family torch.

She plays soccer in the fall and softball in the spring, where she is an outfielder for the Bulldogs.

“Soccer is something I picked up in middle school playing rec soccer,” Avila said. “I enjoy softball too. No one in my family plays soccer. I am like the only one who plays any sports. Hermiston athletics opens a lot of doors for a lot of kids. Coaches have plans for each kid from freshman year and how they progress.”

Avila said she likes the family atmosphere of soccer, which is needed when playing in the highly competitive Mid-Columbia Conference.

“I like how the players all support each other,” she said. “How well we connect on the field. The coaches push us to be our best and we work to be the best we can be. We have to practice a lot to learn how to play at the same speed as the schools in Washington, My junior year, we played Oregon schools and we did really well. Going back to the Washington league, it showed how much we have to work on.”

The coronavirus pandemic wiped out Avila’s sophomore year of softball, and her junior year of soccer and softball were short and condensed. She said it was nice to be back to normal this year.

“It’s been super fun,” she said. “Not playing for two years and wanting to play against teams we had rivals with. It’s nice to have a full schedule against teams in Washington.”

Like many student-athletes at Hermiston, Avila got a helping hand from success coach Jay Ego to navigate the college recruiting process.

“Mr. Ego helped me a lot,” Avila said. “He got my head in the right direction, and helped me talk to coaches from other schools. He was so supportive in my choice. He was super, super helpful. No matter what he is doing, he will put that aside and help you first.”

ON THE SLATE

Schedule subject to change

SATURDAY, APRIL 30

Prep baseball

Sherman at Pilot Rock (2), 11 a.m.
Stanfield/Echo at Lyle (2), 11 a.m.
Grandview at Hermiston, 4 p.m.

Prep softball

Echo/Stanford at Hermiston JV (2), 1 p.m.

Track and field

Ione at Jeff Agar Invitational, Trout Lake, 11 a.m.
Stanfield/Echo at Union Relays, 11 a.m.
McLoughlin at Legends Invite, Walla Walla, 10:30 a.m.

College baseball

Blue Mountain at Walla Walla (2), 1 p.m.

College softball

Blue Mountain at North Idaho (2), noon

College rodeo

Northwest Intercollegiate Rodeo Finals, EOTEC, Hermiston, 5 p.m.

MONDAY, MAY 2

Prep tennis

The Dalles boys at Pendleton, 3 p.m.
Pendleton girls at The Dalles, 3 p.m.

Prep golf

Pendleton girls at Meadow Lakes, Prineville, 11 a.m.