

Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance hires new ED

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

MILTON-FREEWATER — The Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance has hired a new executive director to lead in the growth and expansion of new and existing businesses and to bring more opportunities to the residents of this city. Maryelizabeth Garcia, a native of Walla Walla, took over the reins in mid-July. She said she is quickly getting acclimated to the position and is ready to start making a positive impact.

"I'm an idea machine, and

I love bringing people together to start something from scratch," Garcia said. "We have a great base of volunteers who are passionate about the projects going on, and I love helping people to be successful."

Garcia said she was not aware of the executive director position until a friend told her about it. Garcia looked at the job posting and knew she would be a good fit.

"I like community outreach and fundraising and working with volunteers; it was a good fit for me," she said.

Garcia's goals as director will be to bring more

recreational opportunities, higher-paying jobs, expand campgrounds and even add a zip line to the area, to name a few.

She also has ambitions of bringing new business into the area and inviting existing businesses in Walla Walla to do pop-up events in Milton-Freewater and create a business-friendly environment.

"If I can help anyone with anything with starting a new business, I'm here for that," Garcia said. "If people are looking to start a small busi-

ness in Milton-Freewater, the opportunity is here, we only have room to grow."

Garcia is open to expanding and growing the community events at the new Freewater Square that was recently completed, by adding more live music and a possible stand-up comedy night.

Freewater Square is a community gathering area that hosts Thursdays Rock events with food trucks and live music.

Garcia said she grew up

in a family of small business owners and understands the importance small businesses bring to a city. It also taught her the power of civic duty and the importance serving your community.

Relationship building is one of her best skills, she said, and she has experience in community organizing and management.

After graduating from Walla Walla High School in 2005, Garcia spent four years in the U.S. Navy. She later received a Bachelor of Science in social work from Walla Walla University in 2015.

Garcia has a long record of volunteerism including with the Walla Walla Rotary Club and the Walla Walla Cub Scouts Pack 306. She is vice president of Volunteers Love Serving Veterans.

Garcia also volunteers with The Honor Project, a nonprofit that gives veterans and active service duty members a ride in a 1942 Boeing Stearman.

Her personal interests include outdoor activities such as rafting, hiking and skiing. She also likes crafting and scrapbooking and enjoys spending time with family and friends.



Garcia

EOC3 to debut new website

By **ANTONIO ARREDONDO**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Eastern Oregon Climate Change Coalition is set to debut its new website in the coming weeks, hoping the added accessibility will allow for more education.

Jeff Blackwood, chairman of EOC3, said although the group has been active on Facebook, a new website will greatly help spread the message.

It's a process that has been many years in the making for EOC3. After starting in 2012 as a local focus group, the nonprofit disbanded and reformed

before finding its footing. It grew from eight people to a 300-person group thanks to a series of meetings.

"We started with our climate conversations," Blackwood said. "They're intended to bring in regionally respected experts and academics, and have a conversation for an hour."

At first, the meetings were at the Prodigal Son Brewery & Pub, Pendleton, with EOC3 staff enticing residents with the promise of beer and food. This strategy worked well until the pandemic struck, effectively shutting down the program.

During that time, the coalition switched its meet-

ings to the online platform Zoom, a move that proved bountiful. Now, EOC3 could bring in some of the region's top climate experts without them even stepping foot in Pendleton.

While the in-person meetings may not return soon, the group is hopeful the Zoom meetings and the new website will work as an access point to get climate change information.

As of Friday, Aug. 5, a trip to eoc3.org brings a background tree with the text "Website coming soon to a place near you!" on the page. Blackwell said that will change in the coming weeks, finally giving links to climate change information to all.

M-F police arrest teen for multiple graffiti incidents

By **JEREMY BURNHAM**
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

MILTON-FREEWATER — Milton-Freewater police officers arrested a 14-year-old boy they suspect in "15 to 20" graffiti cases, MFPD Chief Doug Boedigheimer reported in an email.

Because Oregon law does not allow juvenile suspects to be placed in juvenile detention for this offense, police released the child to his mother's custody pending further investigation, Boedigheimer said.

Officers on Tuesday, Aug. 2, observed the teen and recognized him from surveillance video from a graffiti case they were working.

According to Boedigheimer, the teen had a can of black paint on him, as well as a backpack.

Boedigheimer said officers confiscated the backpack, but it was not opened on the spot while officers waited for a warrant.



Greg Lehman/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin, File
Grffiti mars a building Feb. 16, 2022, on Robbins Street in Milton-Freewater. Police reported arrested a 14-year-old on Aug. 2 in connection to 15-20 graffiti cases.

The boy is "is strongly suspected of committing 15 to 20 incidents of defacing property in Milton-Freewater by painting the word 'SOOK' on both public and private properties," according to Boedigheimer.

Grffiti has been a big problem in Milton-Freewater this year.

In May, MFPD arrested three minors and an adult, Harry D. Shaul, 19, of Milton-Freewater, for graf-

fiti. Boedigheimer said at the time the arrests were part of a multi-agency effort also involving Umatilla County Sheriff's Office and the Milton-Freewater School District to address the graffiti problem.

Boedigheimer reported in April that a lot of the local graffiti is not gang related.

"Someone sees painting on a wall, and they assume it's gang related," he said. "We see an awful lot that isn't."

Puppy mill suspect in the wind

East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The woman who the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office was investigating on a report of a puppy mill north of Hermiston now is in the wind.

The sheriff's office in a press release Friday, Aug. 5, reported it has turned over its investigation to the Umatilla County District Attorney's Office for possible prosecution in an animal neglect case. The investigation began when the sheriff's office on July 30 responded to a trailer on the 2300 block of North First Place, Hermiston, after

receiving a report of a possible puppy mill.

A deputy contacted a 70-year-old woman living in a travel trailer at the location, and she stated she bred Yorkshire terriers, according to the sheriff's office. There were several adult dogs — possible Yorkshire terriers — in cages inside the trailer with puppies of various ages. The woman initially volunteered to surrender some of the dogs to a local animal rescue facility.

During the investigation, deputies contacted the woman again, and she eventually voluntarily surrendered a total

of 12 dogs into the custody of a local animal rescue facility. When a detective returned Aug. 4 to the site, however, the woman and trailer were gone.

"Her whereabouts are unknown at this time," the sheriff's office reported.

The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office also did not identify the woman. Sheriff's Capt. Sterrin Ward explained the investigation remains active, and the district attorney's office is looking over the case for possible prosecution. While the sheriff's office knows who she is, Ward said it's not prudent at this time to identify her to the public.

LOCAL BRIEFING

MCSO catches homicide, kidnapping suspect

IRRIGON — Morrow County sheriff's deputies the night of Thursday, Aug. 4, caught a Washington homicide and kidnapping suspect.

Franklin County Sheriff's Office in Washington reported its deputies the evening of Aug. 4 received a third-party report of a missing female who may have been dead in the area of First Avenue in the hamlet of Mesa, Washington.

Deputies found the body near a residence and discov-

ered two children younger than 12 were missing from the home and likely in danger.

"Deputies quickly suspected foul play and detectives were activated," according to the Franklin County Sheriff's Office.

That night at about 11:30 p.m. Morrow County sheriff's deputies near Irrigon located a vehicle related to the homicide and kidnapping investigation in Mesa. Inside the vehicle, deputies discovered a suspect and the two missing children, who were unharmed.

Deputies took the female suspect into custody, Frank-

lin County also reported, and she will make an initial court appearance in Oregon.

The sheriff's office handed over the two children to the Oregon Department of Human Services until authorities can locate their relatives. The Washington State Patrol Crime Scene Response Team will be assisting detectives with processing the crime scene in Mesa, and Oregon State Police is assisting with the vehicle in Irrigon.

Franklin County Sheriff's Office also asked anyone with information related to this case to contact detectives at 509-405-5131 or 509-792-2448.

— EO Media Group

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