

Echo seeks \$1.5M to help with Umatilla River flooding

By MARCO GRAMACHO
East Oregonian

ECHO — The city of Echo is requesting \$1.5 million in state and federal funds for restoration work and protection of the southern part of the town and northern part of the shoreline caused by the high waters in the Umatilla River last June.

“If we don’t get protection by the end of this year, and if we get a normal high water event, next spring we can have significantly more damage,” warned Echo City Administrator David Slaght. “And we won’t have a way to stop it.”

He submitted two permits to work on three areas developed by the engineering company Anderson Perry & Associates.

“Oregon Emergency Management has championed our projects and took them to the Emergency Board in Salem when they meet in late September to decide on approving them or not,” Slaght said. “If we get \$1.5 million, we are planning to return \$475,000 to Umatilla County that funded the emer-



The Umatilla River runs low through Echo on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2022. The small city is seeking \$1.5 million in state and federal money to help abate the river’s annual spring floods.

gency repairs last June, and use the remainder to finalize the first phase of the project.”

To combat rising water, approximately 560 feet of riprap was placed on the shoreline. The rocky material was put on the west bank to protect homes. In the next phase, large logs will be placed under the rocks. This will involve first pulling the

rocks up and placing the logs at the riverbank and then setting the banks on top.

According to the city administrator, this setup will protect the habitat of fish. Other structures, Slaght added, may be constructed on the river to divert flows. These structures, and the log setup, will be the first stage. There are other actions to be

taken, though, he said.

The project also will repair properties, shoreline and river area to the north of the bridge, the eastside of the river and the south end of Echo, Slaght said.

In addition to these goals, the city administrator said the project will increase plantings in the area of the river. Different plant species, including

willows and cottonwood, are planned.

The second phase is the construction of a levee system. The engineers of Anderson Perry are working on the project. Slaght said there are federal funds for the construction of levees.

“The team effort to protect Echo city involves Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, Rep. Bobby Levy, Umatilla County administration, local landowners, engineers, such as Kyle Wagner, and Echo City Council members,” he said.

According to engineers working in the project, a levee system is a long term solution for the flooding.

“It takes a lot more money and a lot of design to make a functional levee to protect the city,” explained Slaght.

Besides threatening residential areas in Echo, the flooding and high water of the Umatilla River has eroded the signs of the archaeological site of Fort Henrietta.

“Several artifacts were damaged and new ones were found by archeologists in the area,” Slaght said.

Fort Henrietta Park is on Main Street adjacent to the

Umatilla River and it is on private property. One of the few public access points to the river in several miles is in the park. The park was named for the Fort Henrietta Militia stockade which was located across the river from the park site in 1855-56.

The National Park Service has listed the park as a National Historic Trail Site because it was a campsite and river crossing for Oregon Trail emigrants. The river ford, known as the Lower Crossing (Pendleton was the site of the Upper Crossing), was at the south end of the park. The crossing also was used later as a stage and freight road.

The park includes several historic displays, including a covered wagon museum and antique fire equipment museum. The museums are unmanned with push button recorders that provide information to visitors. The first Umatilla County jail is in the park as is a replica blockhouse. Interpretive panels provided by the National Park Service and story boards with information on Echo history also are in the park.

HERMISTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

District busy on first day of fall term

By MARCO GRAMACHO
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Hermiston School District had a busy morning on the first day of school for Monday, Aug. 29.

A reset of the electrical panel initiated a lockdown alarm at Armand Larive Middle School. There were traffic jams around the streets close to the school with mostly parents taking their children to the classes.

“After I dropped my daughter off at school around 8 a.m., she texted me saying that they were in a lockdown,” said Audra Workman, East Oregonian/Hermiston Herald advertising assistant. “Thank God it was just a false alarm.”

The Hermiston School District on its Facebook page at about 9:30 a.m. explained what happened and reported it was “all clear to enter the building.”

At Hermiston High School the students were excited to begin school. Outside the building they received their schedules in tables according to their year — freshman, sophomore, junior and senior. The table for the freshman year had the biggest line of students.

“They don’t know the school yet, even though we had orientation last week,” explained family engagement specialist Maria Durán. “But we understand that it is a beginning for them, and accept that some of them are late for their first class today.”

Inside the building, students formed a line in the administration room to register for classes. In the other room on the opposite side, some of the students were invited to change clothes because they were not under the dress code of the high school, such as showing their stomachs.

Adriana Coleman, 17, is a senior, and was helping the students on the tables outside the high school building.

“As a student leader, I am setting an example for the students at earlier stages at school to come back to normal after the pandemic hit in 2020,” she said.

Adriana is a basketball



Hermiston High School students arrive on the first day of school Monday, Aug. 29, 2022, as they pick up their new schedules and navigate their way to classrooms.



Students navigate their way through the halls on the first day of school Monday, Aug. 29, 2022, at Hermiston High School.

player at school and is looking forward to seeing more students engaging with extra-curricular activities and seeing the community attending games.

“I’m a captain in the team and everybody calls me ‘Dri,’” she said, “and I plan to stay in Oregon and major in marketing at college.”

The district reported 5,482 students registered for the school year.

Think Big Space in progress

Hermiston School District also is a couple of months away from opening its first Think Big Space in partnership with Blue Mountain Community College and Amazon Web Services. The space at Hermiston High will provide enhanced classrooms for students in grades three to post high school

to participate in interactive learning experiences, grounded in STEAM.

Umatilla High School, the SAGE Center in Boardman and the Umatilla Indian Reservation near Pendleton also have the AWS spaces that promote science, technology, engineering, arts and math.

“At first we will promote activities to elementary and high school students, but we are going to include middle schoolers soon after,” explained Katie Corral, science instructional lead teacher for the district. “This way we plan to integrate knowledge from an early age.”

The space still is receiving equipment and will have 22 state-of-the-art computers in the computer lab to increase the students’ technology literacy in the areas of coding, robotics, machine

learning and internet-connected devices. The space also includes 3D printers, full color plotters to print posters and laser engravers.

John Fisher, Hermiston High’s engineering and robotics teacher, said he was excited to give a tour to seven high school students who will volunteer as monitors in the space.

“One of the most exciting projects is the AWS DeepRacer,” Fisher said.

This autonomous 1/18th scale race car is designed to test reinforcement learning models by racing on a physical track. Using cameras to view the track and a reinforcement model to control throttle and steering, the car shows how a model trained in a simulated environment can be transferred to the real-world environment.

One of the monitors, senior Jaxson Gribskev, 17, was designing rooms for an engineering class in one of the desk tops in the Think Big computer lab.

“I’m planning to study mechanical engineering after I finish high school,” he said.

Senior Laylah Lucas, also 17, is a graphic designer and has been creating products for the high school in the last few years.

“What I love here the most is to be able to be in control of what I create,” she said.

The school is opening the Think Big Space on Oct. 25.

From Brazil to the Hermiston Herald

Veteran journalist Marco Gramacho joins EO news staff

By YASSER MARTE
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The Hermiston Herald has added a new member to its team.

Marco Gramacho, 47, of Pasco by way of Brazil, joined the Herald on Aug. 16. He already has covered a number of significant events and is delving into larger stories in Hermiston and the surrounding area.

“I’m kicking back to my origins, which is exactly how I started my career, a general reporter,” Gramacho said. “But now I have way more experience.”

Gramacho was a journalist in his hometown of Salvador, Brazil, and at times had to cover stories in the cities of Sao Paulo and Rio. During his career, he would report on a wide range of subjects, including general news, politics, technology and fashion.

Although he began his writing career in newspapers and magazines, his journey into journalism took a few turns along the way.

He moved to the United States after getting accepted to the University of Florida where he pursued a Ph.D. in art history and delved into the spiritual world of Aztec and Mayan culture. With his knowledge, he got accepted into Washington State University, where he finished his degree in cultural studies and social thought education, which focused on the issues of culture and power in the contemporary and historical contexts of education.

“As a journalist in Brazil, with more than 20 years of experience working with newspapers and magazines, I wanted to share a different understanding of reading and writing of the world,” Gramacho said. “Through that program, I found my path.”

Gramacho’s culture is deeply rooted in Salvador, Brazil. Through his upbringing in South America and residency in the United States, Gramacho is able to speak three languages — Portuguese, Spanish and English.



Gramacho

Gramacho lives in Pasco and works in Hermiston, which he said has similarities to his hometown.

“My father’s origins are from the countryside of Brazil. I grew up going to my grandparent’s farm,” Gramacho recalled. “Although this is a completely different country, I feel that the country’s soul is similar. It’s a familiarity that reminds me of when I was a kid. It’s personal in a way that pleases me being in a small town and covering these stories.”

Gramacho said seeing and understanding the differences between a developed versus undeveloped country has had an effect on his worldview, such as understanding the economic struggles in the United States in comparison to the hardships of Brazil.

“It’s very different. I’m learning a lot, it’s fascinating,” he said.

Hermiston Herald editor and senior reporter Erick Peterson remains out while attending to a health issue. The Herald and East Oregonian are part of the EO Media Group. As a reporter for the Herald, Gramacho also is part of the EO news team.

“Marco brings a real passion for journalism,” EO Regional Editorial Director Andrew Cutler said. “I think he has a unique background in newspapers, and I think it will serve Hermiston very well and he will do a fantastic job.”

As Gramacho takes on reporting local news, he immerses himself in getting to know and understand the community of Hermiston.

“That’s the nature of journalism, every day we travel to different things. I research as much as I can before an interview, and when meeting different sources everybody’s been nice,” Gramacho said. “I’m looking forward to getting to know more of the community.”

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