

MILTON-FREEWATER

# Freewater Square opens in time for summer events

**By MAX ERIKSON**  
*Walla Walla Union-Bulletin*

MILTON-FREEWATER — Freewater Square on Milton-Freewater’s North Main Street has officially opened to the public.

More than 100 people joined the opening, with live music and more Thursday, June 30, celebrating Milton-Freewater’s newest community event space that can be used for a variety of gatherings and celebrations.

Awards were given to the mural artists who painted the wall for the square, and local youth band S.A.W. from Athena performed rock songs for the crowd. Walla Walla Cheese Co. provided ice cream, and attendees could have a slice of a celebratory cake.

Freewater Square has been in the works for three years and now is ready to host live events, food trucks



Max Erikson/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin  
**Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance Executive Director Julie Culjak addresses the crowd June 30, 2022, before the ribbon cutting for the new Freewater Square.**

and act as a public space.

The Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance has spearheaded the project, renovating and restoring what was once a vacant gravel parking lot.

Downtown Alliance Executive Director Julie Culjak said having the

opening is amazing, and she joked that now she’s going to sleep for the next two months.

“It was an incremental process as we put everything together,” Culjak said. “We continued to get grants through 2020 and 2021, and that kept pushing us forward.”

The vision is for the square to be used by local businesses or organizations for events or even a movie night during the summer, Cuijak said.

The square also will be used to develop small businesses in what Cuijak calls an incubator program.

Small, converted storage buildings on the site can be rented and used for a start-up business to establish a working site.

The square was wired to provide power to food trucks and the entertainment stage that is a converted flatbed trailer.

Mike Waliser from Milton-Freewater was there with his wife and son and said it was the first time he had seen the square and thinks it’s a great place for the community to get out and do stuff.

“Once the word gets around, people will come out

and socialize,” Waliser said. “It’s great for Milton-Freewater to have an option like this.”

Waliser’s 10-year-old son Henry also was excited and having a good time.

“I really like having the music,” Henry said. “And I hope I get to have some cake too.”

Dr. Norm Saager has been the Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance president off and on for the past 12 years and played an integral part in bringing Freewater Square to the community. He said he was very happy with the number of people who came out to support the opening.

“This will be a very positive thing for this end of town, and we are working on a regular schedule of events,” Saager said. “We want to have a family night, games night or even a wine-tasting night.”

He said the community is reviving an event that

ran before the pandemic hit called Thursdays Rock, and Freewater Square is the perfect place to do it.

Thursdays Rock is a community event that will offer food vendors, live music and other entertainment. It will run on the third Thursday starting in July until the end of September.

Local businesses will stay open late, and a different theme will be highlighted each month.

Saager said he sees Freewater Square as part of a larger offering in the Walla Walla Valley and hopes people don’t restrict their view to just the city of Walla Walla when finding fun things to do.

“There is a lot going on here and everywhere,” Saager said. “People should check everything out that’s happening in all our communities and not solely focus on just one place.”

STANFIELD

## Growth continues, rebounding from pandemic

**By JOHN TILLMAN**  
*East Oregonian*

STANFIELD — Stanfield and its businesses are growing and upgrading as they rebound from the pandemic years.

Masseuse Sharron Newton, 78, moved her business, Royal Health Therapies, from a Hermiston office into her remodeled Stanfield home during the pandemic.

“It was a good move,” she said. “It’s interesting how Stanfield is growing, with the new housing district on the other side of the high school. A lot of houses have gone up in just six months.”

The \$12 million, 41-unit Patriot Heights low-income housing project at 155 Valor Ave. was unveiled May 16.

Newton also cites recent developments such as the general store, excavation for another housing complex on Stanfield’s south side and new street lights downtown.

“When the lights are lit up, it’s striking,” she said. “The beautification is very nice. There’s a lot of growth.” Newton moved because of the pandemic.

“There was fear,” she recalled. “I lost a lot of regular clientele. Some have returned, but not all. The remodeled home office is working out.”

Newton’s health has declined and COVID-19 hit her home, so she cut back on work.

“It’s what I consider part

time,” she added, “at four days a week, with three or four clients per day.”

Newton remodeled her house to separate an office from the private area. She has a large lot for convenient parking and easy access right off Highway 395.

“It’s convenient working from home,” she said. “If a client is half an hour late now, I’m a lot more patient than I would have been in my office in Hermiston.”

She also said some of her regular clients prefer the atmosphere at home.

### Housing projects, businesses expand

The Panoramic Ridge housing development, west of Highway 395, continued to expand, the city’s fiscal year 2022-23 budget reported. Homes and lots sold out in phase four and 39 sites soon will be ready for construction in phases five and six.

The Umatilla County Housing Authority finished its Patriot Heights development this past year. This brought in revenue through additional utility services and about 150 new residents for local businesses and activities. It also provided a local Head Start program and created access to additional land prime for private housing development. This project increased system development charges funding by more than \$200,000.

The 99-unit Bumblebee Estate housing development is under construction. It should bring in property taxes, utilities and roughly 300 new residents, the budget reported.

Dollar General and Java Junkies are both in the construction phases, aiming to open this summer. These will bring additional jobs and revenue to the city, according to the budget report.

In addition, more than 10 residential and two or three commercial lots are going through the development process.

### Videos saved women’s wear business

Live online videos saved Stanfield native Kathy Baker’s business, Fun Fashions Boutique, 165 Coe Ave., during the pandemic.

“When (Gov.) Kate Brown shut us down on March 15, 2020, I didn’t know what to do,” Baker recalled. “I’m not a big online store, just bricks and mortar.”

The shutdown came just as Fun Fashions was getting products in from market. Columbia Bank came to Baker’s rescue. So women still could shop in her store, the bank backed her in picking five customers to receive \$250 each in free merchandise.

Baker also has built

a small website, started selling on Facebook and Venmo with free delivery and showed her clothing lines and sizes over the internet.

“I was scared to death,” she said. “I didn’t want to sound stupid or uneducated, but I did it, and it worked. It saved my business.”

Baker said growth in Stanfield has been “amazing.” She also raised her family in town. She credited public works director Scott Morris and his crew for keeping city parks clean and watered and the city council and city manager Ben Bergener lifting up the town.

“The city has come a long way,” she said. “We have a great Fourth of July event. They’ve done such a good job.” Baker also noted the schools are packed with great teachers and staff.

“Stanfield has changed a lot,” she assessed. “I’m very proud of it. I love my community. They work so hard. There was a little street sweeper on Coe and 395 this morning. I’d only ever seen those machines in big cities before. It’s wonderful. They need recognition.”

Summer is Baker’s slow season. She said she expects business to pick up when school starts again.



Baker

COVID-19

## CDC recommends indoor masking as infections rise

**By JOHN TILLMAN**  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — The U.S. Centers for Disease Control issued a coronavirus alert Tuesday, July 5, recommending indoor masking for 24 Oregon counties with “high” COVID-19 community levels. The warning applied to Eastern Oregon counties, including Umatilla and Morrow.

The CDC recommends wearing a mask indoors in public, staying up to date with COVID-19 vaccines and getting tested if you have symptoms, at the high alert level. Additional precautions may be needed for people at high risk for severe illness.

Umatilla County Board of Commissioners met July 6. There was no agenda item dealing with masking up. Board Chair John Shafer said speaking for himself, he has no appetite to see the return of any restrictions.

The county updates its COVID-19 dashboard Monday through Thursday during the recent surge rather than weekly on Wednesday, county public health department epidemiologist Mike Stensrud said.

Umatilla County reported 88 new COVID-19 cases July 5, which included the holiday weekend. The recent high was 34 new cases June 25. No new deaths were reported. The county has recorded 229 total deaths related to COVID-19 to date.

Hospitalizations for COVID-19 in Region 9 still are below their peaks in October 2021 and February 2022. Baker, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, Union and Wallowa counties compose Region 9. Patients hospitalized with positive COVID-19 peaked at 45 in Region 9 on Feb. 4. On June 25, 12 were hospitalized in the region, up from 0 on April 30 and some other days that month.

Umatilla County Public Health continues to offer COVID-19 vaccines at Pendleton, Hermiston and other locations, said Alisha Southwick, the department’s deputy director. It resumed automatically mailing test kits to people exposed to COVID-19-infected individuals in response to the surge. The kits also are available for businesses.

“We provide support to outbreaks in vulnerable sites, such as long-term care facilities,” she added.

The county continues to monitor case reports and the wastewater sample data from Hermiston and Pendleton, Southwick said, and the public health department’s message is the same as before the latest surge.

“Stay home if you’re sick,” she admonished. “Wear a mask indoors in public. Get vaccinated and boosted. The message gets stale, so it’s difficult to drive it home. We share it with the media at every opportunity.”

## Umatilla County receives grant for digital map

**By JOHN TILLMAN**  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — Umatilla County is undertaking a pilot project to create a digitized, real-time map of its roads, bridges and culverts.

The county board of commissioners at its June 29 meeting accepted a \$250,000 grant from the Oregon Department of Administrative Services for the project. The county intends to match this state funding.

“I’m excited about this initiative,” said Dan Dorrn, the county commissioner overseeing the project. “Whether you’re hauling potatoes, wheat or you’re FedEx, the data will be available to all.”

The pilot project is one of the first in the nation, Dorrn reported. When completed, it should allow county road users to identify in real time all the information they might need to plan their best route. The digitized map is to appear initially on a website, but later on an app, he said.

“Users will be able to look at county roads like they can now for state and

federal highways,” Dorrn explained. “It’s not just GPS, but will include load limits, traffic data, weights, number of axles and trip counts. That’s done at the federal level. We want to transfer that capability to counties.”

Dorrn cited Smith Frozen Foods’ need to haul waste from its Weston plant to a Hermiston area feedlot. The map app with digitized data would permit the company to optimize routes for its trucks.

“It could save them two-and-a-half hours and keep 1½ tons of carbon from going into the air,” he said.

A farmer harvesting wheat could look at the app and find the best route to follow.

Local agriculture indus-

try has expanded over the past 30 years, Dorrn noted. Public and private investment in irrigation systems and value-added development in fresh packed and frozen foods have totaled \$400 million.

“Our roads date from the late 1800s,” he pointed out, “but we’re hauling 40 to 60 tons of wheat on some of them. Having real-time data would let us prioritize maintenance money.”

The county isn’t in the same flood and emergency system as the state and federal government, Dorrn said. The digitized mapping is to include those levels, but 99.9% will be devoted to Umatilla County roads.

The pilot project for transportation planning will serve as a platform upon which other coun-

ties around the country can build, Dorrn observed.

The commissioners selected DKS Associates as consultant on the project, thanks to their expertise in transportation and connections with software engineers. The firm specializes in “smart mobility”, with eight offices in California, Oregon, Washington and Texas.

The board received a single bid for replacing the bridge on Mac Hoke Road near Nolin. Costs will be shared between the county and state, using an Oregon opportunity grant, reported Commissioner George Murdock.

The county’s timeline called for “soon,” so far just one bidder responded to its request for proposals: Ariz Co. LLC bid \$934,850.

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LOCAL BRIEFING

### Idaho man dies in single vehicle crash

PENDLETON — An Idaho man died Monday, July 4, in a single vehicle crash on Highway 244 in rural Eastern Oregon, according to a press release from the Oregon State Police.

Christopher Kendrick, 26, of Mountain Home, Idaho, was killed shortly after 7:30 p.m. when the west-bound silver Subaru Cross-trek he was a passenger in left the highway and rolled. Kendrick suffered fatal injuries and died at the scene.

A helicopter ambulance flew the vehicle’s driver, Jacob Moser, 30, of Yakima, for his injuries.

Oregon State Police and emergency personnel from the Ukiah Quick Response Team responded to the crash site, approximately 13 miles east of Ukiah. The crash closed Highway 244 for approximately six hours.

—EO Media Group

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extra 2:00p show 7/8-7/10
- Elvis (PG13)  
4:00p 7:20p  
extra 1:40p show 7/8-7/10
- Jurassic World Dominion (PG13)  
4:30p 7:40p  
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