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Community support

Hermiston comes together to renovate a home

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — As Heather Spinden stepped out onto her lawn and looked at her Hermiston home, she said she felt overwhelmed.

"It's just so beautiful," she said. Heather Spinden lives with her youngest son. She said she has multiple health problems and her son, a full time Burger King employee, has autism.

Built in 1907, her home has four bedrooms, two baths and 1,164 square feet of space. It is a couple of doors down from the Hermiston Public Library and is a stone's throw away from the Hermiston City Hall, currently under construction.

The place did not look quite so attractive until recently, according to its owner. Spinden said kind and generous members of her community stepped up to make it into the place it is today.

Holly Woods and Josh Ross, an engaged couple, residents of Hermiston, told the rest of the story.

Ross explained he attended school with Heather Spinden's son, Ben Spinden, starting in elementary school and continuing to high school graduation. After graduation, Ross left town.



Photos by Kathy Aney/East Oregonian
Heather Spinden stands in front of her home on Wednesday, May 11, 2022. A group of residents came together to make improvements to the dilapidated house, businesses donated services and more than \$100,000 was raised for the project.

He did not stay gone, however. Ross returned, and one winter he saw his old classmate walking down the street. He picked Ben Spinden up, drove him to his home and met his mom.

Josh Ross said he recalls looking around the home. It needed repair, he said, and this family could benefit from a little assistance. He passed this information onto Woods, who he was dating.

"We needed to do something, and it kind of snowballed from there," Ross said.

Ross and Woods explained they started by giving the Spindens a Christmas basket. But they felt they needed to do more. That is when they had an idea to paint the exterior of the house.

They brought a contractor to the home, though, and learned the siding was not

good enough to paint. And new siding was just the start of a laundry list of needs. The house needed roofing, a new chimney, flooring and more.

Fortunately, Ross and Woods were in a position to help. Woods brought the project up to her workplace, Academy Mortgage in Hermiston. It has, she said, helped people through service programs, and her boss thought Academy could help improve the Spindens' home.

This came at a good time for the Spindens. Their home had problems, and their homeowner's insurance dropped them last summer.

Suddenly, people wanted to help.

Through contacts, Ross and Woods, along with Academy, started attracting more help. An employee of Ross-Brandt Electric Inc., Ross was able to get his family's company on board with this effort. More people and companies followed, as they posted this work on Facebook, distributed flyers and made phone calls.

Cost Less Carpet donated the flooring, C & C Construction Services Inc. provided much of the roofing, and other companies stepped up, too. Ross-Brandt provided workers, as did some other companies. Jimmy's Johns Portable Toilets Inc., offered its services, and other people gave what they could.

Over \$100,000 was given in donations, including around \$40,000 in cash, Woods said. Enough money was left from donations to pay Heather Spinden's medical bills.

"We didn't expect this," Woods said. She added that the Spindens never asked for this help, but people gave it freely.

Heather Spinden said she has a lot of good feelings about her community because of this work.

"We feel so humbled and blessed," she said. "We're so happy that they've made it so we can enjoy this home, and we're going to enjoy it, one day at a time."



Heather Spinden poses with two of her benefactors, Josh Ross and Holly Woods, on Wednesday, May 11, 2022. Ross and Woods have helped mobilize individuals and businesses to make improvements to Spinden's home.

UMATILLA COUNTY

Asked and answered

Candidates for Position 2 address issues, plans

East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — Nine candidates are vying in this election for two seats on the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners.

The Position 1 seat is open and has drawn six candidates: Bob Barton of Hermiston, Jesse Bonifer of Athena, Susan Bower of Pendleton, David Nelson of Pendleton, Cindy Timmons of Milton-Freewater and Alvin Young of Hermiston.

For Position 2, Commissioner John Shafer is running for reelection against HollyJo Beers and Rick Pullen, both of Pendleton.

The East Oregonian contacted each candidate and asked them to answer the same set of questions and to limit the length of their answers.

1) What is your biographical information, including age, occupation and education? (200 words max)

2) What is your current or past political or public service experience? (200 words max)

3) Homelessness is a significant problem in Umatilla County. If you are elected, what is your plan to address homelessness in the county? (400 words max)

4) List and discuss your top three goals if you are to be elected. (500 words max)

The EO edited answers for readability, style, punctuation, grammar and to keep answers within the word limit of each question. Due to space constraints in print, the responses to background and experience are online at www.eastoregonian.com. The EO published responses from Position 1 candidates on Thursday, May 12. These are the responses from Position 2 candidates.

Candidates are in alphabetical order of last names.

HollyJo Beers, retired

If you are elected, what is your plan to address homelessness in the county?

My plan to address homelessness in Umatilla County is complicated, as is the problem. I see five reasons for homelessness. They include lack of affordable housing, mental health problems, drug/alcohol abuse and homelessness as a choice.

The causes of homelessness stem from the economy, the lack of housing, the lack of help for mental health problems, the lack of drug/alcohol treatment centers and the lame law making many drugs legal.

Dealing first with mental health and drug/alcohol problems, I believe that much of the problem lies with the recent legislation making possession of hard drugs no longer a crime. The people were duped by the language of the lenient drug law they voted on. There needed to be treatment centers in place prior to legalizing drugs. Now we are in a situation where drug use is rampant and there are no consequences. We must fix that by building the treatment centers for drugs and alcohol. Building shelters will not cure the problem if the residents do not commit and follow through on treatment, which must



Beers

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MORROW COUNTY

Commissioner candidates discuss solutions, goals

East Oregonian

MORROW COUNTY — Five candidates are vying in this election for two seats on the Morrow County Board of Commissioners.

Jeff Wenzholz is challenging Commissioner Melissa Lindsay for Position 2, which opened because Commissioner Don Russell is retiring. Lindsay holds the Position 3 seat, but her move to seek the open seat means No. 3 also is open, and three candidates are in that race: Gus Peterson, Mike McNamee and David Sykes.

The East Oregonian contacted each candidate and asked them to answer the same set of questions and to limit the length of their answers.

1) Biographical information:

Name, age, occupation, educational background, etc. (200 words max)

2) What is your current or past political or public service experience? (200 words max)

3) What do you consider the most pressing need or issue Morrow County faces during the next four years, and what is your plan to address that matter to the benefit of county residents? (400 words max)

4) List and discuss your top three goals if you are to be elected. (500 words max)

The EO edited answers for readability, style, punctuation, grammar and to keep answers within the word limit of each question. Due to space constraints in print, the responses to background and experience are online at www.eastoregonian.com.

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Position 2 candidates

Melissa Lindsay, Morrow County commissioner

What is the county's most pressing need or issue?

I believe our biggest strength is also our most pressing challenge. Morrow County has seen a great deal of amazing growth, much attributed to the good work of the Port of Morrow team following its mission of economic development and job creation. With growth comes needs; housing and infrastructure, road improvements, diversity in representation, public health, workforce, water quantity and quality. While growing

we must at the same time maintain our quality of life and current service needs. With so much growth, even with the very best of intentions, it can be difficult for county, cities, special districts and, most importantly, citizens to keep pace. We have a responsibility to be stewards of our amazing resources and more important than ever is the need for collaboration, open communication and planning. COVID brought even more challenges to communication with isolation, but we are getting back on track. We must remain diligent in



Lindsay

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