

Trade and event center takeover

Three employees ready to join staff

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The city of Hermiston is planning to take over the management of the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center at the start of 2023.

This represents a change for EOTEC. The city had awarded a five-year contract to VenuWorks, an Iowa-based venue management company, to manage the center. This contract is set to expire at the end of 2022. According to City Manager Byron Smith, the contract gives parties options to renew.

In its most recent meeting, Monday, May 9, the Hermiston City Council decided 7-0 not to renew the contract. There was one absence.

The city manager presented the case for the city managing EOTEC.

Smith passed out EOTEC's budget to council members at the meeting, showing total expenses for fiscal year 2022-23 to be \$587,950. He said the city could run the event center and roughly break even.

"We've been pleased with a great relationship with the local staff here from VenuWorks, but I think our challenges have been more with the corporate side, particularly on the financial reporting and different things we've wanted from them," he said.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian
The staff at Eastern Oregon Trade & Event Center, Hermiston, pose for a photo Wednesday, May 11, 2022, at the nearby rodeo area. The city of Hermiston plans to make the trio — from left, office manager Jennifer Oswald, general manager Al Davis and operations manager Brian Rust — city employees in 2023.

He added there is "potential that we can go after them for breach of contract."

However, he expressed, the company had understandable struggles due to the pandemic. For its part, VenuWorks was able to build a staff, a problem when the city had tried it previously, according to Smith.

EOTEC is back from pandemic

Prior to a vote to not renew the VenuWorks contract,

Al Davis, EOTEC general manager, gave an update about the state of EOTEC. He said before the coronavirus pandemic, the center had a full calendar of events. This soon changed, as only 43 of 173 scheduled events actually occurred in 2020.

In 2021, he said, EOTEC obtained grants to help keep it afloat and add to the facility and certain events.

This year, Davis told the council, EOTEC has 177 event days booked. He

said this puts the center in a spot similar to where it was prior to the pandemic. More events are expected, he said.

EOTEC staff OK with change

Looking forward to 2023, the city of Hermiston is planning to retain EOTEC's three full-time employees. And those employees on May 11 said they are fine with this arrangement.

Davis said he is not a long-term VenuWorks employee, as he started with the company when he was hired to be the EOTEC general manager. He moved to Hermiston from Kansas to take the job, and he said he had not heard of the company prior to his application.

"VenuWorks has been very good to me and good to my family," he said. "I don't have any hard feelings about VenuWorks. I think they're a good company to work for."

He said that Hermiston may have future dealings with the company, especially when it comes to naming rights and future events.

Davis, operations manager Brian Rust and office manager Jennifer Oswald said they do not have negative feelings about joining city staff at the end of the VenuWorks contract.

"I just like working here, period," Oswald said. "I don't care, really, who runs it, I guess. It's really more of a lifestyle than a job, so I really like it here."

First Student starts interviews for bus drivers

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Pendleton School District's new contractor for bussing plans to start interviewing driver applicants next week.

Tammy Thompson is the regional recruiter for First Student. She explained the process to get an interview is all electronic and starts with applying online at apply.workatfirst.com/vacancy/39172/description.

After someone submits an application, she said, the systems sends an email with a time, date and location for the interview.

First Student, she said, is "always hiring, always interviewing."

The work is part time, and pay starts at \$21 an hour. First Student also offers hiring bonuses: \$500 for a driver without a commercial driver's license and \$1,500 for driver's with a

CDL. Thompson said the company also trains drivers for free so they can obtain a Class B CDL.

The school district in February selected the Ohio-based First Student over Mid Columbia Bus Co. in Pendleton. Thompson said First Student is working to have drivers ready as soon as possible, but at the beginning of school in the fall there is going to be a learning curve.

Even so, she said, First Student plans to address and resolve any issues in short order. And First Student is looking at how it integrates into the community, she said.

In other locations, First Student operates its Stuff the Bus event, Thompson explained, where local residents can fill a bus with donations for a food bank or for children at Christmas.

"We're hoping to serve the community in different ways," she said.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Local motorcycle gang members plead guilty

GRIFFIN, Ga. — Two Milton-Freewater men have pleaded guilty to charges stemming from a brawl in Georgia.

Dustin Wendelin and Charles Montgomery also are members of the Pagan's Outlaw Motorcycle Gang, according to a press release from the Walla Walla County Sheriff's Office.

Law enforcement in September 2021 arrested Wendelin and Montgomery on assault and gang charges out of Georgia.

Walla Walla County sheriff's deputies arrested Wendelin the morning

of Sept. 9, 2021, after he reported to work at the Washington State Penitentiary, Walla Walla. Law enforcement caught up to Montgomery a few hours later at his home in Milton-Freewater.

They were extradited to Georgia, where they remained incarcerated until recently. The pair on April 25 pleaded guilty in Georgia to one count each of aggravated assault and a violation of the Street Gang Terrorism and Prevention Act.

Both charges are felonies in Georgia, according to the sheriff's office, and Wendelin and Montgomery received a sentence of credit for approximately five-and-a-half months of time in jail and are subject to up to 12 years of probation.

—EO Media Group

Weather makes seeing lunar eclipse a long shot

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Cloudy weather looks to get in the way of Sunday night, May 15, of a total lunar eclipse over Northeast Oregon.

A blood moon occurs during a total lunar eclipse, when Earth is positioned directly between the sun and the moon, hiding the latter from sunlight. This month's full moon is also a supermoon, which seems slightly larger and brighter than usual, since it is at perigee, its closest point to Earth in its orbit.

Because the moon's orbit

is not a perfect circle, the moon is sometimes closer to the Earth than at other points during its path. On average, supermoons appear about 7% bigger and 15% brighter than a typical full moon, according to NASA.

The full moon in May is called the "flower" moon. Other names for May's full moon are the corn planting moon and the milk moon, according to NASA.

At totality, the moon will reflect a faint, reddish glow, as red wavelengths of sunlight filter through our planet's atmosphere onto the moon's surface. During the

eclipse, it also could appear shades of orange, yellow or brown.

"When this happens, the only light that reaches the moon's surface is from the edges of the Earth's atmosphere," NASA explained. "The air molecules from Earth's atmosphere scatter out most of the blue light. The remaining light reflects onto the moon's surface with a red glow, making the moon appear red in the night sky."

The eclipse begins at moonrise, 8:13 p.m., reaches maximum at 9:11 p.m. and ends at 11:50 p.m., for a duration of three hours and 38

minutes in Pendleton. The penumbral eclipse will actually start at 6:32 p.m., but the moon will be below the horizon at that time.

The combination of it being very low on the horizon and the total eclipse phase will make the moon dim. Thus, it will be difficult to view until it gets higher in the sky or the total phase ends.

The National Weather Service, however, is forecasting a 40% chance of showers and thunderstorms before 11 p.m. over Pendleton. The night looks to be mostly cloudy with a low around 50.

Two tornadoes tear through Blue Mountains

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The wind damage to homes and vehicles on May 6 near Weston came from a pair of tornadoes.

One twister ripped a roof from a home and carried it 300 feet.

The first touched down for six minutes at 1:44 p.m. about 8 miles east of Weston and traveled up to 1.5 miles. The second tornado from the same storm stayed on the ground for three minutes at 1:52 p.m. It landed 1 or 2 miles to the east and traveled less than a mile.

Both tornadoes were

rated F1 on the Fujita Scale of tornado damage intensity, according to the National Weather Service. F1 tornadoes can cause moderate damage and have 3 second gusts of 86 to 110 mph.

"Umatilla County doesn't get a whole lot of tornadoes," NWS meteorologist Cole Evans said. "Counting the two on Friday, only 8 have been reported since 1950. They're also rare in Union and Morrow Counties."

A large farm building collapsed and the roof was lifted off a cabin and carried away, according to

the weather service. Fallen trees also blocked roads.

Cole explained that prolonged southwest flow aloft over enough time, with heating during the day, can

spawn tornadoes. When guided over the mountains, the winds generate sufficient rotation to produce twisters.

A tornado touched down near Stanfield on May 24, 2004.

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